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EXTRAIT

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BRUXELLES BRUSSEL

A Ptolemaic Inscription from Bir 'Iayyan (1)

1. Bir 'Iayyan

Located on the Edfu-Barramiya road *ca* 97 km east of Edfu at 25° 02.50' N/33° 43.28' E (2), Bir 'Iayyan was an unfortified station supplying water to passersby beginning at least as early as the second quarter of the third century B.C. (See map for its location.) The site sits on a sandy floor on the south side of Wadi Barramiya at the foot of a V-shaped sandstone bluff jutting into the wadi. Previous scholars had, on the basis of surface pottery, identified Bir 'Iayyan as Ptolemaic (3). Pottery collected and studied by the University of Delaware-University of Leiden survey confirmed these dates (4). The discovery of at least two Ptolemaic inscriptions at the site by the Delaware-Leiden survey has now established epigraphically a more precise date for Ptolemaic activity here, 257 B.C. (see section 2). There is no ceramic evidence suggesting later Roman use of the site, although one of the stelai discovered by the Delaware-Leiden team was covered with Christian and bedouin *wusum* graffiti, indicating that travellers occasionally frequented the site after the Ptolemaic occupation.

The surface of the site exhibits only several relatively small structures, all grouped under the steep cliff face. The largest structure is an irregularly shaped building of low dry stone walls situated less than 10 m from the cliff; its largest dimensions measure only 8 × 10 m. A one-room building nearby abuts the bedrock base of the bluff. Each of these edifices

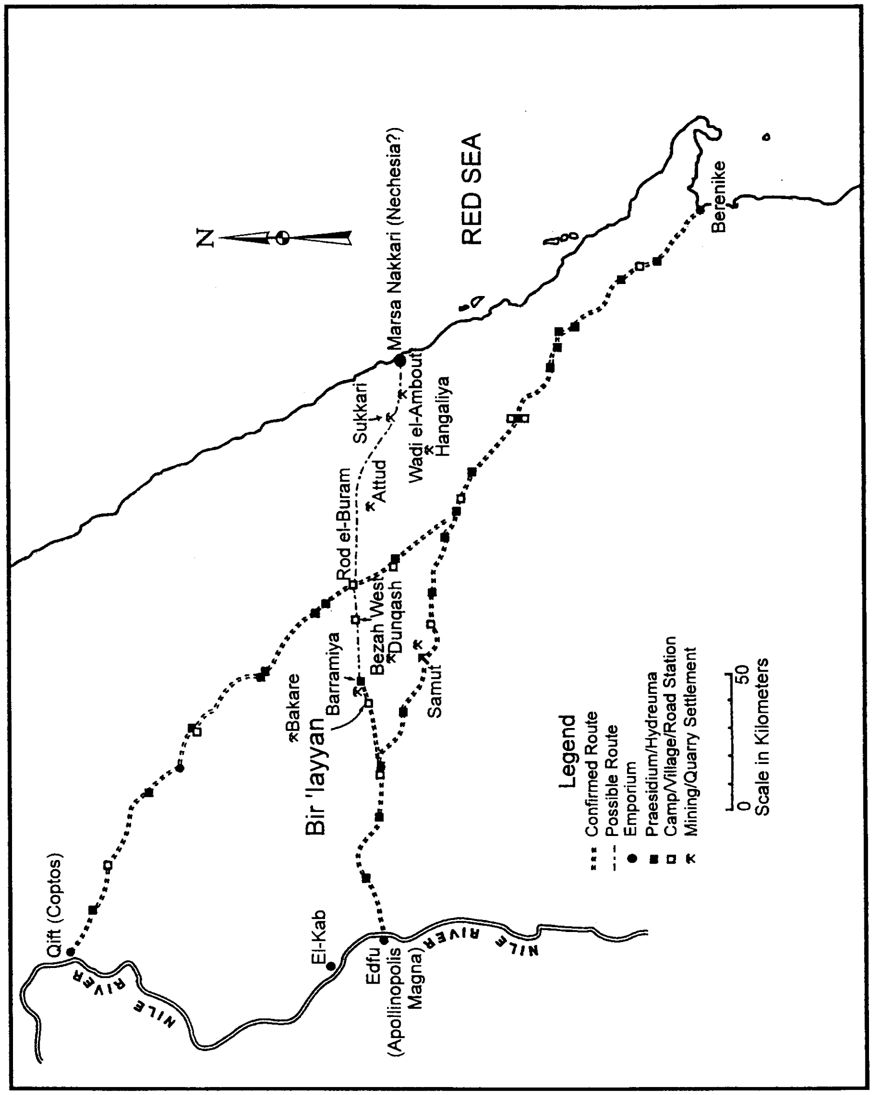
(1) The first draft of section 1 is by Sidebotham and Zitterkopf, of sections 2 and 4 by Bagnall, and of section 3 by Manning, but we have all read and commented on the other sections. The map was prepared by Zitterkopf and T. Webber; all photographs are by Sidebotham.

(2) All coordinates represent averages of readings taken from the Magellan NAV 5000 D Global Positioning System receiver.

(3) H.T. Wright and S. Herbert, "Archaeological Survey in the Eastern Desert of Egypt: Report of the University of Michigan/University of Asiut Project to the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, December 1993", 7 (unpublished).

(4) Dr. John W. Hayes provided dates for the pottery collected by the Delaware-Leiden survey.

Bir 'Iayyan and Associated Roads



is composed of materials similar to the sandstone bluff, as are the stones on which the Ptolemaic inscriptions are cut. There are several mounds of gravel and boulders in the immediate area, some containing chunks of plaster. Two windbreaks in the vicinity are probably of more recent origin.

There are two external cisterns: one is roughly circular with an inside diameter of about 2.8 m, the other rectangular with inside measurements of *ca* 1.7 × 3.8 m. Each cistern contains significant remains of a coarse sand plaster. Although the survey did not locate any surface indications of a well at the ancient site, a modern well exists several hundred meters to the north just north of the modern Edfu-Marsa Alam highway.

The top of the bluff is *ca* 50 m above the wadi floor. This promontory is a striking physical feature observable for many kilometers away on the route. Atop the bluff overlooking the site are three cairns adjacent to one another. Two more are nearby, and one to the east on another ridge. The wadi at this spot is about one kilometer wide; at least two cairns sit atop the north wall of the wadi. Under a protective overhang part of the way up the cliff face are numerous petroglyphs comprising gazelles, ibexes, ostriches and other animals.

Bir 'Iayyan supported traffic between the gold mining center at Barramiya (25° 04.14' N/33° 47.47' E) and the Nile River centers of Edfu and el-Kab. Recent survey work in the region has located other sites which suggest that this road may have extended, via a number of gold mining centers or trunk routes leading to gold mining centers, all the way to the Red Sea coast, the nearest settlement there being the emporium of Marsa Nakari (24° 55.50' N/34° 57.74' E). Sites newly discovered by the Delaware-Leiden survey supporting such a hypothesis include water supply stations at Bezah West (25° 05.50' N/33° 43.28' E), where very little and non-diagnostic surface pottery was recovered, and Rod el-Buram (25° 05.12' N/34° 08.20' E), where fourth-third century B.C. sherds were recovered ([5]). Continued surveying east of Rod el-Buram may well lead to the discovery of other road stations on the putative highway joining Edfu to Marsa Nakari.

This putative road, passing near gold-mining regions known to have been exploited in the Ptolemaic period (e.g., Sukkari, Hangaliya, Wadi

(5) Cf. S.E. Sidebotham and R.E. Zitterkopf, "Routes Through the Eastern Desert of Egypt", *Expedition* 37.2 (1995) 40 (map), 48.

el-Ambout, Attud, Bakare, Dunqash, and Samut) (6), would also have carried the products of those mines to the Nile and have provided travellers with periodic rest and water stops and, presumably, some protection from bandits.

A University of Delaware surface survey of Marsa Nakari recovered ceramics of the first or second and mid-fourth to fifth centuries A.D. and later. Given Claudius Ptolemy's location of the port of Nechesia (*Geography* 4.5.8) in relation to the location of the ruins at Marsa Nakari, there is a high degree of probability that Marsa Nakari can be equated with Nechesia (7). Additional survey work at Marsa Nakari plus the excavation of some sondages there may well confirm a Ptolemaic presence at the site.

Ptolemy II was active in the Eastern Desert and along the Red Sea coast. He is credited with founding Arsinoe-Clysma-Qolzoum-Kleopatris (Pliny, *NH* 6.33.167), Philoteras (Strabo 16.4.5), and Berenike (Pliny, *NH* 6.33.168), together with a number of elephant-hunting stations along the Red Sea coast (Pliny, *NH* 6.33.170-171), with canal work between the Nile and Clysma (Pithom Stele; Diodorus Siculus 1.33.11; Strabo 17.1.25-26; Pliny, *NH* 6.33.165) and with constructing a road between the Nile (at Edfu) and Berenike (Strabo 17.1.45) (8). Myos Hormos and Nechesia may also have been founded in the Ptolemaic period. This Ptolemaic building activity, together with Hellenistic period exploitation of gold mines in the region noted above, provides a broader context in which the discovery of these inscriptions of Ptolemy II at Bir 'Iayyan and the possibility that there was a road of the Ptolemaic period joining Marsa Nakari to Edfu fit comfortably.

2. The Inscription

Stele of local pink sandstone, 73 cm high, 53.5 cm wide, 10.5 cm thick. (Plate 1.) The letters vary from 2-3 cm high. The lettering is roughly and unprofessionally cut, with lunate epsilon and sigma, bearing little resemblance to professionally-cut stones of the period. An inscription of

(6) R. Klemm and D.D. Klemm, "Chronologischer Abriß der antiken Goldgewinnung in der Ostwüste Ägyptens", *MDAIK* 50 (1994) 206-211 and chart 219-222. On the Samut gold mines, see S.E. Sidebotham, "Survey of the Hinterland", in S.E. Sidebotham and W.Z. Wendrich, eds., *Berenike 1994. Preliminary Report of the Excavations at Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden 1995) 85-101 at 85-86.

(7) S.E. Sidebotham, "The Roman Frontier in the Eastern Desert of Egypt", *Proceedings of the XVI International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, forthcoming.

(8) Cf. Sidebotham and Zitterkopf (above, n. 5) 39-52.

PLATE 1

the reign of Ptolemy II from the sanctuary of Pan et El-Kanaïs shows very similar forms (see A. Bernand, *Le Paneion d'El-Kanaïs* [Leiden 1972] no. 9bis, plate 54,1). This again is an unprofessional piece of work. The lower part of the stele is roughed with the chisel, perhaps an indication that it was to be placed in a socle and not visible to the reader.

The stone is a kind of milestone, a distance marker from the Nile, set up by the toparch Rhodon son of Lysimachos.

Ἀπὸ ποταμοῦ ἕως τού-
του στάδιοι τετρα-
κόσιοι ἑξήκοντα εἷς.
βασιλεύοντος Πτο-
λεμαίου τοῦ Πτολε-
μαίου Σωτῆρος ἔτους
κη, μηνὸς Ἐπεὶφ
ἔστησεν Ῥόδων
Λυσιμάχου Πτολε-
μαιεὺς τοπαρχῶν
τὸνς τρεῖς

"From the river to this point, four hundred sixty-one stadioi. In the reign of Ptolemy son of Ptolemy Soter, year 28, month of Epeiph, Rhodon son of Lysimachos, from Ptolemais, toparch of the three ?, set up (this stone)".

1. ἀπὸ ποταμοῦ: The absence of an article is not uncommon. There are not many instances of either ἀπὸ ποταμοῦ or ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ in the papyri, but *P.Oxy.* XIV 1748.4-5 lacks the article, while *P.Tebt.* III 703.39 has it. With other prepositions, omission of the article before forms of ποταμός is variable. Instances of omission occur with εἰς, ἐπί, κατά (+ acc.; particularly and repeatedly in *P.Hib.* II 198), and παρά.

2-3. The Greek stade was of notoriously variable length. If, as one would expect, it means here the most common Ptolemaic stade of about 212 meters, the distance of 461 stades here would be about 97.7 km, very nearly exactly the actual measured distance (cf. section 1). Minor deviations in the course of the modern road from the ancient would suffice to explain this difference.

4-7. This is the standard regnal formula for Ptolemy II at this period (i.e., after the disappearance of Ptolemy the son in 259), cf. *Guide to the Zenon Archive* II 474. Epeiph of year 28 of Ptolemy II was 22 August to 20 September 257 B.C., assuming that it is the Egyptian regnal year (not the financial) that is used here.

8-10. The person appears to be otherwise unknown; no toparch named Rhodon was previously attested, and no Rhodon son of Lysimachos appears in *Pros.Ptol.* VII, p. 306 (in the index of names), although the name is not uncommon in Ptolemaic Egypt. The name does not appear to be of distinctive origin. For example, the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* I 399 lists examples from Crete, Cyprus, Cyrenaica, Delos, Euboia, Rhodes, and Samos, and numerous examples from Athens appear in II 391. Very few citizens of Ptolemais (in the Thebaid), founded by Ptolemy I (see G. Plaumann, *Ptolemais in Oberägypten* [Leipzig 1910] 2-3) are known by name. Unlike most Ptolemaic officials, he gives his ethnic as well as his office; but a similar case is found in *UPZ* II 227, a Πτολεμαιεύς who is a ἡγεμὼν ἔξω τάξεων.

10. The participle of τοπαρχέω is not common, and there is no obvious parallel to its use here (cf. note to line 11). *P.Tebt.* III 735 refers to someone τοπαρχῶν τοὺς τόπους, and in *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59322 we find someone described as τοῦ τοπαρχοῦντος ὑπὸ σέ. As neither the person referred to nor the person addressed there is elsewhere attested, we gain little sense of the possible range implied by the use of the verb. In *UPZ* 153 (*SB* I 1178a-b), these two constructions merge in τοῦ τοπαρχήσαντος ὑπὸ Στράτωνα τὸν Περὶ Θήβας τόπον; cf. the shorter version in *SB* I 3937. Straton was an oikonomos (*Pros.Ptol.* I 1088; cf. also VIII 419 add.). No doubt the circumscription of a toparch could vary; cf. note to line 11 and more generally section 3 on this aspect.

11. This line is the principal difficulty of the inscription. The reading appears clear enough, but it is not obvious what it can mean. Dividing the letters τὸν στρεις does not yield any meaning. It is possible that the inscription was never finished precisely because of the error in writing the (Doric) form τονς instead of τούς. (For the Doric form of the accusative plural in the o-declension, see C.D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects* [Chicago 1955] 68, 86). But nu for upsilon could also, perhaps more likely, be a simple mistake of the stonecutter, with no dialectal significance. The drafter may have intended νομούς, nomes. See section 3 for the administrative questions involved here.

3. The Administration of Upper Egypt

The title borne by Rhodon at the end of our inscription, "toparch of the three", raises questions about the organization of Upper Egypt in the third century B.C. and suggests the ad hoc nature of Ptolemaic administrative practice in the first half of this century. The Ptolemies were above all pragmatic and placed new structures in the countryside only where necessary. The informal nature of the bureaucracy in the third century was mandated also by the gap between Ptolemy I Soter's claim to the kingship in 305 B.C. and the establishment of the royal economy and the bureaucracy necessary to administer it by Ptolemy II Philadelphos ([9]). Our suggestion that we should understand the title of Rhodon as "toparch of the three (nomes)" rests on some specific documentary evidence that the Nile valley south of Pathyris at times coalesced into a coherent administrative region. Ptolemaic titles were fluid and did not always carry the same meaning in the Fayum as in the Nile valley. Thus the title toparch in Upper Egypt, it would seem, could be in charge of a much larger geographic area than was a toparch in the Fayum ([10]). We also offer some more general considerations about the southern Nile valley which strongly suggest that this area of Egypt was traditionally interlinked, both because of the symbiotic relationships of temples and because of social links between the temple towns.

First, the suggestion that Rhodon might plausibly be seen as responsible for three nomes in southern Upper Egypt, the "Thebaid", and, as a result of being responsible also for the desert road leading out from Edfu to the gold-mining regions, also responsible for the adjacent desert regions. There is abundant evidence to suggest that officials under the Ptolemies were in charge of more than one nome ([11]) in Upper Egypt where Ptolemaic control was thinner than in the Fayum, an area divided into districts or *merides* and, as a result of this subdivision, more tightly controlled.

One official explicitly in charge of several nomes was the Thebarch, based at Ptolemais and in charge of finances for the entire Thebaid ([12]). Although a much larger region by the end of the century, the Thebaid may only have consisted of the area south of the Aphroditopolite nome in the mid-third century, as *P.Rev.* implies. Clearly such administrative authority over such a wide area had the intended purpose of controlling the entire region, which otherwise was prone to disturbance. After the great Theban

(9) Eric Turner, "Ptolemaic Egypt", in *Cambridge Ancient History*^{2} VII.1 (Cambridge 1983) 118-174.

(10) For the general scheme of officials and their administrative areas, see P.W. Pestman, *New Papyrological Primer* (Leiden 1990) 24.

(11) E.g., the so-called "lesser strategoi" discussed by J.D. Thomas, *The Epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* I: *The Ptolemaic Epistrategos* (Pap.Colon. 6, Opladen 1976) 32.

(12) On the office of Thebarch, see E. Van 't Dack, "Le thébarque Stratôn", *Le monde grec. Hommages à Cl. Préaux* (Brussels 1975) 646-655 = *Ptolemaica Selecta. Études sur l'armée et l'administration lagides* (Stud.Hell. 29, Leuven 1988) 272-287.

revolt, a stronger and more permanent military presence was also deemed necessary.

More generally, that Upper Egypt was administered at times in large units rather than strictly through the old nome divisions is the result both of the nature of the physical geography and the social history of Egypt before the Ptolemies ([13]). The long thin southern Nile valley, having less arable land the further south one goes, may have been more efficiently controlled as an entire region rather than by strict nome division. In the Ptolemaic period, the Fayum was an area of special concern and therefore under stricter control than the southern Nile valley. It has been persuasively argued by Alan Samuel ([14]) that Egypt was controlled not on a uniform bureaucratic pattern but rather on an ad hoc and informal basis. The Ptolemies lacked the manpower, especially outside the Fayum, to run the country on a uniform model with every possible post filled. Government was fluid, particularly in the upper Nile valley, and officials bore several titles and held responsibility over large areas of the valley. Or, to use David Thomas's formulation, "the administration of the Thebaid was in certain respects centralized in the third and second centuries, but the area was always divided into nomes" ([15]). Thus the lack of manpower and the physical geography of the Nile valley resulted in a kind of bureaucratic economy of scale in Upper Egypt. And offices did not have a fixed jurisdiction, but, rather, depended on the official given the appointment. This fact is stressed by Samuel, who argues that "appointments were not necessarily always made for pre-existing administrative districts, but... appointments could be to rank, with jurisdiction then assigned" ([16]). Such "fluidity" in the jurisdiction of office is also seen in the nome structure itself. In *P.Rev.* (259 B.C.) there are two lists of nomes in very different orders. In both lists, however, south of the Aphroditopolite nome comes the Thebaid which, by the end of the Ptolemaic period, formed four nomes with centers at Esna, El-Kab, Edfu, and Kom Ombo. That the number of nomes in the third century was not firmly fixed is suggested by the so-called Karnak Ostracon, recording a survey of Egypt "nome by

(13) Cf. the remarks of Dimitri Meeks, *Le grand texte des donations au temple d'Edfou* (Bd'E 49, Cairo 1972) 139-147.

(14) A.E. Samuel, "The Internal Organization of the Nomarch's Bureau in the Third Century B.C.", *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles* (Am.Stud.Pap. 1, New Haven 1966) 213-29; id., *The Shifting Sands of History: Interpretations of Ptolemaic Egypt* (Publ.Assoc. Anc.Hist. 2, Lanham 1989) 51-65.

(15) Thomas, *Ptolemaic Epistrategos*, 132.

(16) *Essays Welles*, 223.

nome". The number of nomes in this text was originally given as 36 but was corrected above the line to 39 ([17]).

Further evidence that the southern stretch of the Nile valley was treated as a unit is suggested by a scribal title, *sn n tš Ne Tꜣ-št-rsy*, "scribe of the district of Thebes (and) the 'southern region'" ([18]). More informal connections also existed. The similarities in the scribal traditions of Edfu and Elephantine have been noted by several authors ([19]). There are also archaeological records which suggest connections between the towns. For example, the chapel of *Snꜥꜥ-ib* from Elephantine was found at Edfu. In noting this connection between Edfu and Elephantine, Pascal Vernus described the links between the two towns as "lâches, mais réels" ([20]). As in the Ptolemaic period, interlocking landholding patterns seem to have formed the basis for administration in earlier periods. In the Ramesside period, for example, a mayor of Elephantine was responsible for farming land at Edfu ([21]). In the Saite period, a priest of the official *Ḫnsw-ir-dy=s* at Nag el-Hassaya (later the cemetery for the priests of Horus at Edfu, 11 km south of the town) reveals that he was mayor not only of Thebes but of Elephantine as well ([22]).

This organization of the early Ptolemaic bureaucracy was a pragmatic response to political conditions in Egypt before the arrival of Alexander and his army. The office of dioiketes, known from Egyptian texts dating back to the sixth century B.C., is perhaps the best-known specific example of Ptolemaic grafting onto pre-existing administrative structures ([23]), but it does not stand alone. One of the most important aspects of the conditions in Upper Egypt was that social organization extended beyond nome boundaries in landowning patterns and cultural ties, even more than

(17) See Edda Bresciani, "Registrazione catastale e ideologia politica nell'Egitto tolemaico. A completamento di "La spedizione di Tolomeo II in Siria in un Ostrakon demotico inedito da Karnak", *EVO* 3 (1983) 15-31; for an English translation of the text see S.M. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII* (Cambridge 1985) 122-123, no. 97.

(18) P.Ryl.dem. 17.2 (118 B.C.); cf. Pestman, *Pap.Lugd.Bat.* 14 (1965) 48 n.9.

(19) Karl-Theodor Zauzich, "Ein Kaufvertrag aus der Zeit des Nektanebos", *MDAIK* 25 (1969) 223-229; Wolja Erichsen, *Ein demotischer Ehevertrag aus Elephantine* (Abh-Berlin 8, 1939).

(20) *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 6.328.

(21) P.Valençay 1; see Sally L.D. Katary, *Land Tenure in the Ramesside Period* (London 1989) 207-216.

(22) Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography* 5.205-206; *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 4.318-319.

(23) See Jean Yoyotte, "Le nom égyptien du 'ministre de l'économie' de Sais à Méroé", *CRAI* 1989, 73-90.

was true generally in Egypt. Split holdings of temple land dispersed through several nomes are an ancient feature of temple land tenure. The Edfu donation text, inscribed on the outer wall of the temple of Horus at Edfu, is a good witness to this pre-Ptolemaic practice ([24]). For, although the text was inscribed on the wall in the late Ptolemaic period, the donation which this survey of temple land reflects dates to the fourth century B.C. In this text, we see that the temple of Horus received land in three nomes, from the Pathyrite down to Kom Ombo. Temples in Dendera and Elephantine also owned land in the nome of Edfu, and the temples were also linked through cult ritual.

More evidence could certainly be brought to this discussion, but all of these items speak to a regional component in the organization of Egypt which the Ptolemies simply adopted. If our working hypothesis is correct — and we must stress its preliminary character ([25]) — what looks prima facie as a less than promising inscription in fact sheds valuable light on Ptolemaic administrative practice at the time of political consolidation and innovation under Ptolemy II. The system of control used by the Ptolemies was not uniform throughout the country, and the inscription from Bir 'Iayyan reminds us of the exceptionality of the Fayum and its organization, and of the continuity in the Nile valley from earlier times. The dictum of Welles, nearly half a century ago, should again be stressed: "... Ptolemy took over a going concern, and did not change it very much, except as was necessary to adapt it to Macedonian control and to the Greek monetary economy..." ([26]).

4. Fragments of An Inscription

Seven fragments of the local sandstone were also found close to the first inscription. The letters are only slightly better cut than those of the other inscription and are similar in style, except that sigma is made with four branches, not lunate. Distinctive is the small, raised omicron. Not enough is left to allow a comprehensive reconstruction. It appears, however, that three of the pieces (fragments 1-3) can be combined to provide part of three lines. (Plates 2-3.) We give first a text of these, then a hypothetical reconstruction incorporating one additional fragment (fragment 4, Plate 4).

(24) For the text, see Meeks, *Le grand texte des donations*.
(25) I (J.G.M.) hope soon to treat this matter in more detail.
(26) C. Bradford Welles, "The Ptolemaic Administration in Egypt", *JJP* 3 (1949) 47.

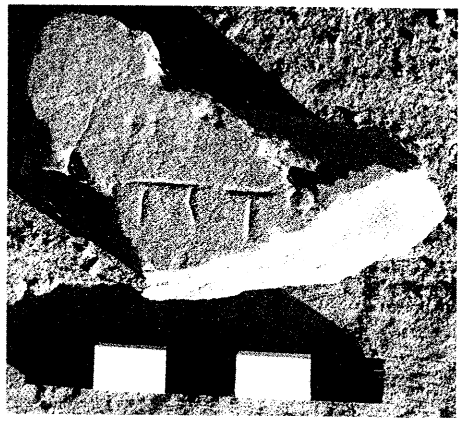


PLATE 2

PLATE 3

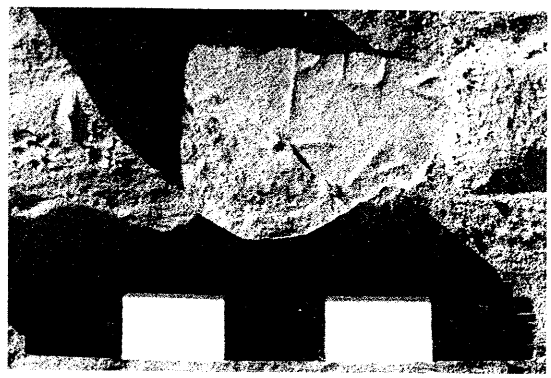


PLATE 4

]ΠΤΟΛ̣ΕΜ[
]ΝΖΗΝ[
].ΙΣΤΗ.[
- - - - -

Fragment 1, with ΠΤΟ and slight traces below the pi, apparently has clear surface above the letters; this we take to be an indication that this is the first line of the inscription. It therefore cannot have followed entirely the formula of the first inscription, which gives the indication of distance from the Nile above the titulature. It is, however, possible to reconstruct a regnal titulature. Fragment 4 comes into play at this point:

PLATE 5

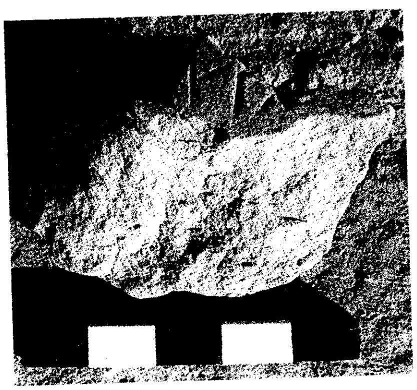


PLATE 6

PLATE 7

- - - -
ΡΟΣ[
ΣΑ[-
- - -

As this fragment clearly preserves part of the left margin, it is at least plausible to suppose that its first line is the ending of Σωτῆρος. This yields the possibility of

[Βασιλεύοντος Πτολεμαίου τοῦ] Πτολεμ[αίου Σωτῆ-]
ρος, [μηνὸς (e.g.) Φαρμοῦθι, ἔστησε]ν Ζην[όφιλος]
Σα[- 19 -].ιστη.[
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

The month is clearly chosen for length; a date could be added without difficulty, for the restoration is a couple of letters short as it is (but see fragment **5**). The name in line 2 is purely *exempli gratia*, and ΣΑ could be in the middle of a patronymic as easily as at its start. An ethnic and at least the start of a title then could have followed in the lacuna. The partly preserved letter after the lacuna may be either a high omicron (as in Πτολεμ in line 1) or a rho. We have no suggestion to offer for taking what follows, and given the exiguousness of the remains even the above may well be pushing the evidence beyond reasonable limits. But it must be noted that there are no clear traces on the stone below line 3, and the text could have been as short as three lines.

The above reconstruction of course depends on the assumption that the formula of this inscription was at least generally similar to that of the completely preserved one published above. If this is not the case, one could imagine (for example) that the three combined fragments stood further to the left in the text, viz.

[Βασιλεύοντος] Πτολεμ[αίου τοῦ Πτολεμαίου Σωτῆ-]
ρος, [μηνὸς Παχὼ]ν, Ζην[- 21 -]
σα[- 19 -].ιστη.[
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

But -]ν Ζην[- could be also the end of a name followed by the beginning of the patronymic.

(fragment 5, Plate 5).
- - - - - - - - -
]ẸXIP[
- - - - - - - - -

A possible restoration would be the month Μ]ẹχὶρ [as part of the date.

Photographs of fragments 6-7 are printed (Plates 6-7), but we have not been able to derive any useful sense from them or to place them in either of the above reconstructions.

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