A Rhodian Stamped Amphora Handle from the Site of Barsinia
(North-western Jordan)

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ABSTRACT

During excavations carried out by the Department of Archaeology at Yarmouk University in the site of Barsinia in North-West Jordan, a Rhodian stamped amphora handle was found. This square shaped stamp with three lines inscription composed in Greek language constitutes the first Hellenistic evidence in the site. The text contains the name of an eponym and a Rhodian month-name. In the light of similar objects known in the adjacent areas, it was possible to roughly date the stamp to the second century B.C.

Keywords: Amphora Stamp, Barsinia in North-West Jordan, Rhodian, Second Century B.C.

1. INTRODUCTION

Barsinia is located in the north-western part of Jordan, at about 15 km to the west of the city of Irbid, 1.5 km east of the village of Deir es-Se'neh (Fig 1). It is situated on a flat hill, about 570 m above sea level, dominating the surrounding fields and a small wadi in the northern side of the site called Wadi al-Mehwara which separates the site from the village of Kufr ‘An (Fig 2).

It was late in the nineteenth century when the site of Barsinia was mentioned by G. Schumacher for the first time (Schumacher, 1890: 127-129). The site has been mentioned afterwards by N. Glueck during his archaeological survey made to the region in the fourteenth of the twentieth century (Glueck, 1951, site no. 117). The site was described in both reports as prominent and rich in archaeological remains. Barsinia was visited recently during the project of the west-Irbid archaeological survey conducted by a joint team from the Department of Archaeology at Yarmouk University and the French Institute of Oriental Researches (IFPO) at Damascus. The site was considered as one of the most important settlements in the region. Due to this result the site was selected to be excavated. The first season of excavation was conducted in summer 2006, by a specialist team from the Department of Archaeology, at Yarmouk University, directed by Dr. Lamia El-Khour. Numbers of archaeological finds have been uncovered; architectural remains, burial tombs, water installations, and several artifacts.

The excavated residential part of the site demonstrated a number of rooms of different sizes, dated by material cultures to the periods from Hellenistic to Abbasid. At the lowermost levels of one of the rooms (Fig 3) a Rhodian stamp with ancient Greek alphabets depicted on an amphora handle has been found, it was considered as a good evidence for the Hellenistic period at the site. This paper presents a detailed description of the stamp and its cultural significance.

The Rhodian Stamped Amphora Handle

This stamp which was written with Greek alphabets was considered to be as one of the important artifacts in the site. This kind of object shows not only a Hellenistic presence in the area but also a commercial relation with other areas during that period.

Such amphora stamps were attested in the surrounding regions. For instance, a number of this kind of stamps were found at the sites of Samaria- Sebaste (Reisner, et al., 1924: 123-129; Crowfoot, 1957: 379-388); Marisa (Macalister, 1901: 123-143, 394-396); Gezer (tell Abu–Shushah) (Macalister, 1912: 349-364); Beit Shean (Scythopolis) (Fitzgerald, 1930: 16; 1931: 44-46); Nessana (Auja al-Hafir) (Grace, 1962: 106-127) and Jerusalem (Thomson, 1941: 235-248; Ariel, 1990: 13-98) in Palestine. In Jordan they were found at

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**Fig. 1. Map showing the site of Barsinia and the surrounding area**

**Fig. 2. The Site of Barsinia And the Surrounding Area.**

**Fig. 3. Location where the stamp was found in Barsinia**

**Dimensions**
A rectangular stamp of 4.3 X 2 cm.

**Reading**
Three lines written in ancient Greek

**Reading in small letters**
JEpi; Peisivstratou Diovsqeou

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EPIPEI  

SISTRATOU  

DIOSQEU
Meaning
During the time of Peisistratos
(in the month of) Diostheos

Description
Upper part of a Rhodian amphora handle carrying a stamp with three lines written in ancient Greek (Fig. 4); in the first line of the stamp we have the prefixed preposition \textit{Epi}, followed by three letters forming with the letters of the second line the name of the eponym \textit{Peisivstratou}. We have in the third line the name of the Rhodian month \textit{Deo}.

The aim of the stamp is to inform users of the amphora or the contents of the amphora that it was made during the time of the eponym \textit{Peisivstrato} in the month of \textit{Deo}.

The eponym is an honorary position, defined by M. Sartre as those who was holding the title eponym as the magistrate who give their names to the year of their reign, because they hold high honorary position (Sartre, 1991: 509). For her part, Virginea Grace described the eponym as the magistrate whose name dated the Year (Grace, 1963: 83).

Normally every Amphora has two handles, one handle carry the name of the eponym during whose reign the Amphora handle was made, while the second handle carry the name of the fabricant who made the Amphora. This handle depicts the name of the eponym and the month in which the amphora was made within the year when this eponym was governing. The name of the fabricant could not be known since that it is usually stamped on the other handle of the amphora. Virginia Grace and Petropoulakou have published in 1970 a complete amphora, a deposit of the National museum in Athens (museum no. 2405). The first handle of the amphora was stamped with the name of the eponym \textit{Peisivstrato} while the other handle was stamped with the name of the fabricant \textit{Marsu}.

This means that the fabricant \textit{Marsu} made the amphora during the reign of \textit{Peisivstrato}, it was of great help for the question of dating the period in which the eponym (Grace and Petropoulakou, 1970: 314, no. E37) was reigning.

Since all fabricants during the reign of the eponym \textit{Peisivstrato} mentioned the name of the eponym and the name of the month in which the amphora was made, some examples of stamps using the name of the eponym were found in some archaeological sites like Gadara (Weber, 1987: 69, no. 119; Rousan, 1998, Stamp no. 23 and 24), Sebast/Samaria (Crowfoot, 1957: 382; Reiser, et al., 1924: 19, 313, no. 69), Jabal Ophel (Macalister and Duncan, 1926: 210); Tell Sandannah (Macalister, 1901: 128-129, no. 187), Rhodes (Hiller von Gaertringen, 1931: 839, no. 241), Delos (Grace and Petropulako, 1970: 314, no. 37; 316, no. 45) and in the Athenian Agora (Rotroff, 1982: 105, no. 211).

Two amphora handles found in the nearby site, Umm-Qeis (Gadara) (Rousan, 1998, nos. 23-24), north of Barsinia in northwest of Jordan, also mentioned, as the examples cited above, the name of the same eponym \textit{Peisivstrato} which was found on the stamp published here. They are all preceded by the preposition \textit{Epi}; In one of the stamps of Umm-Qeis the name of the eponym is followed by the name of a Rhodian month called (\textit{Artamivtio}) while the second is followed by (\textit{Davlio}) both of which are Rhodian months.

Although the three stamped amphorae handles, those of Umm-Qeis and the one of Barsinia, mentioned the same name of eponym \textit{Peisivstrato}, there is a significant difference between those three stamps is that the characters in the first stamp of Umm-Qeis, are some times written in capital letters and other times in small letters. In addition, a very important feature found on the same stamp is that the
letter C is written in a lunar form, which is abnormal because in this type of stamps it is normally written as capital sigma (S) (Rousan, 1998, no. 23).

We cannot confirm that amphorae found in Umm-Qeis (Gadara) and having the same name of eponym are made by the same fabricant since the name of the fabricant is normally mentioned in the stamp on the other handle of the amphora. This fact explains the difference in the shape of the characters of the amphorae; it means that amphora, mentioning the name of the eponym was made during the year when the eponym was in power. It could have been produced any time during his year of reign, by two different fabricants since fabricants, producing amphorae were numerous (Rousan, 1998, no. 23).

Dating the stamped amphora handle is normally done according to the year when the eponym was in control, so here, in the case of our amphora handle we have the eponym Peisivstrato~ during his reign and in the month of Deovsqeo~, the fabricant, who we ignore his name, made the amphora.

The eponym Peisivstrato~ was in power according to Hiller von Gaertringen approximately in the year 150 B.C (Hiller von Gaertringen, 1931: no. 241). For Crowfoot, it could be between 180 -150 B.C. this later date, was also accepted by V. Grace and M. Petropoulakou (Grace and Petropulako, 1970: 316, no. EA5), and finally S. Rotroff had dated a stamp on an amphora handle found in the Athenian Agora to the period 175-150 B.C (Rotroff, 1982: 105, no. 211).

Accordingly, as suggested by most scholars, this eponym can be dated to the first half of the second century B.C (200-150 B.C).

2. CONCLUSION

The importance of this stamp reside in the place of finding, this is the first time that this site delivers a stamp dated to the second century B.C. which means that Barsinia was inhabited during the Hellenistic period, this phenomena is a new evidence of the Hellenistic presence in the north west of Jordan (Atallah, 2003: 485-498).

We can also conclude as Hapern-Zylberstein concluded that "les timbres amphoriques témoignent de la présences et de la pénétration d'une population grecque qui ne se satisfaisait pas de la production viticole locale de moindre qualité" Which means that a commercial relationship is going on between this part of Jordan and other parts of the Hellenistic world as the Rhode Island.

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٧. تأهـ٦

له بذلك نفسي حواصلت بهم النزول، حيث نفسي بناء حقيق معوري كليّة، وبهذا يقترب النزول، حيث نفسي بناء حقيقة معوري كليّة. إنه ذلك النزول، حيث نفسي بناء حقيقة معوري كليّة.

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