

ROYAL PTOLEMAIC GREEK INSCRIPTIONS AND MAGIC LEAD FIGURES FROM TELL SANDAHANNAH.

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(Translated by permission from the "*Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.*" Séance du 19 Octobre, 1900.)

IN the course of the excavations carried out for the Palestine Exploration Fund at Tell Sandahannah, Dr. Bliss discovered, among other objects of interest, a fragment of Greek inscription, of which he gives a sketch,¹ accompanied by some explanations, but the true historic value of which he seems to me not to have suspected.

This fragment consists of three lines engraved on a quarter of a "column" having a radius of about $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The text is mutilated on the left and incomplete below.



"The inscription," Dr. Bliss says, "mentions a king and a queen, probably the local sovereigns; the name of the queen is missing; the name of the king is an indeclinable word; if this followed the Semitic trilateral law, it was *Τήμεγ*, in which case the preceding three letters represent the termination of some Greek word, such as *χώρα*, on which the genitive depended. A thorough but unsuccessful search was made for the rest of the inscription."

After having examined the sketch published in the report of Dr. Bliss, I believe it is possible to prove that we have, in reality,

¹ *Quarterly Statement*, 1900, p. 334.

a fragment of a cylindric base, which served as the pedestal of a statue of a queen of Egypt, answering to the name of *Arsinoë*.

Arsinoë, sister and wife of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, seems excluded, *à priori*, by the surname which appears in part at the commencement of line 2, and which can hardly be, as we shall see, other than $[\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau]\omicron\rho\alpha$ or $[\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\mu\acute{\eta}\tau]\omicron\rho\alpha$. There remain Arsinoë, sister and wife of Ptolemy IV Philopator, and Arsinoë, daughter of Ptolemy XI Aulètes and sister of the famous Cleopatra. Under reserve of the paleographic indications, upon which I have not ventured to form an opinion from a simple view of the sketch of Dr. Bliss, I am inclined to regard this Arsinoë as identical with the wife of Ptolemy IV. The historical circumstances¹ are in favour of this conjecture. In effect, it must not be forgotten that this queen of Egypt was present² with her brother and husband at the celebrated battle of Raphia, where Antiochus the Great was defeated in 217. Raphia, now Refah, south of Gaza, was at the southern frontier of Judea, consequently in a region near Eleutheropolis and Marissa—the ancient Maresba, Moreshat—which is believed to have been situated at Tell Sandahannah. In any case, this last point is situated on the way to Jerusalem, where Ptolemy went after this victory, which gave Syria to him for a time, and where he even desired to offer, if we may believe the Third Book of Maccabees, thank-offerings in the Jewish Temple.

Would it be on this occasion that the statue of Tell Sandahannah was raised in honour of the queen? In this case one might, under the paleographic reservation indicated above, propose the following restoration of the fragment in question:—

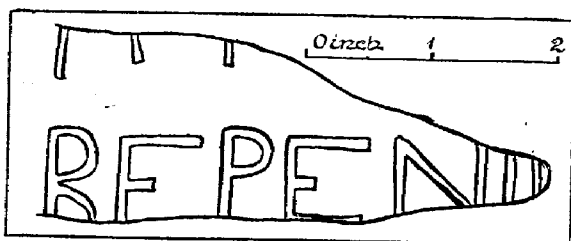
[Βασίλισσαν Ἀρσινόην, μεγάλην
[Θεὸν ? Φιλοπάτ](ο)ρα, τὴν ἐγ βασιλεως
[Πτολεμαίου καὶ] βασίλισσης [Βερενί-]
[κης, θεῶν ἐνεργέτων]
[.]

[The queen *Arsin*oe great [goddess *Philopat*]or, daughter of the king
[*Ptolemy* and] of the queen [*Berenice* the gods *Euergetes*]

¹ Cf. Maccabees, Book III, ch. 1. It is needless to remark that this find, thus interpreted, imparts an element not to be despised into the question so much debated of the historical credibility which it is right to accord to the Third Book of Maccabees.

² It is said by the Book of Maccabees that Arsinoë even personally played a sufficiently energetic part in the affair of Raphia, which at one moment threatened to turn out very badly for the Egyptians.

In support of this conjecture I deduce an argument from the fact that in the same excavation there was exhumed a small fragment of another description in which one recognises without difficulty the name of *Bereni*[κ...].

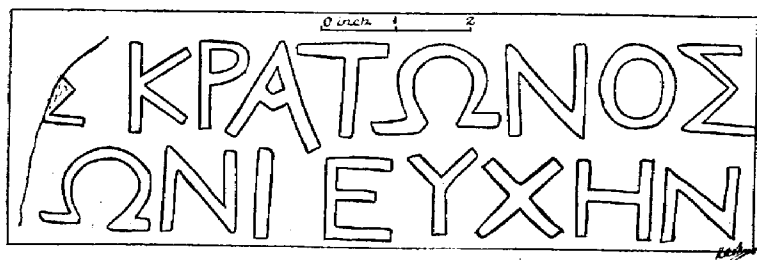


I suppose that this second fragment¹ belongs to the similar dedication of a statue of Ptolemy IV Philopator, which formed the fellow to that of his sister and wife, the Queen Arsinoë. The two heroes of the day of Raphia would have been represented side by side. This second dedication, although almost totally destroyed, could then be restored entirely, thanks to that of the statue of Arsinoë, attempted above, almost as follows:—

[ΒΑΣΙΛΕΑ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΝ ΜΕΓΑΝ ΘΕΟΝ ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΑ]
[ΤΟΝ ΕΓ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ]
ΒΕΡΕΝΙ[ΚΗΣ ΘΕΩΝ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΩΝ]²

[*The king Ptolemy the great, god Philopator, son of the king Ptolemy and of the queen*] *BERENI*[*ce the gods Euergetes.*]

This is not all. Besides these two fragments Dr. Bliss has exhumed a third worded thus:—



¹ It would be very important to know if these few letters were engraved on a stone with a curved or a flat surface.

² The original text was perhaps arranged in four lines.

Following the development of my hypothesis I would incline to restore :—

[Σκόπα]ς Κράτωνος

[Ἀπόλλ]ωνι εὐχῆν

“[Scopa]s, son of Craton, to Apollo [addresses his] prayer.”

The name of *Scopas* would afford just the number of letters—five—required by the extent of the gap which results from the obvious restoration on line 2. If one admits this reading: *Scopas*, this personage would be no other than the famous general of Ptolemy IV, afterwards of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, who, after having conquered Judea and even a part of Coelesyria for his masters, ended by being defeated by Antiochus the Great at Paneas, the sources of the Jordan. He invokes Apollo. Why Apollo? Because this was the god *par excellence* of the Seleucids, even the ancestor of the dynasty. The act was quite in accordance with the idea, so deeply rooted and so generally spread among the ancients that, to obtain victory, it was necessary above all to gain for one's cause or at least to conciliate the *god of the enemy*. The formula εὐχῆν seems to imply rather a prayer addressed to the divinity than thanks for a prayer already granted.¹

This conjecture, risky as it may appear, for it only rests on a very precarious epigraphical basis—the *sigma* which terminates thousands of Greek names—agrees well enough with the interpretation which I proposed for the two other fragments found beside this one. The principal difficulty which runs counter to it is that the historians, who nevertheless tell us at sufficient length about the General Scopas, have not preserved for us, so far as I know, the name of his father. Could this unknown name have been *Kraton*? Until the contrary is proved, there is no reason why we should not suppose it; some later find may perhaps one day permit us to affirm it.

I take this opportunity to add a few observations upon a whole group of objects of a very different kind, which, coming

¹ One detail to be noted which is not unimportant is that this fragment of inscription is cut upon the base of a statue which should represent a *colossal eagle*, of which there remains only one of the claws. This eagle—the eagle of the Ptolemies (*cf.* their coins)?—was it not there as a symbol of victory, of the victory prayed for, perhaps even of the victory obtained, if one does not insist too much on the absolute value of the word εὐχῆν?

out of the same excavations at Sandahannah, have remained an archaeological enigma. These are 16 little figures of men and women in lead, 2 to 3 inches in height, very roughly executed,¹ and of a most *bizarre* aspect. They are mere strips of lead cut into shape, as *silhouettes*. The personages, all nude, with one exception, are represented in strange and distorted positions, as if they were writhing in suffering and torture. They have all, without exception, the peculiarity of having the hands and feet laden with bonds and fetters designedly complicated. Sometimes the hands are bound in front on the breast, sometimes behind the back. The bonds which tie them are formed of thick wire of lead, of iron, or of bronze.

Dr. Bliss sees here simply the representation of "captives." This explanation is not very satisfactory, and raises all sorts of objections. I propose quite a different one; it was suggested to me by another find of Dr. Bliss—a find which seems to me to have an intimate connection with these figures unperceived until now.

It is this. Dr. Bliss has also exhumed, at the same place, 50 tablets in soft stone bearing Greek inscriptions.² These tablets are not yet published. Only Professor Sayce has been able to glance at them, and he limits himself to saying briefly that they contain magical charms and incantations.³ If this is so, would it not be permissible to suppose that these little lead figures represent the persons against whom the incantations were directed? We know that lead was in ancient times the chosen metal of those who were addicted to sorcery. We know, above all, that witchcraft consisted essentially in the act of *binding* magically by supernatural means the victim of it; the verb *καταβέν* is the verb consecrated to the forms of *defixiones*. We would have here, then, in our little figures, so carefully and complacently bound, a very curious plastic representation of this fundamental conception of ancient black art, and the first example of a practice which recalls in more than one respect that of the spells of the Middle Ages.⁴

¹ See Plate, p. 332, *op. cit.*

² Four of them bear, it is said, inscriptions in Hebraic characters.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁴ It is possible that lead was chosen as material for the figures because of its fusibility; these figures were perhaps destined, like the wax images of the spell-bound, to be finally melted in some magic ceremony.