BRIEF NOTES

RECENT SUGGESTIONS ON THE BILINGUAL OSTRACON
FROM KHIRBET EL-KÔM

LAWRENCE T. GERATY
Andrews University

My publication of the third-century-B.C. bilingual ostracon in Aramaic and Greek scripts from Khirbet el-Kôm has recently called forth two helpful reviews that form the basis for my further brief discussion of this ostracon below. For the sake of convenience I present first the bilingual text, English translation, and my hand copy of the ostracon as these appeared in the original publication¹ (a slightly revised form of the text and translation appears at the end of the discussion):

\[ \text{NHMOY EXEI N1} \]

(1) On the 12th (day) of (month) Tammuz, year 6,

(2) Qōs-yada', son of Hanna', the moneylender,

(3) loaned to Niqeratos: zuz,

(4) 32.

\[ \text{Ls IB MHNOS PI A} \]

(5) Year 6, 12th (day), month of Pā-

(6) nēmos, Ni-

(7) kēratos, (son) of Sobbathos, received

(8) from Kos-idē, the money-

(9) lender: drachma, 32.

The first of the aforementioned reviews is that of Aaron Skaist which appeared in 1978, and the second is an unpublished one by my colleague William H. Shea. Though Skaist has offered no new suggestions that were not considered in my original publication, he did opt for two alternative readings to the ones I preferred. His argument for reading br in line 2 of the text instead of bn may be correct, but it would hold true for certain only if the script observed strict differences in letter length between medial and final positions; since this is not the case, one may choose between nun and resh on other than palaeographical grounds, which I did. His (and Shea’s) choice of my fourth option for the reading in line 3, namely hw ntn [], may be right after all; it is certainly the simplest reading and seems to me, too, after further reflection, to present the fewest problems. (I do not see the original suggestion as anomalous, however—the Greek text merely acknowledges the loan made in the Semitic text, just as it acknowledges the receipt of a payment if my fourth option is preferred.)

As for Joseph Naveh’s interesting suggestion that the last word in line 2 is a verb like hnsq, I am afraid that it is palaeographically difficult, not because the first letter could not be a he or the last one a qof (which I also considered), but because among the traces where he would read samekh, the upper tick is too high and the lower stroke too short. Given the clear Greek reading of the other half of the ostracon and the parallel for transliteration of a Greek

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3The nine-page manuscript by William H. Shea, “The Receipts of the Bilingual Ostracon from Khirbet el-Kôm,” is available from the author for 75¢.

4Skaist, p. 106, n. 2; cf. Joseph Naveh, “The Aramaic Ostraca from Tel Beer-Sheba (Seasons 1971-1976),” Tel Aviv 6 (1979): 194, where br is also proposed.

5In ibid.; Skaist says that I gave no examples of the use of non-Aramaic grammatical forms, though in fact I did: hzpt rather than zpt, or kzpt rather than kzpt; but admittedly these forms are uncertain.

6Ibid., p. 107, and n. 7. (My original suggestion for the space between the lamed and the name was that Nikeratos may have signed the document. At least his name is lighter and in a different hand from the rest.) On the same page and in n. 6, Skaist correctly points out my mistake in translating a first-person form as a third-person; obviously from my transcription, I intended the former.

7Ibid., n. 7.
technical term in an Edomite context,⁸ *qpyls* seems to me to still be the preferred reading, probably to be translated in its most usual meaning of "shopkeeper."⁹

Shea's study offers a novel and appealing interpretation of the ostracan: that the actions described in the two halves of the text are reciprocal, the bottom of the ostracan describing the loan that Qôs-yadaᵉ made to Nikeratos, and the top of the ostracan describing Nikeratos' repayment of the loan exactly one month later.¹⁰ I might be persuaded if it were not for (1) the order of the transaction's record (it seems to me more logical for the top half to describe the loan and then the bottom half, the repayment) and for (2) the two different languages used (if two different phases of the transaction on two different dates is being recorded, what purpose does the difference in language on the same ostracan serve?). This still leaves the chronological problem mentioned by Shea.¹¹ Because of the above objections to his most recent suggestion, I suppose I would still prefer his original suggestion to me that the problem of the month could be resolved by considering the problem of intercalation.¹² Perhaps the Greeks had intercalated already that year, thus pushing Panēmos one month later than it ordinarily would have been, whereas the Edomites had not yet intercalated. So far, very little is known about the relationship of the Macedonian calendar to others that are better known. As a last resort one might even consider the possibility of a scribal error.

Thus at the present time I prefer to see both halves of the el-Kôm bilingual ostracan as referring to the *same* transaction on the

⁸Geraty, p. 57.


¹⁰Shea, p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4. As Shea points out, in the Macedonian calendar used in the Near East from the third through the first centuries B.C., Panēmos was equated with Simanu in Babylonia and Sivan in Palestine. Apparently it was not until the first century A.D. that the names of the months of the Macedonian calendar were regularly shifted one month later so that Panēmos came to line up with Duzu in Babylonia and Tammuz in Palestine.

¹²Though this chronological difficulty was not discussed in my *BASOR* article (see n. 1, above), it was treated in my unpublished thesis which is now being prepared for publication.
same day—probably some kind of payment made by Qôs-yada the shopkeeper, Nikeratos. The ostracon served as Qôs-yada’s receipt—perhaps one signed by Nikeratos. Thus the bilingual would read:

/// /// למקות שמת (1) On the 12th of Tammuz, year 6,
كسرיע בן חנה Campbell (2) Qôs-yada, son of Ḫanna, the shopkeeper,
ור נוק [ןקטראטס ווק (3) gave [to] Niqueratos: zuz,
///ך (4) 32.
ה풀ום ע ‘MAHUM NIKERATOS (5) Year 6, 12th (day), month of Pa-
KHPATOC XOBBA (6) nemos, Nî-
NhmoY exeI ni (7) kēratos, (son) of Sobbathos, received
KHPATOS ΣΟΒΒΑ (8) from Kos-idē the shop-
O PAPA KOSIDH KA (9) keeper: drachmas, 32.
PHALOY ΠΑΒ