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Note on a Latin Ostrakon from Sbeitla ([EDCS-69100243](#) = *P.Gascou* 17)

The ostrakon discussed in this note comes from Sbeitla (ancient Sufetula) in modern Tunisia. It documents a transaction of wine and money, and features a dating clause in the reign of the Vandal king Hilderic (8.06.523-15.06.530) (l. 4). The Vandal date is what led me to publish it in *P.Gascou* despite lingering uncertainty about some details of the text.¹ One place that posed especial problems was line 5, which begins with a series of letters I was unable to make sense of. *Qçtøbri* (l. 5n.) seemed like a remote possibility, although the traces were not enough to accommodate a word of seven letters. Now, with the help of what appears to be a parallel formulation in ostraca from the town of Maknassy, which is located south of Sbeitla between Gafsa and Sfax, I think I have solved the mystery of these letters.

Here is my text of the Sbeitla ostrakon as printed in *P.Gascou* 17.

Nimmiṛṛe . . [
 çel() p() vidu quando. [
 emiṇu unu . . . () quartø [
 Çarthag(inis) d(omini) n(ostri) reg(is) Hilderiçi [
 5 çr(). ri inviṇiør̄ sex() emin. . [
 . . .
 item pro porçellu filio m[eo
 foll(es) septuaginta quinque. . . [

The beginning of line 5 could easily be construed as *cr. bsi*. From this, we might postulate the word [*sus-*]|*cribsi*, with *sus* having been in the now lost part of line 4. The only awkwardness posed by this reading is the purported *i*. The character on the ostrakon consists of a sharp diagonal stroke that crosses the descender of *C*, which comes down from the word *Çarthag(inis)* in the line above, creating what looks like an *x*. Despite the unusually oblique angle of the letter, the reading seems all but certain in light of the following parallels: Five ostraca from Maknassy reported by M. Merlin in 1912 in the *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* contain a subscription phrase (*suscribsi in*) near the end of each document.² They are undated and no photographs are available, but the reference to a king in line 4 of [EDCS-16300213](#) suggests a date also in the Vandal period. The relevant lines, as they appear in *L'Année épigraphique*, run thus:

No. 1, ll. 4-5 ([EDCS-16300213](#))

sus-
cribsi in carnes berbecinas p/

“I undersigned for the mutton, lbs...”

No. 2, l. 4 ([EDCS-16300214](#))

¹ *P.Gascou* is the name used by papyrologists to refer to J.-L. Fournet and A. Papaconstantinou (eds) *Mélanges Jean Gascou* (Paris 2016); see pp. 29ff. Cf. W.S. Kurtz, “Sobre inscripciones fechadas con la fórmula *anno regno domini nostri*,” [EDCS-J 6](#), 02/2021, where this ostrakon is listed as no. 4 on p. 15.

² The texts were reprinted in *L'Année épigraphique* as AE 1913, 15 = AE 1999, 1756 = [EDCS-16300213](#) and AE 1913, 16 = [EDCS-16300214](#), AE 1913, 17 = [EDCS-16300215](#); AE 1913, 18 = [EDCS-16300216](#); AE 1913, 19 = [EDCS-16300217](#)).

suscribsi in [carnes berbecinas]

“I undersigned for the mutton...”

No. 3, l. 3 ([EDCS-16300215](#))

suscribsi in vini I-f unu

“I undersigned for one³ ... of wine ...”

No. 4, ll. 4-5 ([EDCS-16300216](#))

*suscribsi in car-
nes [ber]b pond tres vini I-f*

“I undersigned for the mutton, three pounds, for ... of wine”

No. 5, l. 5 ([EDCS-16300217](#))

... sus[cribsi in ...]

“I undersigned for”

Drawing on these parallels, I propose the following text for lines 4-5 of the Sbeitla ostracon:

cribsi in vini oṛc̄ sex (h)emina[3-4] [sus-]

“I undersigned for the six jars and ... *hemina* of wine”

The reading of *(h)emina[* at the end of line 5, which was not in the *ed. pr.*, means the wine was measured at least partly in *heminae*, a possibility first raised in *AE* 2016, 1876. The same measure is probably mentioned in line 3 as well: *(h)emina(m) unā(m)*. The diagonal stroke observed on the ostracon after the word *sex* in line 5 is of unclear significance, but I can suggest two possibilities. Either it was an abbreviation mark going with *sex*, such as for *sextarius*, or it was the bottom of a diagonal descender from the line above. The former interpretation deprives us of a sum of jars (*orcas*),⁴ whereas the latter, i.e., that the stroke came from the line above, gives us the cardinal number *sex*, “six jars,” the number of *heminae* being lost on the right. This is the interpretation adopted here, albeit with some reluctance.

The Maknassy ostraca nos **1-3** and **5** are clearly receipts (for wine or mutton), as each begins with the word *erogasti* (“you paid”). In one case the recipients of the payments are also specified: *acceptores* (**1**). Payments are modest, three and six pounds of meat, and unclear amounts of wine. On the basis of these documents, I am inclined even more than I

³ It is unclear what exactly the *f* in *I-f* here and in no. **4** stands for, but it is presumably a liquid measure.

⁴ For discussion of the *orca*, see R. Ast, “A Latin Letter from Carthage and the Whale-Bellied Jar,” in J.A. Stolk and G.A.J.C. van Loon (eds) *Text Editions of (Abnormal) Hieratic, Demotic, Greek, Latin and Coptic Papyri and Ostraca* (Leiden 2021): 142.

was when I first published the Sbeitla ostrakon to view it also as a receipt or, at any rate, as some kind of record of transaction.⁵

What follows is a revised transcript of [EDCS-69100243](#), which incorporates suggestions made in AE 2016, 1876.

Nimmiṛṛe . . [- - -]
çḗ!() p() vidu quando . [- - -]
(h)emina(m) una(m) () quarto . [- - -]
Çarthag(inis) d(omini) n(ostri) reg(is) Hilderiçi . [sus-]
5 criḃsi in viṇi ḡrc(as) sex (h)emina[3-4]
.....
item pro Porçellu filio m[eo]
foll(es) septuaginta quinque . . . [2-3]

2 çḗ! / p / | q^uando || **3** emina (*for* hemina) una *AE 2016, 1876*, eminu unu *ed. pr.* / q^uarto || **4** çarthag' dn' reg' || **5** çḗ() . ri *ed. pr.* / ḡrc / sex() *ed. pr.* || **7** porçellu *ed. pr.*, *l. Porcello AE 2016, 1876* | (h)emina *AE 2016, 1876*, emin . . *ed pr.* || **8** foll / *perhaps* tan[tum]

Nimmire [...] one *hemina* ... [in the] fourth (?) [year] of Carthage of our lord king Hilderic [...] |⁵ I undersigned for the six jars and ... *hemina* of wine ... Likewise for Porcello my son, 75 folles ...

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⁵ For some unstated reason, the editor of AE 2016, 1876 expressed skepticism about this idea.