
In his dissertation entitled Bir Shawish, Small Oasis: Ostraka and Other Inscribed Material, Marek Dospel offers an edition of 50 ostraca and 10 inscriptions from the site of Bir Shawish in the El-Hāyz Oasis, which is situated in the south of Egypt's Bahriya Oasis. The texts were found during excavations conducted by members of Charles University's Department of Egyptology at Bir Shawish. The thesis presented here is very important, because it gives us a large number of new textual witnesses to an area of Egypt that is poorly represented in the written record when compared with other parts of the country. New evidence is thus especially welcome, and I will preface my report by saying that Mr. Dospel's work lives up to the highest standards of papyrological research. It deserves to be accepted towards his PhD qualification.

The preservation of the ostraca edited here is typical of corpora of ostraca from elsewhere: some are well preserved, while others are not. Those that are not pose considerable challenges for even very skilled papyrologists. Mr. Dospel has done an admirable job of transcribing the texts and trying to make sense of them despite their often fragmentary state and abraded surfaces. His work is meticulous and argumentation very balanced, and he concentrates not only on papyrological minutiae, such as readings of individual letters, but attempts also to explain the broader significance of the texts, particularly in the chapters following the individual editions.

Not only has Mr. Dospel edited the texts in a highly meticulous fashion, he has also gone to great lengths to situate them within their archeological context, refusing to view the ostraca and inscriptions as isolated texts. Instead, he approaches them as complex material witnesses to a concrete historical setting. This is a point of methodology that deserves recognition, since it is not always adhered to. In fact, it has only been quite recently that papyrologists, aided by better archeological reporting than in the past, have taken care to consider the broader archeological context of the finds that they are working on. As a result, the reader gets a good idea of the domestic setting from which these texts come and a general picture of the more-or-less exact findspots of the objects (although here Mr. Dospel did not have at his disposal as precise
information as he might have wanted). Moreover, Mr. Dospel has provided a very valuable
discussion of the basic geomorphological character of Bahriya, followed by a welcome survey of
the sites of the El-Ḥayz Oasis, as well as thoughtful consideration of possible reasons for the
apparent demise and abandonment of settlements in the Oasis during Late Antiquity. His survey of
previous explorations in the area is also most welcome. This information will be of interest to the
broader papyrological community and related disciplines, and I look forward to its eventual
publication in slightly revised form.

**Typos, omissions, and suggested corrections**
While, as stated above, Mr. Dospel's thesis is of very high quality, there are, not surprisingly, some
typos and other infelicities, such as occasional omissions in the bibliography (e.g., Skeat 1978 is
not the most recent discussion of isopsephisms, see p. 164), that should be addressed before the
work is published. I do not mean to detail all of these here but will note some points of
disagreement in the editions of a couple of ostraca. (Mr. Dospel will be given a separate document
containing a list of corrections and suggestions at the time of his defense.)

In 13, line 2, the ostracon has παρέσχες not ἐπαράσχες. What looks like ink before π is simply
discoloration occurring in the fabric of the ostracon. While the ε following ρ shows some
resemblance to α, it is perfectly defensible as ε. The two letters often look similar in this type of
hand.

The edition of 15 could also be improved. Diaeresis is written above the initial ι in both Ἰακὸβ
(line 1) and Ἰσὰκ (line 4), but it is not noted in the apparatus; also, the omicron in line 6 has a
spiritus asper above it, which should also be recorded. This text points up an infelicity observed
consistently throughout the volume, namely, the use of diacritical marks in the diplomatic
transcriptions found in the apparatus. The use of such editorial conventions should be avoided
unless diacritical marks actually appear on the object.

**Recommendation**
The work that Mr. Dospel has done is admirable. It is my pleasure to recommend it for acceptance.

Kind regards,

Rodney Ast