MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

BULLETIN
DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

BIFAO 94 (1994), p. 381-382

Christopher Toll

Two Nabataean Ostraca from Egypt.

Conditions d'utilisation

L'utilisation du contenu de ce site est limitée à un usage personnel et non commercial. Toute autre utilisation du site et de son contenu est soumise à une autorisation préalable de l'éditeur (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). Le copyright est conservé par l'éditeur (Ifao).

Conditions of Use

You may use content in this website only for your personal, noncommercial use. Any further use of this website and its content is forbidden, unless you have obtained prior permission from the publisher (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). The copyright is retained by the publisher (Ifao).

Dernières publications

9782724711219	*Gateway to Africa. Cultural Exchanges Across the Cataracts*	Valentina Gasperini (éd.), Gihane Zaki (éd.), Giuseppe Cecere (éd.)
9782724711264	*La chapelle d'Osiris Ounnefer Neb-djefaou*	Laurent Coulon
9782724711752	*Guide du Caire Islamique*	Hadrien Collet
9782724711660	*Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales 41*	Adrien Candiard (éd.)
9782724711745	*Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger (BAEFE)*	
9782724711271	*Du côté de chez Zeus*	Emmanuel Botte (éd.), Hélène Cuvigny (éd.), Michel Reddé (éd.)
9782724711677	*La Description de l'Égypte*	Paul-Marie Grinevald
9782724711714	*La pensée et la pratique pharmacologiques d'Avicenne*	Sylvie Ayari

© Institut français d'archéologie orientale - Le Caire

Two Nabataean Ostraca from Egypt

***Christopher TOLL** **

THE INSCRIPTIONS on the two ostraca published below are Nabataean and consist mainly of numerals.[1] The ostraca were found during the excavation at Wakâlat al-Zarqâ (in antiquity *Maximianon*) near the Read Sea coast, 65 km. from Quseir.[2] The ostraca are attributed to the 2nd century A.D.

What makes the inscriptions interesting and at the same time difficult to interpret is that they are the only ones of their kind known so far, other Nabataean inscriptions from Egypt, also from the 2nd century A.D., being graffiti containing mostly caravaneers' greetings of the formula "Hail! NN son of NN".[3] Since the potsherds have been found at the coast and it is known that the Nabataeans traded with Egypt[4] they could be supposed to be some kind of unloading records in which only the figures were necessary, the goods being known by the recorder. But that interpretation does not explain the two columns of figures in numerical order. A study of Nabataean inscriptions on potsherds from other parts of the Near East (if any are known - among the published Nabataean inscriptions I have found only tomb and votive inscriptions beside graffiti) might solve the question.

* Carsten Niebuhr Institute, Copenhagen.

1 The facsimiles were made by Jean-Luc Fournet, the photographs by J.-Fr. Gout (both IFAO). The ostraca were brought to my attention by A. Bülow-Jacobsen.

2 For more information about the excavation, see N. GRIMAL, « Travaux de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale en 1993-1994 », in this volume p. 420-423 and, also in this volume, A. BÜLOW-JACOBSEN, Hélène CUVIGNY and J.-L. FOURNET « The Identification of Myos Hormos: New Papyrological Evidence ».

3 See E. LITTMANN, D. MEREDITH, « Nabatæan inscriptions from Egypt », [1-]2, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15, 1953, p. 1-28; 16, 1954, p. 211-246. PH.C. HAMMOND, « Nabatean », in D.S. WHITCOMB, J.H. JOHNSON, *Quseir al-Qadim 1978. Preliminary report.* Cairo, American Research Center in Egypt, 1979, p. 245-247. (For another interpretation of this formula, see Chr. TOLL, « Eine kurze Bemerkung zu den nabatäischen Graffiti », *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, forthcoming).

4 See D.S. WHITCOMBE, J.H. JOHNSON, *Quseir al-Qadim 1980. Preliminary report.* Cairo, American Research Center in Egypt, 1982, p. 67.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

O. Max. inv. 507 II A.D.
8 × 7 cm.

Fragment of a jar. Light coloured ceramic with pitch on the inside. Eight lines, the left part is lacking, leaving *ca* 8 signs in the first line and only one sign in the bottom line. The first line seems to contain two or three letters, whereas the rest of the inscription consists of numerals. Of these 1-10, in two columns (1-7 and 8-?) are well known,[5] the sign for 20, however, being more like the letter ' (*'alef*) but a similar sign in a graffito from Egypt A.D. 260 is read by Littmann (No. 46a) as '20' and its repetition in this inscription and its place after '10' in the second column line 6 speaks for its being '20'.

1. ? ? ? 20(+)20(+)20(+)20 ? ...
2. 1 8 3 s 20(+)20(+)20(+)20 ...
3. 2
4. 3 9
5. 4 10 2 20(+)20(+)20(+)20 ...
6. 5 20 ? ...
7. 6 20 ...
8. 7 ...





O.Max. inv.508 II A.D.
2 × 2.5 cm.

Fragment of a jar. Light coloured ceramic with yellow slip. There is no pitch on the inside. Six lines, the right part is lacking, leaving one sign in the first line and only four signs in the bottom line. The last two lines seem to contain the three letters *' s d* followed by '8'. Strangely enough the ' (*'alef*) has its final form. The letters could be read as the Arabic name *'Asad,* known from inscriptions in the form *'sdw, 'asadû*.[6]

1. ... 8
2. ... 8
3. ... d 8
4. ... 2 3
5. ... ' s d 8
6. ... ' s d 8





5 J. CANTINEAU, *Le nabatéen* 1, Paris, 1930, p. 35.

6 E.g., *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 2:1:2 No. 300, 315; A. NEGEV, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm*, Jerusalem, 1991, Qedem. Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, 32, p.15

BIFAO 94 (1994), p. 381-382 Christopher Toll
Two Nabataean Ostraca from Egypt.
© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net