

REPORTS ON DECIPHERMENT OF PETRA PAPYRI (1996/97)

by

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Papyri Scrolls 10 and 60 (L. Koenen)

The U.S. team continued the work of deciphering and interpreting the papyri in its assignment. During part of the summer of 1996, Traianos Gagos, Robert Caldwell, and Ludwig Koenen worked on the project, while Robert Daniel was able to spend the entire year on this papyrus archive, partly in 'Ammān and partly in Cologne, Germany. The present report, for the sake of convenience under the name of L. Koenen, is a team report and reflects the work of all its members.

The last year was mostly devoted to details of Scroll 60, the registration of a vineyard, and Scroll 10 (*Papyrus Petra Khaled and Suha Shoman*), a division of property among three brothers.

Scroll 60 is a written notice submitted to the tax collectors in office at Petra by Flavius Leontios, son of Valens, a man of high social standing (a *curialis*), and by the chief character of our archive, Theodoros son of Obodianos. Theodoros registers a vineyard, located in the deserted hamlet of Baith Tel al-Keb which he had inherited from his father. Previously, the property was registered in the local cadastre of Augustopolis by Leontios' grandfather on behalf of Magdios son of Euzoios, a steward or perhaps rather a slave, long deceased (lines 5-6). We may suspect that the vineyard had come into the possession of Valens, father of Leontios, and that Obodianos, father of Theodoros, bought the land from Valens, but the vineyard had remained registered under Magdios' name. Now, in 540, Leontios and Theodoros reached an agreement that the land should be reregistered under Theodoros' name so that it would become Theodoros'

direct responsibility to pay the taxes.

The details of this transaction as well as the word used for the tax ("contributions") remain unclear, but may well have been related to an association of landowners being jointly responsible for the payment of their land taxes. Moreover, we learn that the *collegium* of the Tax Collectors was situated in Petra, but its authority extended to at least some of the private land registered in nearby Augustopolis (Udhruh). Around 540, Petra was the dominant city. Moreover, we hear that the tax rate was that charged for "free" *iugera*. Similar terminology is known from two other cities, in which there were two branches of fiscal administration: the "imperial" and the "free" fiscal administration. This seems to indicate that in 540 the fiscal administration of the imperial house was still active in Petra.

The work on Scroll 10 (*Papyrus Petra Khaled and Suha Shoman*) was concerned with an endless series of details and quite a number of small fragments were correctly placed. It was thus possible to improve our reading and understanding of the text substantially. It appears now that the houses in Petra and a village called Serila are basically two-story structures: the ground-floor with its subunits (apartments) of large and small sizes and additional upper-floor apartments. These houses are very different from multistory buildings as they appear in contemporaneous mosaics, for example at Umm ar-Raṣāṣ, but they are well attested in Egypt. In Petra, most houses feature an internal courtyard, sometimes with (perhaps) an entrance structure or passageway (as at Nessana) and a vestibule. The living quarters are arranged around the courtyard. The

entrances may have a door passage and what perhaps is a porch. Twice we find a watch-tower as a part of a house in the village of Serila, and we wonder whether this is just a traditional name or whether such towers served for protection of the house and the village. Bed chambers are sometimes in apartments, sometimes outside an upper story apartment. People may have had protected sleeping facilities on the roof. Regular features include staircases and balconies. Also mentioned are a farmhouse and several dung depositories.

All buildings listed in scroll 10 as being located in Petra are part of one seemingly large building in and around what once was a stately structure belonging to Valens son of Romanus. Over its long history this structure was divided and redivided into smaller structures, and Scroll 10 attests to the latest steps of this development. The new divisions of the structure made it necessary to block existing entrances, as well as an access to a cistern, and to replace them with new entrances — all at the cost and risk of the new owner. In this way, each newly separated unit had its own entrance. In all likelihood this development was part of a conversion of the once stately structure into tenant housing. We may conclude that the part of the city in which the houses were located had become more densely populated in the first half of the sixth century. But, of course, we do not know whether this also applies to other parts of the city. Nevertheless, we should be more cautious about assuming an overall decline of the population during that period.

Following up on one aspect of the summer work of the group, Robert Daniel spend much of his research on the Arabic names and identification of places. In this he was advised by Pierre M. Bikai and Zbigniew T. Fiema of ACOR as well as by many Jordanian scholars: Fawzi Zayadine, Ibrahim Zoqurti, Omar al-Ghul, and Hani Ali Falahat, to mention just a few. We

deeply appreciate the help we are receiving from Jordanian scholars. At this point, we simply use their advice as much as we can; in the final edition we will credit the individual contributions.

In 1995 we had already identified a number of places in the wider area of Petra: as-Sadaqa, al-Ḥammām, Ail (?), Udhruh, and Brāq. We are now adding - to mention just a few - al-Baṣṣa, Kaffat al-Ḥawāwir, ‘Ayn al-Eis (all three in the town of Wādī Mūsā), and al-Rafid (5 km north on the high plateau overlooking the Bayḍa in the wadi to the west). An area called Ogbana in Scroll 10 is so named after the tribe of the Oqbah who once lived near ash-Shawbak. The tribal name is attested for the region around Petra in the chronicle of Nuwairi (1279-1332) citing the annals of Muhyi al-Din Ibn ‘Abd al-Zaher (1223-92) about the voyage of Sultan Baibars from Cairo to al-Karak 1276. Marching north, he passed by Petra and ash-Shawbak.

More importantly, we no longer doubt that the names given to pieces of land and houses attest for the most part pre-Islamic Arabic (rather than Aramaic or Nabataean), and this may very well become one of the most important contributions of the Petra papyri. For example, the Greek term *hyperoon*. “upper part of a house”, is frequently followed by an Arabic name beginning with *ellia*, “upper chamber”. Thus the Greek term is the precise equivalent of the Arabic word. One of these upper chambers is called *Ellia Aphthonios*, “Upper Chamber of Aphthonios”, so called after its former owner. The Baith al-Manām, “House of Sleep”, was a large and elaborate structure including several stables. Quite possibly it received its name, because it was originally a caravanserai. Baith al-Akhbar is probably “House of the Worshippers”. The same house is also named *Baith al-Kellar*, either after Latin *cellarius* (steward) or *cellarium* (storage room). Occasionally there is mention of a garden next to a house. The Greek

uses the curious and rare term *xērokēpion*, literally 'dry garden'. Since in the papyrus *xērokēpion* renders Arabic *janna*, we can be sure that its chief characteristic was constituted by shade-providing trees. *Dārat al-'Ebād* seems to be "the House of Worshipers", although in the context this house must have been converted to profane use.

Turning to land, we mention *al-Abla*, the first part of names of vineyards. The word may be derived from *abl*, "tree". In ancient agriculture vineyards had trees or wooden posts, often interwoven into "beds" supporting the vines. In a similar way, *aram* or *haram* is used as a generic word for an area of fields. For example, *(H)aram al-Ber* (possibly spoken *al-Bir*) is land around a spring, while *(H)aram al-Kouabel* may be land named after a tribe. The precise meaning of the first part of the term remains uncertain. Two derivations seem feasible: (1) The term may be derived from *haram*, "dedicated, sacred, belonging to". In this case, it may name what once was temple land. Thus, the *hiera ge* of Egypt attests the use of the term "sacred land" (Greek *hiera ge*) for an important category of land belonging to and administered by temples. But at the time and in the society of the Petra papyri any connotation of temple land must have been forgotten. Hence, the use of *haram* may also be derived from a profane use of the word *haram* for "precinct". In both explanations, the use of *haram* in the Petra papyri would attest the pre-Islamic use of the word and, perhaps, attest a shift of connotations in the use of the word for land. However, as said, an alternative derivation is available. (2) It is equally tempting to take *aram* as "heap of grain". The land in question seems to have been planted with wheat or other grains.

As is obvious, much remains (and most likely will remain) doubtful. Yet, the general structure is recognizable. The toponyms and the names of the houses used in the sixth century are clear evidence of the Ara-

bic character of the area, despite the fact that the people wrote their documents in Greek. Members of upper-class families use Flavius before their name, thus commemorating Constantine's second Flavian dynasty (325-95). This name stresses the high social standing of the person. "Flavius" is followed by individual names, which are either Greek, Roman, specifically Christian, or in some cases Nabataean. All these names have social and cultural significance. It is particularly important that at least some people tried to take names that sounded similar to their indigenous name. Bassus of Scroll 10 is a good example. His is a Latin name, but there is no Roman Bassus who became famous in the Eastern Mediterranean of the Byzantine period. Thus we are strongly inclined to agree with those orientalist who suggest that the name Bassus or Bassos maintains the old Semitic name BSS meaning "cat", but in the now-fashionable Greco-Roman clothing.

All in all, we were forced to spend much more time on Scroll 10 than had been anticipated, but the effort has paid off in the details resolved. Robert Daniel is presently drafting the preliminary edition (introduction, text, translation, commentary).

Papyri Scroll 83 (M. Kaimio)

On the occasion of the visit of HM Queen Noor to ACOR in 1995, Inventory No. 83 of the scroll archive was named *Papyrus Petra Scroll HM King Hussein bin Talal and HM Queen Noor al-Hussein*. The scroll is among those assigned to the team from Finland. In 1996, work on reconstruction of the text began and it is possible to make some preliminary observations about it.

This scroll is one of the largest and best preserved in the archive. Its total length was probably eight to nine meters, and it contained approximately 600-700 lines of text. The document was written in one column from the beginning to the end of the docu-

ment, and the scroll was rolled so that the end lay in the middle. In a roll of this length, the separation of the layers (there were some 140 altogether) was very difficult, and from many of the layers, only fragmentary pieces have been recovered. There are obviously still some, although probably not many, un-separated layers. Additionally, there are many loose fragments, some of which will never be placed in their correct position.

The text concerns the settlement of a dispute between two men known from other Petra papyri, Theodoros son of Obodianos and Stephanos son of Leontios and Stephanos son of Leontios. Such settlement by arbitrators is typical Byzantine practice. The properties under dispute are not, however, in the town of Petra, but in the neighboring village of Zadakatha (Sadaqa). The agreement is confirmed with oaths exchanged in a Chapel of Kyrikos situated in the same town. Therefore the properties under dispute are probably situated there, too.

Theodoros and Stephanos owned houses adjacent to each other, and over several decades there had been disputes between the families. Now the situation has flared up as Stephanos has begun to build a water-channel running from the spring in the courtyard of his neighbor to his own house.

The dispute was not settled in a court of law, but by a hearing before two trusted men, and the decision given by those arbitrators. The document reports in detail the process of the case. After some preliminary remarks, the text begins with the date and place of the event. Only the beginning of the regnal formula of the emperor is visible, without the year. This means the document was written after 537, when use of the regnal year of emperor began. Traces of the Macedonian date have been identified. The seventh indication year has been identified, as well as the ninth year of the era of the Province of Arabia, which can be interpreted as AD 574, the ninth regnal year of Justinus II. Such a date would be appropri-

ate as the titles used of Theodoros *theosebestatos*, *theophilestatos* indicate a late date in his career; in Inv. 67, dated AD 544, he does not use these titles.

The place, Zadakatha, is clear. There is then a record of the proceedings, including long speeches by each party in which they describe in detail the wrongs to which they have been subjected. They refer to many earlier transactions, some of them conducted 53 years before by their respective fathers. The speeches are not without rhetorical flourish:

If everybody could at his will act in this way, many men would be deprived of their lawful rights by the ill-doing of such people who wish — yes, who insist — on taking other people's property into their possession.

There are several subjects under dispute, including rights to draw water from the spring and lead it through the houses, to build water channels, to use drains, and of access through the houses. Theodoros also accuses Stephanos of trespassing and of stealing building materials from his house, and Stephanos raises the question of an old debt concerning the sale of a vineyard. Finally, the decisions of the arbitrators are given, and the litigants settle their disputes with solemn oaths and their signatures.

Of special interest is the appearance of the name of the Ghassanid leader, Abu Karib ibn Jabala, in this document. In AD 528, the Ghassanids became reconciled with the Byzantines, and Abu Karib was named a phylarch, a military leader, of the Arabs in *Palaestina Tertia* by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian. In our document, his position as a phylarch is mentioned, as he may have acted as a private mediator in the earlier dispute over the sale of a vineyard, an event that is mentioned by our litigants.

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