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Coptic graffiti in Speos Artemidos

In 1969, in connexion with an excursion to Beni Hassan by the members of the Finnish Egyptological Society also the rock temple of Hatšepsut and Thutmosis III of Speos Artemidos or Stabl Antar was visited.

During this visit, under a layer of dirt adhering to the walls, a number of much defaced Coptic graffiti was noticed and recorded on the spot.

As no description of them has so far appeared, this brief one is rendered.

The graffiti (Fig.1) are painted in dark red ochre and occur on the southern wall of the hypostyle hall at a height of about 1 metre above the floor on the blank space below the reliefs of Sety I: They represent two types of Christ's monograms and include also a representation of the Holy Cross and two human figures, probably saints.

The monograms are repeated twice on the both sides of the doorway leading to the sanctuary. Those closer to the doorway are adorned with two letters, alpha and omega, and a superimposed branch of a palm- or olive tree. The outermost monograms are without any adornments.

On the easternmost part of the southern wall is a representation of the Latin cross with two palm- or olive branches emanating from the horizontal crossarm. The top of the cross is

adorned with a circular figure representing the moon crescent or the darkened sun, mentioned in Luke 23:45. This cross is evidently to be associated with the events at Golgatha, as indicated also by the thin and pointed lower termination of the vertical bar, in other representations (e.g. at Faras in Nubia) piercing the head of Adam, thus symbolizing the victory over the sin, i.e. the death. The moon and the sun are also common additions to the later Byzantine representations of the Crucifixion (c.f. Banck 1966, Figs. 182 and 199). The cross at Speos Artemidos seems to me as an evolution of the 'nh-sign, used as a cross-symbol in the Coptic Egypt (c.f. Dobrzeniecki 1974, pp. 247 ff., and Figs. 16, 17 and 21).

On the both sides of the cross are two human figures. The one to the right is much defaced but has a clearly visible halo. The figure to the left is without a halo and represents a man with curly hair, dressed in a wide robe. The lower part of the human figures is not preserved.

Secondary holes and scratches, partly destroying the ancient reliefs are numerous. They are traces of a re-occupation of the temple probably for sacral purposes by the Copts as indicated by the graffiti. Whom the two human figures represent cannot be certified as no accompanying texts were found.

Literature:

Banck, A., Byzantine Art in the Collections of the USSR. Leningrad-Moscow 1966.

Dobrzeniecki, T., Maiestas Domini w zabytkach Polskich i obcych z Polska zwiazanych (Maiestas Domini in Polish and related antiquities). Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XVIII. Warsaw 1974, pp. 215-308.

COPTIC GRAFFITI IN SPEOS ARTEMIDOS

Fig.1. The coptic graffiti in Speos Artemidos

Scale (approximate)  50 cms.

a.



b.



