

A new wooden board from the temple at Kellis

With Plate XXVI

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One of the striking aspects about the whole corpus of inscribed material found at Ismant al-Kharab (ancient name: Kellis) in the Dakhleh Oasis is the relatively large number of wooden boards with some form of writing upon them.¹ It is common knowledge that in Egypt wood was, after all, a commodity used for writing purposes certainly not as frequently as papyrus or potsherds. The tablets found at Kellis include a few more or less complete multi-page codices (among which the most spectacular are the Isokrates-codex and the Harvest Account Book), individually preserved boards and small fragments of such boards with only minimal traces of writing remaining. The tablets appear to have been used in Kellis for several purposes: predominantly for various administrative purposes, but also for astrology, liturgy and religious affairs in general and, finally, in education. A useful survey of the usage of wood for various writing purposes and a list of publications of wooden boards known from Graeco-Roman Egypt was published by W.M. Brashear and F.A.J. Hoogendijk in *Enchoria* 17 (1990) 21-54 (add now to this list, e.g., the tablets published in P.Brook. 27-31 and P.Kell. Gr. I 60-62, 82, 84, 88, 90, furthermore the astronomical T.Amst. inv. 1, published in CdE 52 [1977] 301ff. and recently discussed in CdE 68 [1993] 178f.; add also Bodl. Gr. Inscr. inv. 4, Pack² 2710); for the subject in general cf. also E. Lalou, *Les tablettes à écrire de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne* (Turnhout 1992), where P. Cauderlier gives (pp. 63-96) another list and where J.L. Sharpe discusses (p. 127-148) codicological aspects of the Isokrates-codex and the Harvest Account Book from Kellis. For the manufacture of wooden boards at Kellis see P.Kell. Gr. I 67.

During the most recent season of excavations, January/February 1995, another wooden board was found in the temple area. The excavation's director, Dr Colin Hope, presented me with the remains of a wooden board and requested a description of its physical features and an idea of its content. Unfortunately it turned out to be incomplete and the precise content of the board in its original form could not

¹ For general information on the excavation site and for further details on wooden boards found there see K.A. Worp (ed.), *Greek Papyri from Kellis*, vol. I Nos. 1-90 (Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph No. 3, Oxford 1995; = P.Kell. Gr. I), pp. 1-2, 160. Several wooden boards with administrative texts found at Kellis in Area A, House 2, and in Area B are to be published by R.G. Jenkins and G. Wagner. Wooden boards from House 3 in Area A published in P.Kell. Gr. I are Nos. 60, 61, 62, 82, 84, 88 and 90.

be established. The fragment was returned to Dr Hope, who several days later gave me another fragment of a wooden board (which had been found at another place) with the same request. Again, the content of that fragment was unclear. As I returned this second fragment to Dr Hope, the other fragment happened to be still on his table and a stroke of lucky inspiration made me suggest to Dr Hope that the fragments should be joined. They turned out to fit together perfectly and the result was a wooden tablet which is now complete.

Inv. 31/420-D.6-1/D/3/8 (Room 3, level 2) + 21 (North corridor, level 2). H. 18.5 x B. 6 cm. Two holes (diameter of each: 0.5 cm.) have been drilled at 0.9 cm. from the edge of the board through the LH side of its front, apparently intended for making the board part of a codex; the distance between the holes is 12.5 cm. The text on the back of the board has been written over an earlier, mostly erased text.

SB 29. 1599

Front side

Plate XXVI, fig. 1

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | αῶ// Κλαυδίου
Θῶθ κῆ. Ἔσχον
παρὰ σοῦ Ψάις
προφήτης διὰ | (A.D. 268/9)
(25.ix. [Alex.St.] or 15.vii. [Eg.St.] |
| 5 | Ἦρων ὑπὲρ τι-
μῆς ὄρνιθας
γενήμ(ατος) ιεῖ''
καὶ αῶ// Κλαυδίου
ἔδωκ() ἐπὶ λόγῳ | (A.D. 267/8)
(A.D. 268/9) |
| 10 | ἀργυ(ρίου) δραχ(μάς)
εἴκασι τέσσα-
ρων, (γίν.) (δρ.) κδ. | |
| | Φαῶφι ιζ̄ κατ' ἀρχ(αίους)·
δι' ἐμοῦ δραχ(μάς) | (3.viii. [Eg.St.] |
| 15 | ὠκτώ, (γίν.) (δρ.) η.
Ἀμμώ(νιος) σσημ(εἰώμαι). | |

3-4 Ψάιτος προφήτου 5 Ἦρωνος 6 ὄρνιθος 11-12 εἴκοσι τέσσαρας 15 ὠκτώ

Back side

Plate XXVI, fig. 2

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | γῶ/- ἔδωκεν Ψάις προ-
φήτου ὑπὲρ φόρου ἐντη()
ὑπὲρ γενήματος δῶ// ἐπὶ λό- | (A.D. 270/1 or 272/3?)
27.12.22 ni 21E 62
(A.D. 271/2 or 273/4?)
22/273 p.124,
note 7 |
|---|--|---|

5 γφ ἀργυρίου κατὰ μέρος
 δραχμὰς ἑκατον ἐξή-
 κοντα ὀκτώ, (γίν.) (δρ.) ρξη.
 Ἐγραψα τὴν ἀποχὴν Ἀυ-
 ρήλιος Ἀπόλλων, ὃς σεση-
 μίωμαι. Μεσορὴ κθ.

(22.viii. [Alex.St.] or 10/11.vi. [Eg.St.]

1-2 προφήτης 8-9 σεσημείωμαι

"Year 1 of Claudius, Thoth 28. I received from you, Psais the prophet, through Heron for the price of fowl from the revenue of year 15 and of year 1 of Claudius (you [?] have given it on account) twenty-four silver drachmas, in total 24 dr.

Phaophi 17 according to the ancients; through me eight drachmas, in total 8 drachmas. I, Ammonios, have signed."

(Back side)

"Year 3. Psais the prophet has given for rent of *entie* () (?) from the revenue of year 4 on account one hundred and sixty-eight silver drachmas in instalments, in total 168 dr. I, Aurelius Apollon, have written the receipt, (I) who has signed. Mesore 29."

Chronological Commentary

The front side of the board (written by a trained scribe, whose Greek was defective, cf. the errors in his spelling and syntax) mentions the regnal years of two emperors:

- Year 15 of an anonymous emperor (l. 7), which should be connected with the emperor Gallienus and refers, then, to the year A.D. 267/8, and
- Year 1 of the emperor Claudius II (ll. 1, 8) which covers the year A.D. 268/9.

Apparently, therefore, this side concerns a (money) payment for two consecutive years, A.D. 267/8, 268/9. Furthermore, the back side of the board mentions a regnal year 3 of an anonymous emperor. Below, it will be seen that there is a problem with attributing this 3rd year to Claudius II (i.e. to A.D. 270/1). First, however, one more calendar element on the front needs to be discussed, i.e. 'Thoth 28' (l. 2) which is the equivalent of 25.ix. in the 'Alexandrian' calendar (see below, n. 4).

Written on the front of the newly excavated board we are facing, then, a text dated in l. 1 by the first regnal year of the emperor Claudius, more precisely by the first month (Thoth) in his regnal year and written on the 28th day of that first month (l. 2). This is truly remarkable. Following the standard approach for assigning a precise date to the front side of this wooden board, viz. that in Roman Egypt the first regnal year of any emperor was counted from the emperor's *dies imperii* until the next first day of Thoth, on which day his second regnal year began, we would have to assume that (1°) Claudius II was proclaimed emperor in

Rome on or around Thoth 1 (= 29.viii.) of the year 268,² and (2°) that the news of his ascension arrived within 4 weeks or even less all the way from Rome to the Dakhleh Oasis, i.e. 600 km south-southwest of Cairo. Consequently, the scribe of this wooden board would have dated according to exceptionally recent chronological information at his disposal.

Ad (1°): It is known that Claudius came to the throne in Rome in A.D. 268 somewhere at the end of August or early September (the precise day is unknown, cf. fn. 2). In fact the earliest papyrus we find dated to Claudius' first year is P.Stras. 10 (Hermopolis) from Phaophi 19 = Oct. 16 (cf. J.R. Rea's remarks in P.Oxy. XL p. 19 n. 1).

Ad (2°): A transmission time of approximately 6 weeks for news about a new emperor in Rome to arrive in Hermopolis is certainly acceptable,³ but a fast transmission of the news about Claudius' ascension *within* 4 weeks all the way from Rome to the deep South of Egypt is difficult to believe.

In my opinion the way-out of this problem is found in l. 13 on the front of our board, where we find the indication 'Φαῶφι ιζ κατ' ἀρχ(αίους)'. No mention is made of a new regnal year, so we have to assume that this date still fell within Claudius' first year (the sequence of months Thoth, Phaophi should be noticed). According to the Alexandrian/Greek calendar of 365¹/₄ days Phaophi 17 in Claudius' first regnal year would have fallen on Oct. 14, A.D. 268. This text, however, states in unambiguous terms that Phaophi 17 was calculated according to the ancient Egyptian calendar, based upon the traditional wandering year of 365 days (the system is referred to by the expression κατ' ἀρχ(αίους)). Phaophi 17 'Egyptian style', therefore, fell 73 days earlier than 14.x., i.e. on August 3.⁴ It is easily seen that a date '3.viii.' would match perfectly with a first regnal year of Claudius, running in Egypt officially from some time before 16.x.268 – 29.viii.269. Such a date, Phaophi 17 'Egyptian style' in Claudius' 1st regnal year, would be, then, the equivalent of 3.viii.269 in our calendar. It should be noted, of

² The precise date of Claudius' ascension to the throne is still unknown. D. Kienast (*Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt 1990, 228) is probably not correct in stating: 'Sept./Oct.', as that seems too late. According to the SHA (Vita Claud. 4.2) his ascension date was viiii. Kal. Apr. (= 24.iii.), but this date is fictive. It is hard to believe that it was simply a matter of 'Zahlensturz' during the process of the transmission of the text, i.e. that one should reckon with a simple error of 24.iii. [= viiii. Kal. Apr.] for 24.viii. [= viiii. Kal. Sept.], because there is another chronological indication added to the date itself (the festival of the 'blood' of the Magna Mater). One might, perhaps, wish to speculate that the author made a purely anachronistic leap from a historical date of ascension on 24.viii. to a fictitious date of ascension on 24.iii. just in order to establish a link with that festival of Magna Mater. If that speculation were justified, one might feel entitled to assume that Claudius' first year actually started a few days *before* the first of Thoth (29.viii.), but that the news arrived in Egypt too late for assigning him an ultra-short 1st year.

³ Cf. D. Rathbone in ZPE 62 (1986) 103.

⁴ Between the years A.D. 267 and 271 the Egyptian calendar was 73 days ahead of the Alexandrian calendar. For details of both calendar systems used in Egypt next to each other for a long time, see the recent article by D. Hagedorn and myself in ZPE 104 (1994) 243-255.

course, that our text, like many others, does not state *expressis verbis* what calendar system was used for calculating the precise start of the regnal year.⁵

It is only natural to suppose that one particular scribe, writing two consecutively dated receipts on one side (i.e. the front) of one wooden board, made use of one single chronological system. We are, therefore, entitled to assume that, though in this case it was not specifically indicated which calendar was used, the earlier date of 'Thoth 28' was also 'Egyptian style'; that would be, then, the equivalent of 15.vii.269 (cf. above, fnn. 4, 5). At the same time it must be stressed that such a phenomenon, i.e. dating by the Egyptian calendar without any clear indication of this practice, is unexpected and that it seems unique.

Once, however, the phenomenon is accepted, it might perhaps be adduced for explaining the problem raised by P.Oxy. XIV 1698 where we find a house-property sale contract dated (l. 27) Thoth 13 in a first regnal year of an emperor, whose name is lost but who was most probably Claudius II. If one assumes that this contract was also dated to Thoth 13 in the Egyptian calendar, there is no need to assume a scribal error of year 1 for year 2 (cf. above fn. 5); according to my calculations the contract might have been drawn up on 30.vi.269. It must be noticed, however, that in the case of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus the date of an official contract would have been by the Egyptian rather than by the Alexandrian/Greek calendar, and that this would have happened without any warning. Such an approach is not unproblematical; cf. the remarks by Hagedorn and me (*loc. cit.* [fn. 4] p. 255).⁶

⁵ Even though it is an established fact that the traditional Egyptian calendar ran ahead of the Alexandrian/Greek calendar (cf. above, fn. 4), it is, of course, impossible that the first regnal year of any emperor would have started in the Egyptian calendar already before it started in the Alexandrian/Greek calendar. Beginning with an emperor's 2nd regnal year, however, starting dates of his regnal years became divergent, depending on whether one used the Egyptian or the Alexandrian calendar, and during a short period within one Julian year there may have been two year numerals circulating for one emperor. From a theoretical point of view, e.g., a date to 18.vi.269 could be expressed as 'Claudius 1, Epeiph 24' (according to the Alexandrian calendar) while at the same time it may have been regarded as 'Claudius 2, Thoth 1' (according to the Egyptian calendar). For methodological reasons one is, I think, not allowed to assume that regnal year '1' in our text is in fact just an error for year '2' (NB: the conversion, based upon such a year 2 'Egyptian style', into our Julian calendar would not produce a different result). Cf. moreover, the horoscope P.Fay. 139 from A.D. 161: α (ἔτους) Ἀντωνίνου [καί] Οὐήρου τῶν κυρίων Σεβαστῶν, κατ' Ἑλληνας Μεσορή ε, κατὰ δὲ τοὺς ἀρχαίους Θῶθ ις (in itself one might expect that Thoth 16 'according to the ancients' (i.e. to the Egyptian calendar) fell into the 2nd year of Antoninus and Verus, cf. the situation in the horoscope P.Aberd. 13 (A.D. 187) = Greek Horoscopes # 187 (p. 51), where in a dubiously read [!] text [Mesore 7] 'Alexandrian style' in year 27 is equated with Thoth 23 of year 28 'Egyptian style').

⁶ *Inter alia* the following question needs to be addressed: so far the latest attestation of the traditional Egyptian calendar in a papyrus from the Nile Valley comes from A.D. 237 (P.Grenf. II 67). Is an extension of the period of use of the Egyptian calendar in the Nile valley by approximately 30 years acceptable, while this extension would be based only upon an interpretation of a mutilated papyrus? Moreover, it goes without saying that once the phenomenon of an unmarked 'Egyptian style' dating in a document from the Nile valley would be accepted, one should reckon with the existence of a larger number of such documents.

Finally, there is the question of the dating of the backside of the board, where we find a receipt for a payment made again by Psais the prophet, now dated to 'year 3 [I. 1], Mesore 29 [I. 9]'. There is no indication of an emperor's name, and no indication of the calendar system ('Egyptian' vs. 'Alexandrian/Greek') used. In itself, Mesore 29 'according to the Alexandrian calendar' corresponds to August 22 in the Julian calendar, but Mesore 29 'according to the Egyptian calendar' would have coincided with June 11 in the Julian calendar (i.e. at least in the period 267-271 with its 73 days difference between the 'Egyptian' and the 'Alexandrian/Greek' calendar).⁷ As year 3 of Claudius would have covered the period 29.viii.270 – 28.viii.271, the date, therefore, of the back of the wooden tablet would have been either 11.vi or 22.viii.271.

However: Claudius died shortly before August 28 in the year 270, i.e. still during his 2nd year (cf. J.R. Rea in P.Oxy. XL, p. 25). His 3rd year (A.D. 270/1), however, is attested; apparently the news of his death reached Egypt only after 28.viii.270 and we find datings to Claudius' 3rd regnal year (A.D. 270/271) in P.Stras. I 7 (Thoth 23 = 20.ix.) and P.Oxy. XIV 1646 (Phaophi [-] = 28.ix.-27.x.); see D. Rathbone in ZPE 62 (1986) 120. On the other hand: a date to Mesore 29 'according to the Egyptian calendar' and its equivalent in the Julian calendar, June 11, would then have fallen in the summer of the year 271, i.e. about 8 months later than the last known regnal dating after Claudius and probably much too late (at this date of 11.vi.271 we are well in the joint reign of Claudius' successors Aurelian and Vaballathus). The problem is only aggravated, if we take Mesore 29 as 'Alexandrian style', i.e. as equivalent to August 22, because that would yield a date of 22.viii.271, more than 1½ months later again than 11.vi.271. It is clear enough that with year 3 we have a problem. This is compounded by the fact that in l. 3 the γέννημα of a 4th year is referred to. Obviously, there is no point in assuming that 'year 3' refers to Claudius 3 [already problematical in itself] with 'year 4' referring to the 4th year of Vaballathus (= A.D. 270/1, cf. P.Oxy. XL, p. 24).

Under these conditions we are forced, I think, to admit that 'year 3' should NOT be attributed to Claudius; the first possible year 3 would be, then, Aurelianus 3 = A.D. 272/3. In the period A.D. 271-275 the Egyptian calendar ran 74 days ahead of the Alexandrian/Greek calendar, and Mesore 28 'Egyptian style' would be the equivalent of June 10 in the Julian calendar or, with Mesore 28 taken as 'according to the Alexandrian/Greek calendar', of August 22, hence the date would be 10.vi or 22.viii.273. But regardless whether the text was written on 10.vi or 22.viii.273, it is irritating that the revenue/crop of a (coming?) 4th year is referred to, while we are still *in* year 3. One can only assume that, after all, in this case the payment was an advance payment. At the end of any given regnal year one may have felt inclined to label already after the next regnal year a payment of a sum which was due within a few weeks.

⁷ In the period A.D. 271-275 [with a 74-day difference] the equivalent in our calendar would have been 10.vi.

Further notes of detail

Front, 4 For the title of 'temple prophet' (in Demotic the 'hm-nṯr') used for the highest ranking priest in an Egyptian temple (*in casu*: of the cult of the god Tutu? For literature on this god in Kellis cf. P.Kell. Gr. I 8-12 introd.) cf. the remarks in P.Vindob. Tandem, p. 139-142 (where further literature is given). Apparently Psais officiated at least during the period A.D. 269-273, cf. the chronological discussion above.

5-6 As the number of fowl paid for has not been indicated, we cannot tell whether the price was high, low, or just regular. Were the birds used for cultic purposes, or just for feeding the priests of the temple?

9 In itself this line looks a bit superfluous and its syntax is not clear; I am inclined to regard it as a kind of parenthesis. It is perhaps only a matter of taste, whether one resolves ἔδωκ(ες) or ἔδωκ(εν).

Back, 2 ὕπὲρ φόρου ἐντιη(): both the reading and the meaning are unclear. One expects, of course, a specification of the cause of the payment of rent (φόρος). Alternative readings like ἐντιμ() or even ἀντιμ() have been considered, but were rejected (at the start, the reading of an epsilon looks better than the reading of an alpha; at the end, the reading of an eta looks superior to the reading of a my; both the ε- and the -η, however, remain slightly uncertain, hence the dots). Furthermore, though there is no clear mark of abbreviation following the eta (itself written on normal line level), an abbreviation may have been intended. But it remains an open question, whether ἐντιη() should be kept together as the start of an unknown, abbreviated word, or ἐν should be separated from τιη() and if so, whether we should regard these 3 letters as a place name, i.e. read ἐν Τιη and understand 'for rent (for an object) in Tiē'? A place name Τιη in the Dakhleh Oasis is not yet known.

4 For κατὰ μέρος cf. F. Preisigke, *WB* II 76.16: = 'Teilzahlung'.



Abb. 1. T. Kellis Inv. 31/420-D.6-1/D/3/8
Vorderseite (Receipt for the price of fowl;
zu K. Worp, S. 1014ff.)



Abb. 2. T. Kellis Inv. 31/420-D.6-1/D/3/8
Rückseite (Receipt for rent;
zu K. Worp, S. 1014ff.)