

## Three Coptic Potsherds from the Cairo Museum

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**Abstract:** This paper presents three Coptic potsherds kept in the Cairo Egyptian Museum - as part of a collection of Coptic ostraca bearing the special registration number 18953.

The first ostrakon represents a private letter, the sender's name is missing here suggested to be Joseph and the recipient seems to be a monk his name is Mosses; this letter was sent concerning giving dates to a shepherd called Anaias.

The second and the third ostraca are parts from agreement for repayment a loan and perhaps they represent one text.

In the second potsherd, the names of debtor and creditor are missing in the text, the loan was one (or more) of golden coin called Tremis. The repayment will be in something lost in the text perhaps money or cereals. The repayment will be with interest.

The third potsherd represents the assent formula of an agreement for repayment a loan (perhaps represents the end of the last text), it represents the signature of the debtor who is a deacon and called *Pashtosh*.

**Key Words:** Ostraca, potsherd, Coptic, Tremis, shepherd, monk , deacon.

### ثلاثة قطع فخار من المتحف المصري

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**المخلص:** يقدم هذا البحث نشر ثلاثة أوستراكا عبارة عن قطع فخارية ذات لون بني وأحمر مكتوبة بالقبطية وموضوعاتها كالتالي:

القطعة الأولى: تمثل خطاب شخصي مرسل إلى راهب (?) يدعى موسى بشأن استلام المرسل لشيء ما مفقود في النص (يقترح إنه بلح) تم إعطاؤه أو دفعه إلى راعي الخراف المسمى أناياس.

القطعة الثانية: تمثل جزء من اتفاقية سداد دين، وأسماء كل من الدائن والمدين مفقودين ومتبقى اسم والد المدين ويسمى "باني" والدين هنا هو العملة الذهبية تريميسيون ويتضح من النص أن السداد كان سيتم مع دفع فائدة.

القطعة الثالثة: تمثل نهاية اتفاقية سداد دين بها صيغة موافقة المدين على ما كتب بالاتفاقية ويظهر توقيعهم مع ذكر اسمه ولقبه ويقترح أنها تمثل نفس النص المكتوب على القطعة الثانية والمدين هنا يسمى باشتوش وهو شماس هنا.

ويُقترح تأريخ النصوص من القرون السادس إلى الثامن الميلاديين.

**الكلمات الدالة:** أوستراكا، قطع فخارية، القبطية، تريميسيون، راعي الخراف، راهب، شماس.

### Three Coptic Potsherds from the Cairo Museum

This paper presents three unpublished Coptic ostraca written on potsherds kept in the Cairo Egyptian Museum - as part of a collection of Coptic ostraca, lacking any information about its provenance(s) or date(s) and bearing the special registration number 18953.

The first ostrakon represents a private letter, while the second and the third ostraca are parts from an agreement for repayment a loan and perhaps they represent one text. It is remarkable that the Copts preferred to write the private and administrative letters on potsherds while they prefer limestone chips in writing the ecclesiastical letters. As for the contracts and agreements, they preferred to write it on potsherds because the pottery absorbs the ink so it became difficult to be erased and falsified.<sup>1</sup>

#### The 1<sup>st</sup> Ostrakon

*SR no.:* 18953

*Inventory no.:* 98

*Dimensions:* height 6 x 4 width cm.

*Excavator:* Unknown

*Provenance:* Unknown.

*Date:* Unknown, suggested being from the 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

*Description:* The text is written in black ink on the outer part, remaining with about 8 lines. The writing is clear. The beginning and the end of the text is both missing.

*Dialect:* Sahidic (indicated by super linear strokes and the trema).

**Content:** A part from a letter, probably a private one. The sender's name is mostly missing, and the recipient seems to be a monk his name is *Moses*. The letter's subject concerns giving dates to a shepherd called Anaias.

#### The text:

##### Recto

+1.[ΔΝΟΚ ἸΩϸΗ-]

2. Φ[ΕϸϸΔΙΕϸΩΙΝΕ]

3. ΕΠΑ[ϸΟΝ ΜΩ-]

4. Ḳϸϸϸ[ϸΕ]

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<sup>1</sup> سهير أحمد، جوانب من الحياة اليومية للأقباط من النصوص والآثار القبطية (القاهرة: ٢٠١٧)، ٩٠.



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### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ostrakon

*SR no.:* 18953

*Inventory no.:* 42

*Dimensions:* height 6 x 5.6 width cm.

*Excavator:* Unknown

*Provenance:* Unknown

*Date:* Unknown, suggested being from the 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

*Description:* Parts from five regular lines written in black ink on the outer side of a red potsherd. The writing is clear, with lacunas on both right and left sides and at the end of the text.

*Dialect:* seems to be Sahidic with other influences.

**Content:** A part from a promise for repayment a loan. Names of the debtor and the creditor are missing in the text, only the father's name of the debtor remains. The loan was one or more of a golden coin called *Tremision*. The repayment was to be in something lost in the text, perhaps money or cereals, plus interest.



#### **Text:**

#### **Recto**

1. [ANOK NN]N ΠANЄ Єϫ[С2αι π NN π NN]
2. [† χρεωστει NAKπ ..]ΤΡΙΜΗCΙΟΝ [πΠΟΥΒ]
3. [2πΠΟΥω πΠΠΟΥΤЄ] 2πCΟΥΧΟΥ[-Tπ...]
4. [† ω η2ЄΤΟΙ]ΜΟC ЄΤ[Ρ]Δ[†....]
5. [NAK] ππ†[-ЄϫMHCE]

**Translation:**

1. [ INN son of] "Pane" he [writes to NN son of NN]
2. [I owe you (number/one)] tremis [of gold]
3. [by God willing] in the 20<sup>th</sup> [ of (month –name)]
4. [I pre]pareto repay(something)]
5. [to you] with it[s interest]

**Comment:**

Line 1: Generally, the usual opening formula of the agreements for repayment loans consists of:

The names of both debtor and creditor, as:

ΔΝΟΚ Α ΕΤ/ΕΥ/ΕΪCϨΔĭ ĩ B, sometimes also written are:

The names of their fathers, or the address of both (or of the creditor only), or adding sometimes the date<sup>1</sup>.

Ν ΠΑΝΕ: It is remarkable that Ν was not assimilated to Μ before Π which may refer to ME dialect and this matter never happened in Thebes<sup>2</sup>.

ΠΑΝΕ is a proper name<sup>3</sup>.

Line 2: ΤΡΙΜΗCΙΟΝ: A golden coin, its weight is 1.5 gm. And it is 1/3 the *holkottinos* (=solidus)<sup>4</sup>.

Line 3: it represents the date of repayment which is usually written in one of several forms:

1. Ϩĭ-(ΠΕΒΟΤ) month name.
2. Ϩĭ-month name -number.
3. Ϩĭ-month name (number)-indiction.
4. Ϩĭ-monthname - under NN (son of NN) the *lashane*.
5. [Ϩ]ĭ-CΟΥ-number-month name (under NN the *lashane*).
6. Ϩĭ-month name -number (referring to indiction year).<sup>5</sup>

Line 4 and 5: the formula of repayment:

[† ω ΝϨΕΤΟΙ]ΜΟC ΕΤ[Ρ]Δ [† something ΝΔΚ] Π̄Η†ΕΥΜΗCΕ]<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kopt. Ostraka I, 42

<sup>2</sup> Bal. I, 99-100

<sup>3</sup> Hasitzka, Monika, Namen, part II, 15.

<sup>4</sup> WB, 820

<sup>5</sup> OMH, no. 50-52, 56,59,60, 61,65

<sup>6</sup> Cf. OMH, no. 60.

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ⲙⲏⲤⲈ “usury, interest” from *ms* “grain received as interest” In Demotic *mst* means “interest”<sup>1</sup> replaced by ⲱⲱⲙ many times.<sup>2</sup>

#### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ostrakon

*SR no.:* 18953

*Inventory no.:* 76

*Dimensions:* height 4 x7.5 width cm.

*Excavator:* Unknown

*Provenance:* Unknown

*Date:* Unknown, suggested being from the 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

*Description:* The text now comprises parts of two regular lines written in black ink on the inner side of a red potsherd. The script is clear with lacunas on both left and top sides of the text.

*Dialect:* Difficult to be determined, the text being too short.

**Content:** Assent formula of a loan-repayment agreement (representing perhaps part of the last text). It consists of the signature of the debtor who is a deacon called *Pashtosh*.

This formula is usually followed by the signatures of the scribe and witnesses.



#### The text:

##### Verso

1. [ⲁⲛⲐⲚ ⲡ]ⲁⲓⲁⲕⲅ ⲡⲁⲱⲧⲱⲱ

2. [ⲧⲤⲐⲐⲱⲤⲈ Ⲉ]ⲧⲂⲁⲕⲈ+

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<sup>1</sup> CED, 90.

<sup>2</sup> Sohair Ahmed, "Two Coptic Legal Ostraca", in P. Buzi, A. Camplani & F. Contradict, Coptic Society, in OLA (247), 1321.

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### Translation:

1. [I the] deacon *Pashtosh*
2. [I assent to] this sherd+[

### Comment:

Line 1: ΠΔΙΑΚΥ: An abbreviation for ΠΔΙΑΚΟΝ "the deacon" common in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.<sup>1</sup>

ΠΔΩΤΩΩ: A Coptic personal name common as ΠΔΩΤΩΩ.<sup>2</sup>

Line 2: ΒΛΧΕ in Sahidic and Akhmimic dialects, it means lit. "Pottery, potsherd"<sup>3</sup>, here it refers to the agreement. A ligature is between Ε and the cross.

### Results:

- Using the dates in paying the hires and repayment the loans.
- The debtor in Coptic texts can owe golden coins like solidus and Tremis.
- The repayment of loans can be with or without interest.
- The promise of repayment a loan was closing with the assent formula (as a signature of debtor) then the signature of scribe then the signature of witnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> WB, 181-182.

<sup>2</sup> Hasitzka, Monika, *Namen*, part 2, 19.

<sup>3</sup> CD, 38b

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