

HERODIUM

Final Reports of the 1972–2010 Excavations
Directed by Ehud Netzer

Volume I

Herod's Tomb Precinct

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CHAPTER 13
THE LATIN AND GREEK INSCRIBED POTTERY
FROM THE AREA OF THE TOMB AT HERODIUM

Avner Ecker

The Greek and Latin inscriptions found in the fills around the tomb area in Herodium are in poor condition. They are presented here according to language, first the Latin (two inscriptions) and then the Greek (eight inscriptions). Three inscriptions are not presented here as they belong to a series in Greek mentioning King Herod that was found in the fills on both sides of the late stairway. It seems more fitting to publish them, within their epigraphic assemblage, in conjunction with the expedition's ceramics experts. Moreover, a Greek inscription on a glass beaker is discussed in Chapter 9.

The use of Greek in the inscriptions of Herodium exceeds that of Latin, as was common in Judea and the east. In fact, the mere appearance of Latin in such early, first-century BCE contexts is clear evidence of King Herod's close ties with Rome and Italy, a connection reserved for only the highest echelons of Judean society. The Latin inscriptions found in this area were etched on an imported fine-ware vessel (no. 1) and as a *titulus pictus* on what is probably the sherd of an imported amphora (no. 2). Unfortunately, neither of them lend themselves to clear interpretation.

Other inscriptions on imported amphorae and local storage jars are in Greek, but these also bear only few letters (nos. 4–8). No. 9 may be in Greek, but it may also be a “tag” of the kind hundreds of which were found in Masada and are considered to have been in use during the First Jewish Revolt.

It should be noted that the Latin inscribed sherd no. 2 was found in a First Jewish Revolt context; thus it may serve as a reminder that not all Latin *tituli picti* necessarily come from the Herodian palace (Rea 1998). In fact five inscriptions were found in First Revolt contexts (nos. 2, 4–5, 7–8). All these inscriptions may relate either to Herod's palace or to any period on the mountain between the death of Herod and the end of the First Revolt.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

1. L.A12218-10500 — Latin Graffito on an Imported Thin-Wall Red-Ware Bowl¹ (Ill. 13.1)

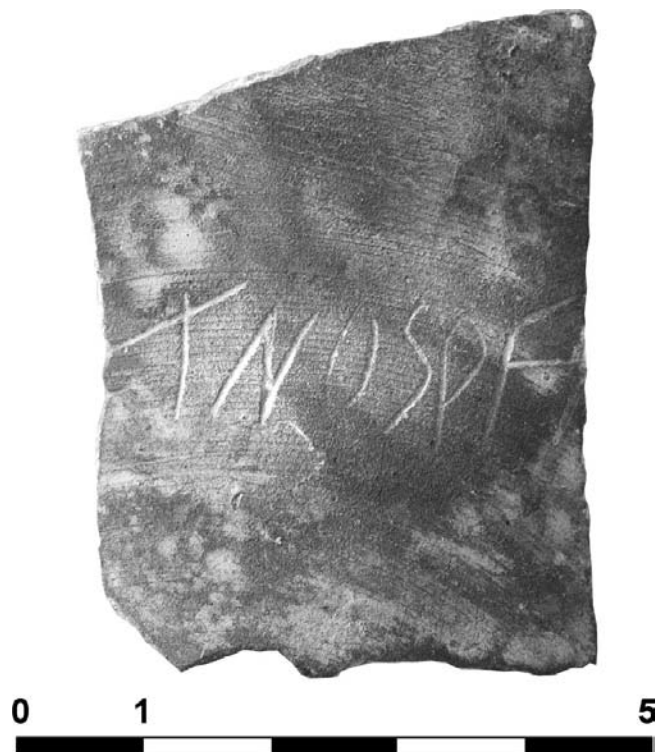
Description: Seven Latin letters incised before firing around a thin red metallic sherd of a bowl; probably imported; the top hasta of an F intersects the I.

Measurements: Sherd: height *c.* 5.1 cm, width *c.* 4 cm; line length 4 cm; letters 1–1.2 cm.

[--]FINOSPF+[--]

Commentary

The meaning of these letters is unclear. If they were incised before firing, in view of the fact that the vessel is an import from the west, they may be the potter's name or a manufacturer's mark. The string of letters certainly suggests abbreviations, but their resolution evades me. SPF may stand for Sp(urii) F(ilius), but filiation is very rare on *instrumentum domesticum*. NOS may be resolved as the *nomen gentilis* Nos(tius). FI may be Fi(glina) or perhaps (Opus) Fi(glinum). But mention of the opus or the workshop (*figlina*) is known mostly from stamps.



III. 13.1. Latin Graffito on an imported thin-wall Red-ware bowl (cat. no. 1: L.A12218-10500). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

This sherd was retrieved from a Herodian fill rich in pottery that was exposed in the northern part of the tomb precinct, and was deposited at the bottom of one of the collapsed terrace walls there.

2. L.A2772-10192 — Latin *Titulus Pictus* on a Sherd (Ill. 13.2)

Description: Possible remains of three letters in dull black ink on a body sherd (light orange exterior, gray section, darker interior, metallic, much white patina).

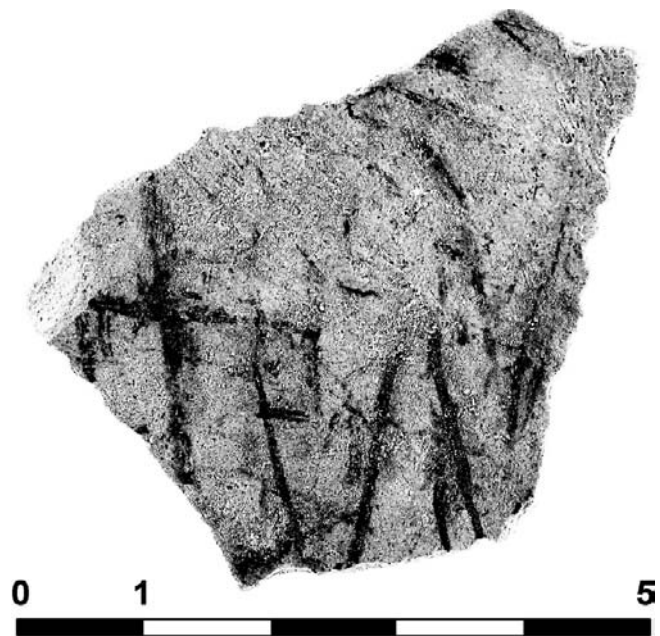
Measurements: Sherd height *c.* 4.6 cm, width *c.* 4.9 cm; letters 1.5-1.7 cm.

[--]TĒ·A[--]

Commentary

The reading is far from certain. There are many lines painted on the sherd and they are possibly meaningless scribbles. The resolution of the abbreviation evades me.

This sherd was found inside the pool to the west of the mausoleum, in a context relating to the First Jewish Revolt.



III. 13.2. Latin *titulus pictus* on a sherd (cat. no. 2 — L.A2772-10192). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

3. L.A12236-10473 — Greek or Latin Graffito on the Base of a Fine-Ware Bowl (Ill. 13.3)

Description: A single letter etched in the center of the exterior of the stepped ring base of a fine-ware bowl, red material, hard metallic and thin.

Measurements: Sherd: dia. 4.8 cm; letter 1.0 cm.

N



III. 13.3. Greek or Latin graffito on the base of a fine-ware bowl (cat. no. 3: L.A12236-10473). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

This is probably an owner's mark etched on the bottom of the bowl. It should be noted that the letter

N appears also on a cooking pot found in the fills in the theater area (L.A12231-10441). Both items may have come from the same kitchen, possibly belonging to the same owner or even the same cook.

This bowl base was found in a Herodian fill similar in character to the one mentioned above (item no. 1), which was exposed in the northern part of the tomb precinct, and which was deposited at the bottom of one of the collapsed terrace walls there.

4. L.A2825-10197 — Greek *Titulus Pictus* on an Amphora Sherd (Ill. 13.4)

Description: Remains of three letters painted in black ink on the body sherd of an amphora (white slip over pink surface and section, white inclusions, metallic).

Measurements: Sherd height *c.* 3 cm, width *c.* 5.4 cm; Letters 0.6 cm.

--]ΑΘΑ



Ill. 13.4. Greek *titulus pictus* on an amphora sherd (cat. no. 4: L.A2825-10197). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

Since nothing follows the second *alpha*, it seems to be the ending of a word. The possibilities for interpretation are numerous.

This amphora sherd was found to the east of the mausoleum, in a context postdating its destruction and containing First Jewish Revolt material.

5. L.A2660-6073 — Greek *Titulus Pictus* on an Amphora Sherd (Ill. 13.5)



Ill. 13.5. Greek *titulus pictus* on an amphora sherd (cat. no. 5: L.A2660-6073). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Description: A single letter painted in black ink on the sherd of an amphora with slightly white slipped exterior and gray section.

Measurements: Sherd: height *c.* 7 cm, width *c.* 5 cm; letter 1.3 cm.

[--]Π

Commentary

Since nothing seems to follow this letter, it is either the last one in an abbreviation or a number. If a number, it is either a measure of capacity (weight/volume) or the serial number of the amphora. The letter *pi* is the number 80 and it would probably be preceded by any letter that represents a numeral in the hundreds.

This amphora sherd was revealed quite close to the bottom of the refuse dump exposed between the ruins of the mausoleum and those of the late

stairway, which can be dated around the end of the First Jewish Revolt.

6. L.A12236–10725 — A Greek Owner’s Name on a Locally Produced Storage Jar (Ill. 13.6)

Description: Two letters in Greek written in black ink above the handle on the sherd of a bag-shaped storage jar, pink surface, light gray section, metallic; lunate *sigma*.

Measurements: Sherd: height *c.* 8 cm, width *c.* 8 cm; letters: *c.* 1.0 cm.

ΣΙΣ[--]
Of Sis...



Ill. 13.6. A Greek owner’s name on a locally produced storage jar (cat. no. 6: L.A12236–10725). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

The sherd is broken and the reading of the last two letters is thus far from certain. The third letter curves to the right and seems to recede toward the *iota* without contacting it (before the break). This letter is probably another *sigma* (an *epsilon* is hardly to be expected after a *sigma* and an *iota*). Accordingly, the inscription is probably an owner’s mark (a search through *LGPN* gives 21 names beginning with these letters). In Masada several similar storage jars were

found with names inscribed on them (Cotton and Geiger 1989: nos. 867–889).

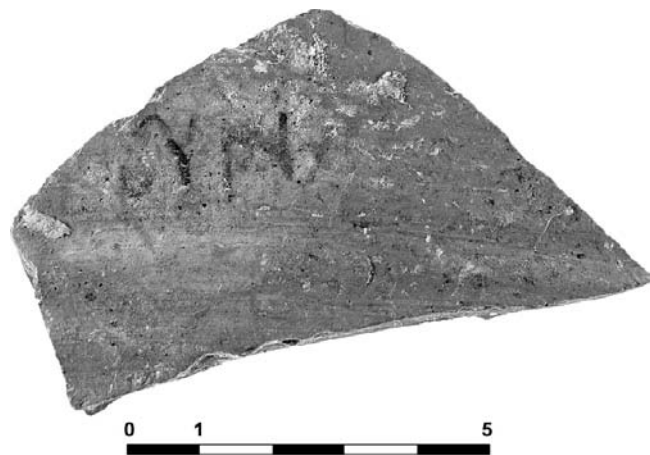
This sherd was found in the aforementioned Herodian fill (item no. 3), which was exposed in the northern part of the tomb precinct, and was deposited at the bottom of one of the collapsed terrace walls there.

7. L.A2828–1093 — A Greek Owner’s Mark (?) on a Sherd (Ill. 13.7)

Description: Three or four letters in black ink on the body sherd of a storage jar or amphora (light orange surface and interior with many black inclusions and some voids, gray section with white inclusions); lunar *sigma*, in ligature with *upsilon*.

Measurements: Sherd height *c.* 5.6 cm, width *c.* 8.8 cm; letters 1.0–1.1 cm.

ΣΥΠ+
Συ(μ)π...
of Sump...?



Ill. 13.7. A Greek owner’s mark (?) on a sherd (cat. no. 7: L.A2828–1093). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

The inscription seems complete, but its meaning is far from clear. Since the string ΣΥΠ is extremely rare in Greek (no name in the *LGPN* begins with it; only two entries in *LSJ*) it is probable that a *miu* before the *pi* was omitted because a name was written phonetically. The Greek *tituli picti* from Masada mostly contained people’s names, probably those of producers or merchants (Cotton and Geiger 1989: 179–180). This is probably some name (a search of *LGPN* gives

four options). The name as it appears here is probably abbreviated.

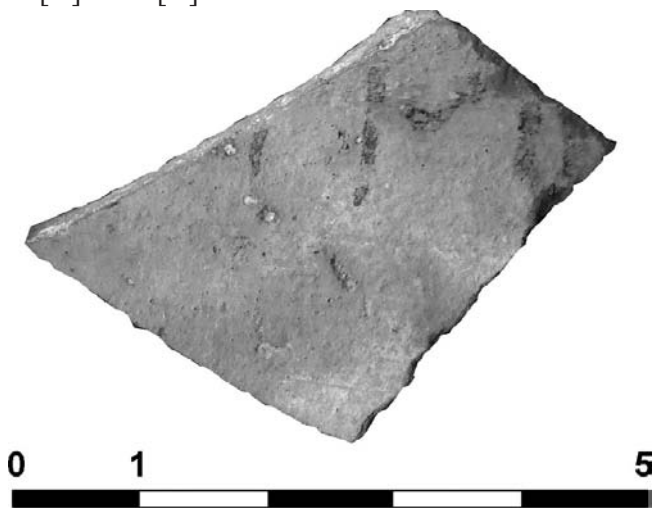
This sherd was revealed in the refuse dump exposed between the ruins of the mausoleum and those of the late stairway, which can be dated around the end of the First Jewish Revolt.

8. L.A2828-10198 — Greek *Titulus Pictus* on a Sherd (Ill. 13.8)

Description: Remains of three letters painted in black ink on the sherd of a jar or jug (light yellow exterior, yellowish-brown section, thin, metallic).

Measurements: Sherd: height *c.* 3 cm, width *c.* 4.5 cm; letter 1 cm.

[--]+M+[--]



Ill. 13.8. Greek *titulus pictus* on a sherd (cat. no. 8: L.A2828-10198). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

The inscription is probably in Greek, simply because of the paucity of Latin in this assemblage, and the somewhat round appearance of the other, undecipherable letters before and after the *miu*.

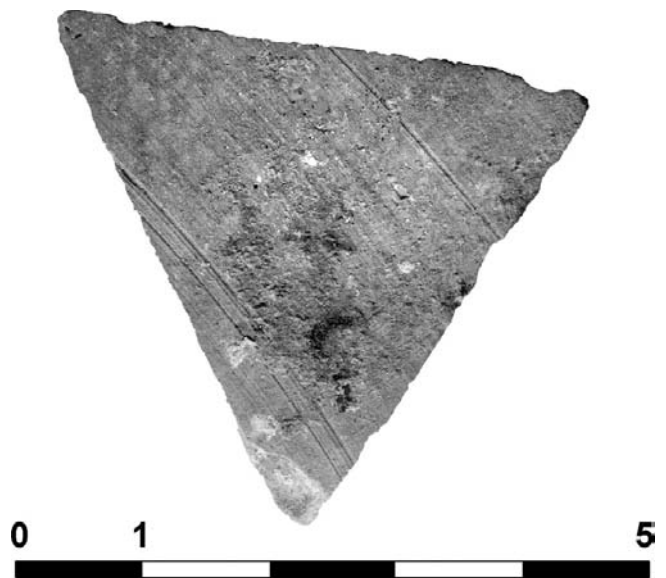
This sherd was revealed in the refuse dump exposed between the ruins of the mausoleum and those of the late stairway, which can be dated around the end of the First Jewish Revolt.

9. L.A2536-5112 — A Tag (Ill. 13.9)

Description: One letter with a line above it written in black ink at the point of a triangular sherd (pink surface, gray core — seems to be part of a locally produced jug or jar).

Measurements: Sherd: each side *c.* 4 cm; letter height 0.8 cm.

Ϛ
6



Ill. 13.9. A tag (cat. no. 9: L.A2536-5112). (Photo: T. Rogovski)

Commentary

This is probably a token of sorts. The sherd is worked into the shape of an equilateral triangle. This could possibly also be the Hebrew letter (כ *kaf*) written on a tag, the likes of which were found in the hundreds in Masada, where they were interpreted as tokens for food rationing for the rebels (Yadin and Naveh 1989: 2, 12-16, esp. Pls. 6-7). On the other hand, since this tag was found in a sounding dug into the artificial mount, in a Herodian context, it seems more feasible to connect it with the organization of the palace stores.

NOTE

1. I wish to thank Hannah Cotton and Werner Eck for their help with this inscription.

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