

Tomasz Derda, Adam Łajtar, Tomasz Płóciennik

*R*ECEIVE (...) FOUR PIGS': PIGS IN THE PAPHRI FROM QASR IBRIM

For Adam, a pork lover

Abstract:

The paper presents three papyri discovered at the site of Qasr Ibrim in Lower Nubia and connected to a short-lived presence of Roman military post there in the late 20s BC. All three papyri are letters to soldiers of the Qasr Ibrim post sent by their colleagues who remained in their permanent bases in Egypt. Their common element is that they mention shipment of pigs. The authors discuss the role of pigs in the diet of Roman soldiers as well as patterns of supplying soldiers of the Qasr Ibrim post with pork.

Keywords:

Qasr Ibrim, Greek papyri, Roman army, military supplies, pigs, pork

Introduction

'Although meat did not dominate ancient diets (...), pork when available and affordable was a favoured food for the Romans'.¹ This statement from the *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome* is a good illustration of the role and place of pork in the dietary practices of ancient Rome. Pork was the meat of choice for all Romans, irrespective of their social position and economic standing, although the rich obviously got better cuts and ate pork more often and likely in larger quantities. Pork was eaten fresh, prepared by boiling, stewing, frying or baking, and also as an ingredient of various dishes, often prepared according to elaborate recipes, such as those listed in the famous Roman culinary manual preserved under the

¹ MacKinnon 2013: 113.

name of Apicius.² Meat preservation was commonly practiced, mainly by salting and pickling, less often smoking.³ The Romans also used to eat processed pork as cold cuts, such as bacon, ham, various kinds of sausages, and so on.⁴

Roman soldiers, as exponents of the Roman way of life, were significant consumers of pork. Their diet, both in peacetime and in war, consisted essentially of bread, bacon (preserved pork), cheese, and vegetables washed down with sour wine.⁵ These products, constituting iron rations, were delivered to the army as part of the state supply.⁶ Soldiers supplemented this rather monotonous menu with what they could buy privately on the local market, produce, hunt, or receive as a gift from family and friends. Among these additions, pork certainly took a prominent position, both preserved and in the form of living animals. Intensive consumption of pork by the Roman army is confirmed by literary sources (see in particular Polybius 2.15.3) as well as by pig bones found in places where the Roman army was stationed, both in the West and in the East.⁷ For example, bones of pigs, particularly piglets, make up a significant component of the archaeozoological material from the early Roman camp in Colchester in Britain,⁸ and dominate material from military outposts guarding the caravan roads and quarries in Egypt's Eastern Desert.⁹ As we will demonstrate in this article, Greek papyri from Qasr Ibrim in Egyptian Nubia, albeit fragmentarily preserved, significantly complement this picture.

Qasr Ibrim (Greek Πρίμις / Latin Primis), located on the right bank of the Nile some 200 kilometres south of the first cataract, was an important occupational centre between the end of the second millennium BC and the beginning of the nineteenth century AD. In 24 BC, in the aftermath of a war between the Roman Empire and the Meroitic Kingdom, the Romans established a military post there in force of c. 500 soldiers. The post was withdrawn in 21 BC in result of the Samos Treaty concluded between Octavian August and envoys of the queen of the Meroites.¹⁰ The

² For a most recent edition with an English translation, see Grocock, Grainger 2006.

³ For preserving pork by salting, see in particular Columella, *Rust.* 12.55. Generally, for curing meat in ancient Rome, see Thurmond 2006.

⁴ For various kinds of Roman and Byzantine cold cuts, see Frost 1999; Rzeźnicka, Kokoszko, Jagusiak 2014.

⁵ For a general discussion on the diet of a Roman soldier, see Davies 1971; Roth 1999: 29–30.

⁶ It should be noted, however, that before the introduction of the *annona* system in the third century, the cost of meat supplied to soldiers under the central supply system was probably deducted from their pay.

⁷ For a general discussion on animal (including pig) bone finds in relation to food preferences, see King 1984; King 1999a; King 1999b; King 2001.

⁸ Luff 1993.

⁹ Leguilloux 2003: 552–558; Leguilloux 2011: 169–170; Leguilloux 2018.

¹⁰ For the Roman military presence in Primis in the context of the conflict between Rome and Meroe in the 20s BC, see Jameson 1968; Hoffmann 1977; Kirwan 1977; Burstein 1979; Adams 1983; Török 1989–1990; Locher 2002; Wiegels 2015.

short-lived presence of Roman troops in Qasr Ibrim produced a large amount of movable artefacts discovered during archaeological work carried out by a mission of the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) between 1963 and 2008.¹¹ They occurred mostly in layers of a refuse dump which accumulated between the eastern face of the so-called South Bastion and the adjacent South Rampart and the girdle wall of the citadel of Qasr Ibrim. They include elements of armament and military equipment, objects of daily use, coins, large amounts of pottery, especially wine amphorae, and also c. 150 papyri in Greek and Latin, mostly in a fragmentary state of preservation.¹² The papyri are predominantly letters to the soldiers of the Primis post written by their colleagues who remained in Egypt, in their permanent garrisons in Koptos¹³ and Alexandria. The three letters presented here – two in Greek and one in Latin – belong exactly in this category. What they have in common is that they mention pigs.¹⁴

The papyri

1. Fragment of a letter to Quintus

The papyrus was found in the South Rampart Street refuse dump, Section A, Level 3C (= 6). Of four fragments forming this papyrus only two, preserving remnants of the lines 3–10, were registered as: Exc. no. 78.3.23/1 (A, G); Reg. no. 78/253p; Inv. of inscriptions: GI/43 (A, G); Neg. 78A112_004 (Fragments A [lines

¹¹ Unfortunately, we do not have a comprehensive summary of the ‘Roman’ finds from Qasr Ibrim. Scattered information can be found in the excavation reports published regularly in the *Journal of Egyptian Archeology*; see also Adams 1985 and Alexander 1988: 78–79. Individual pieces of armament and uniforms were also published, with particularly noteworthy studies on military devices and artillery shells offered in Wilkins, Barnard, Rose 2006 and James, Taylor 1983. For ‘Roman’ textiles from Qasr Ibrim, see below, n. 20.

¹² Only papyri discovered in the 1974 excavation season of the EES mission were published in full in Weinstein, Turner 1976. Later finds were presented only selectively; cf. Anderson, Parsons, Nisbit 1979 (elegiacs in Latin attributed to Cornelius Gallus, statesman and poet, the first prefect of Roman Egypt); Parsons 1983 (a Latin letter); Derda, Łajtar 2012 (a ‘school exercise’ with a verse of the *Iliad*); Derda, Łajtar 2013 (a Greek letter); Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2014–2015 (a Greek letter from Licinnius, a trumpeter); Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2015 (three lists of soldiers, of which two are in Greek and one in Latin); Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2021a (a Latin letter); Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2021b (two Greek letters). The present authors prepare an edition of the unpublished papyri from Qasr Ibrim.

¹³ We argued elsewhere that Koptos was probably a quarter of one of the three legions constituting the garrison of Egypt in the 20s BC (the other two located at Alexandria and Babylon); see Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2014–2015.

¹⁴ Pigs may have been mentioned in yet another letter from Qasr Ibrim, whose line 8 contains a request: ἰδία καὶ ἀγόρασον . The partly preserved word at the beginning of the request can be reconstructed as either χοιρίδία or παῖδία , with the latter possibility seeming more probable; for the letter in question, see Derda, Łajtar, Plóciennik 2021b: 643–648.



Fig. 1. Qasr Ibrim, Exc. no. 78.3.23/1 (A, G) + two unregistered scraps: fragment of a letter to Quintus (copyright: Egypt Exploration Society; computer montage and rendering: T. Derda).

5–10] and G [lines 3–4] shown unconnected); 78A112_008-010 (Fragment A [lines 5–10]). These two fragments were registered with some other fragments, not belonging to this papyrus. Two fragments with remnants of the lines 1–2 were apparently unregistered. They are known to us only from the photographs Neg. 78A112_005 (two fragments shown unconnected) and 78A112_011-013 (two fragments shown unconnected, with the right-hand fragment placed upside down, and Fragment G [lines 3–4]). Present whereabouts unknown.

Dimensions: Fragment A: 5.7 × 6 cm; Fragment G: 1.3 × 3 cm. Measurements of the unregistered fragments with the lines 1–2 unknown. Vertical fibre side.

Four fragments of a papyrus combined together to form a bigger portion of a letter. Two combined fragments with the lines 1–2 preserve the top margin. Fragment A preserves the right-hand margin of the text. This is especially well visible at the end of Line 8, where the script is slightly rising and the final *sigma* is written above the line of the script. The papyrus was folded and then broken vertically along the folding. The hand is essentially calligraphic majuscules with the occasional use of cursive forms (seen best in *alpha*, which is written with two movements of *kalamos* in the majority of cases, but sometimes with only one movement). *Iota* and the vertical hasta of *kappa* are incurved at their top and bottom extremities towards left. The same holds true for the bottom extremity of *rho* and *tau*. *Rho* is open at the top. The left-hand stroke of *upsilon* is s-shaped. Line 5 shows slightly different script characteristics than the rest of the text, perhaps because the writer changed *kalamos* there.

Late 20s BC.

Κ]οίντω καικ[
] χαίρειν· πα[
]ενον τὸ βα[
4]ν βεβουλε[
]ν ἵνα ἄν δυ[να
κ]όμισαι παρὰ τοῦ
Α]γτέρωτος δύο λαῖ-
8 [κ κ]αὶ τέσσαρες χοιρὸν ὅς
γ]είνωσκε δὲ περὶ
] παρὰ τοῦ προ[

8. τέσσαρας | 9. γίνωσκε

The subject of the letter is not clear. The lines 6–10 (Fragment A) seem to suggest that the addressee was being informed about some goods sent to him through the agency of Anteros (or a son of Anteros) who may be identical with the person carrying the letter. Among the goods were four pigs and two items of local (Egyptian) origin as suggested by the adjective *λαϊκός* (see commentary to l. 7).

1. One can read either *Καικ*[- - -], e.g. *Καικ*[λίω, or *καὶ Κ*[- - -]. Accepting the second possibility would mean that the letter had at least two addressees, which would be exceptional in the Qasr Ibrim epistolographic material. *Καικύλιος* is on record in a list of persons, perhaps soldiers belonging to one tent companionship, preserved in another papyrus from Qasr Ibrim (Derda, Łajtar, Pióciennik 2015: 49, no. 1, l. 8). Note that *Καικύλιος* must be a single name and not an element of *tria nomina* there, whereas here it would be a *nomen gentile* (Quintus Caecilius).

6. What we have here finds analogies in, among others, *BGU* VII 1677: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ ἀναδιδόντος σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον (similarly *BGU* III 801; *P. Fay.* 130; *P. Ifao* II 40; *P. Mert.* II 85; *P. Mich.* VIII 481); *O. Did.* 423: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ ὀναιλάτου Κλαυδίου δέσμην; *O. Did.* 444: κόμισαι παρὰ [τοῦ ὀ]νηλάτου μαρσίπια τέσσαρα; *O. Krok.* II 201: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ [φέρο]γτος [- - - τὸ ὄσ]τρακον δρ[...] τέσσαρες; *O. Krok.* II 221: [κόμισ]αι παρὰ τ[οῦ ὀ]νηλάτου (δραχμὰς) ...; *O. Krok.* II 278: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ φέροντος τὴν ἐπιστολὴν δύσμην; *P. Oslo* II 53: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ αὐτ[οῦ] καθαροῦς ἄρτ[ο]υς δώδεκα; *P. Oxy.* XXXVI 2787: κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς Χαιρήμονος ὁσύπτρον (= εἴσοπτρον).

7. λαῖ with a clear trema, is likely the adjective λαϊκός in the accusative, either singular or plural. The context suggests that the adjective denotes something ‘common’ (LSJ, s.v.), i.e. ‘local, of Egyptian origin’, and refers to a thing rather than to a person.

8. Nominative τέσσαρες is frequently used in the language of Greek papyri from Egypt for the accusative τέσσαρας; cf. Gignac 1981: 190–191.

9. One expects full stop before γ]είνωσκε δὲ.

2. Beginning of a letter

The papyrus was found in the South Rampart Street refuse dump, the sections A and B, Level 3. Found and registered with two blank fragments (A, C). Exc. no. 78.3.19/5 (B); Inv. no. 78/253; Inv. of inscriptions: GI/35; Neg. 78A125_004–005; 78A125_029–031 (unavailable to us). Present whereabouts unknown.

Dimensions: 6 × 5.6 cm. Vertical fibre side.

Two fragments of a papyrus. A bigger fragment (i) has the top margin preserved. Fragment (ii) cannot be located with certainty. The surface of the papyrus is dirty. One notes large interlinear spaces.

Late 20s BC.

(i)

4]μαριων Ἀρρουγτ[ι]ϙ[
]. . . . θεμε[.]εδ . φονε[
]. ον χοιρίδιον [
]. . α . . . γ . [
]βιω[
]. π[

(ii)

]μοι[



Fig. 2. Qasr Ibrim, Exc. no. 78.3.19/5 (B): beginning of a letter (copyright: Egypt Exploration Society; computer rendering: T. Derda).

1. $\mu\alpha\rho\iota\omega\nu$ is probably the ending of a male name in the nominative, such as Μαρίων , Δημαρίων , referring to the sender. If so, very little is lacking on the left-hand side.

The reading Ἀρρουγῆ[ι]ϙ is not certain, but is at least possible. *Lucius Arruntius Lucii filius Pollia* is listed together with his colleagues in a Latin list of soldiers (Derda, Łajtar, Płóciennik 2015: 53, no. 3, l. 11).

3. Fragment of a letter

The papyrus was found in the South Rampart Street refuse dump, Section C, Level 4A. Found and registered together with four Latin fragments coming from a single document. Exc. no. 80.2.16/12 (A); Reg. no. 80/6; Inv. of inscriptions: LI/26; Neg. 80F92_011; 80F92_012. Now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JdE

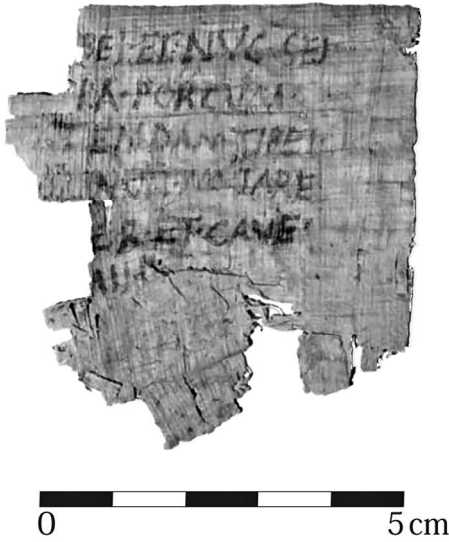


Fig. 3. Qasr Ibrim, Exc. no. 80.2.16/12 (A): fragment of a letter (copyright: Egypt Exploration Society; computer rendering: T. Derda).

95210, where it was seen by W.E.H. Cockle during the photographic mission of the International Society of Papyrologists in January–February 1984.

Dimensions: 6.3 × 5.7 cm. Vertical fibre side.

Top right-hand corner of a papyrus. Majuscule capital script, slightly inclined to the right. A with a cross-bar, of three movements; left stroke joining the right one at its top. B of three movements, with upper loop bigger than the lower one. R of three movements, with big closed loop. S of one movement, quite narrow. Punctuation by an elevated point. It should be stressed that the script of this letter is a *unicum* among the Qasr Ibrim papyri. It seems not to be a testimony of the conservatism of the writer but rather the inaptness of his hand, in spite of the regularity of letters. As an analogy, one can quote texts drafted nowadays by children who – not knowing the minuscules – write with capital letters.

Late 20s BC.

ti]bei · et · nuc sei
] · ra · porcum ·
e]xtendam tibi ·
4] non · motare
]er · et · caue
] . . . vac.

1. ti]bei: tibi; nuc: nunc; sei: si | 3. tibi: tibi | 4. motare: mutare

[---] to you and now, if [---] a pig [---] I shall extend for you [---] not to change [---] and be careful [---].

In addition to the unique script, an interesting aspect of this papyrus is its orthography which displays conservative or even archaic features. Forms like *tibei* = *tibi* (ll. 1 and 3) and *sei* = *si* (l. 1), mirroring the archaic pronunciation of these words, find parallels in inscriptions of the second century BC; cf. *CIL* I 581 with the spellings *ubei*, *ibei*, *sibei*, *sei*, *nisei*, etc. One gets an impression, however, that what we are dealing with in our papyrus is an archaising orthographic manner rather than a testimony to the archaic phonetics still in use towards the end of the first century BC. The spelling *nuc* = *nunc* (l. 1) represents the well-known phenomenon of omitting the nasal before a consonant. For this phenomenon involving the consonant /k/, see *CIL* IX 2991 (*nuc*), V 6520 (*nucquam*), II 4969 (*huc* = *hunc*), II 4173 (*defuctus*), III 2100 (*defuctae*), VIII 483 (*sacta*), IV 1945 (*pricipis*), or VIII 9923 (*provieie*), among others.

2. What precedes the accusative *porcum* should not be a substantive (either feminine, such as *terra*, or neuter, as for example *viscera*) or an adjective (such as *pura* or *clara*), as it is difficult to imagine its syntactic and semantic connection with the said *porcum*. Also reconstructing a preposition (e.g., *extra*, *intra*, *supra*, *infra*, *ultra*, or *citra*) in this place does not seem probable. The most likely possibility is the imperative of a transitive verb of the first conjugation with the radical in *-ra* (with *porcum* as an object). Considering that verbs of this kind are not very numerous and most of them are rare or even very rare, the best reconstruction seems to be *compa]ra*, 'prepare, procure, deliver, buy'. Such a reconstruction, however, must assume that the letter was not sent from Egypt to Primis, but written on site and never sent.

5. *]er* looks like the ending of a third declension substantive in the vocative, as, for example, *pat]er* or *frat]er*.

General commentary: Pigs and pork in the Nile Valley

Although the papyri are fragmentarily preserved and reconstruction of their content, even approximate, is impossible, the mentions of pigs seem to raise no doubts. The word 'pig', singular or plural, appears in all three cases most probably in the accusative,¹⁵ depending on the verb 'accept', as in Papyrus 1, 'I send you', or the like. Apparently, the senders of letters, soldiers of Roman garrisons in Egypt (in

¹⁵ Accusatives in the papyri 1 and 3 are certain. In Papyrus 2, χοιρίδιον may also be a nominative, but the context strongly suggests an accusative.

Koptos or Alexandria, perhaps also in the area of the first cataract) provided their colleagues serving in the temporary post in Primis with pork (or rather live pigs, as we shall argue below) and announced the parcels in letters. Beyond doubt, these were private parcels, exchanged between tent companions or soldiers who were in some other way close to each other, for example by performing similar functions in the army. There is also no doubt that the papyri discussed here speak of shipment of live animals. Sending fresh meat would be pointless in the hot climate of Northeast Africa; it would rot during shipment to Primis, which must have taken around 25 days from Alexandria, ten days if the starting point was Koptos, and five days from the first cataract area. Processed pork is also out of question. If shipment of salted or pickled pork was advertised, the names of ceramic containers with the contents or the names of the parts of the animal's body or weight terms would be used as in *O. Did.* 379 and 452, respectively. Shipments, both letters and goods, were certainly transported on a bargain, mainly by companion soldiers travelling between Alexandria, Koptos, and Primis for one reason or another.¹⁶ Occasionally, other people could also transport goods: itinerant traders following the troops to Primis,¹⁷ civilians employed by the army to transport supplies,¹⁸ or the like.

It should be observed that pigs are the only food product whose dispatching is mentioned in the private letters. Besides pigs, the only other private consignments which can securely be identified in this context are pieces of clothing. Thus, a certain Peras should have received a new apron (σιμικίνθι = *semicinctium*), a cover (ἐνίλιμα), and a woollen rag (ἐριωράκι) according to a Greek letter addressed to him.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the local (i.e., Egyptian, λαϊκός) product mentioned in Line 7 of our Papyrus 1 near the reference to four pigs escapes identification. The products in question were shipped to Primis, because they apparently were not available on the local market. This is obvious for fabrics and clothing,²⁰ but less so for pigs and requires a few words of commentary.

¹⁶ An excellent illustration of the movement of people between these three places is provided by a letter from Licinius, a trumpeter, to another trumpeter, Caesius. The sender, who was in Koptos at the moment of writing the letter, informed the addressee that he had visited Alexandria in search of a trumpet; cf. Derda, Łajtar, Płóciennik 2014–2015.

¹⁷ A Greek letter addressed to a certain Peras informs him about shipment of some pieces of clothing through Alexandros, a travelling salesman (πενταπόλης); cf. Derda, Łajtar 2013: 109–110.

¹⁸ A Greek list of grain deliveries (Exc. no. 80.2.6/51 (A); Inv. no. 80/11; Inv. of inscriptions GI/69) mentions eleven men with Greek and Egyptian names, apparently civilians, who might have transported the corn on a boat. A fragmentary Greek letter from a secretary of the corporation of camel-drivers (Exc. no. 80.2.3/4 (A); Inv. no. 80/11; Inv. of inscriptions GI/57) shows that the Romans in Egypt might have outsourced transportation services in difficult desert areas.

¹⁹ Derda, Łajtar 2013: 109–110; see also n. 17.

²⁰ For the 'Roman' textiles found in Qasr Ibrim, see Crowfoot 1989; Adams, Crowfoot 2001; Adams 2013: 65–66; Wild, Wild 2014: 74–75. They were mostly Egyptian products, even if there are some imported fragments originating from as far as Western Europe.

The pig is a domesticated version of the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), whose natural habitat is forested and marshy areas of Eurasia. There are also known African subspecies of this animal (*Sus scrofa barbarus*, *Sus scrofa sahariensis*, sometimes classified as a single subspecies, *Sus scrofa algira*), occurring in the northern and north-western parts of the continent, along the shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The original domestication of the pig occurred in the early Neolithic, perhaps as early as 9000 BC, somewhere in the Middle East.²¹ In later times, in various places of the wild boar's biotope, secondary domestication took place, which influenced the imported Middle Eastern genome, displacing it over time. Despite hypotheses put forward on occasions, there is no compelling evidence that Africa may have been the place of primary pig domestication, although secondary domestication may have occurred there.²² The domesticated pig was most likely brought to Africa from the Middle East via Egypt, where it is confirmed in bone materials as early as around 4000 BC. The pig was well-known in Egypt in the dynastic times,²³ although it did not seem to play an important role in agriculture in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. We have abundant evidence of its breeding, both textual and archaeological, for the New Kingdom, especially for the late Eighteenth Dynasty, including the Amarna Period. The economic importance of pigs in Pharaonic Egypt was not only due to the fact that they were a rich source of protein, but also because they were used in agricultural work: for trampling freshly sown grain into the soil and for crushing the ears of harvested grain. Despite these benefits, the role of the pig in Egypt was always limited by its negative cultural and religious connotations. The pig was considered one of the animals of Seth, the mythical brother and opponent of Osiris. As such it was shown killed by Horus, son and successor of Osiris, in relief decoration of Egyptian temples.

The role of the pig in Egypt increased significantly with the coming of the Greeks and the cultural changes that this brought about. Greek and demotic papyri from the Hellenistic times show that pig farming was an important part of the life of the Egyptian countryside of that period.²⁴ The farming took place both at home farms, having a few animals at most and producing mainly for their own use, and large 'commercial' farms with herds of several dozen or more individuals, clearly

²¹ For the question of pig domestication and the spread of domesticated pig, which has received much attention in the past twenty or so years thanks to application of genetic methods, see Albarella et al. 2006; Larson et al. 2007; Rowley-Conwy et al. 2012. For the general overview of the cultural history of pigs, see Albarella et al. 2007.

²² Thus, for example, Epstein 1971, and, more recently, Gautier 2002 who hypothesised that pig could have been domesticated in the Nile Delta. Specifically, for pig in Africa, see Blench 2000; Amills et al. 2012.

²³ Generally, for pig in ancient Egypt, see Keimer 1937; Lobban 1998.

²⁴ For pigs in Hellenistic Egypt, see Schnabel 1925: 328–331; Thompson 2002; Clarysse, Thompson 2006: vol. II, 208–217.

bred for sale. The importance of pig farming grew even more during the reign of the Roman Empire, due to the need to feed the pork-loving Roman soldiers, whose number exceeded 20 thousand in the time of Augustus, as well as other Romans who came to Egypt for some reason. An excellent illustration of the latter phenomenon is the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, currently stored in the Special Collection Library at the Duke University, containing a declaration under oath made to the strategus of the nome by the pig overseer (ἐπιμελητῆς χοίρων), Aurelios Onnophris alias Lykarion. The overseer stated that he gathered 40 pigs for a planned visit of Alexander Severus and Iulia Mammea (probably in AD 232/3).²⁵ Intensive pig farming and pork consumption continued in Egypt through late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages²⁶ until Islamisation brought about a cultural ban on pork consumption. Today, pigs are kept only on a small scale by Egyptian Christians.

The presence of pig to the south of Egypt stands in sharp contrast to the Egyptian situation. Upstream from the first cataract, the pig is well-attested through osteological materials only in the Christian Middle Ages (from mid-sixth to fifteenth centuries). Pig bones have been found at many sites between the third and fourth cataracts, i.e., in the central part of the Christian Nubian Kingdom of Makuria, including Dongola, the capital of the kingdom, and the sub-capital Selib. Above all, however, they were common at a small settlement in Banganarti with the pilgrimage church of Archangel Raphael where they constituted the third largest group (17.4%), after the bones of cattle (47.1%) and sheep/goats (32%).²⁷

Evidence of pig presence in this area in pre-Christian times, either in the so-called post-Meroitic Period (mid-fourth to mid-sixth centuries) or earlier, in the times of the Meroitic Kingdom (until the mid-fourth century), is less than modest. A Greek inscription (OGIS 210 = SB V 8534 = FHN III 248) carved on the western wall of the pronaos of the temple of Mandulis in Talmis (Kalabshah) contains an ordinance of Aurelius Besarion, strategus of the Ombites and Elephantine (AD 247/8), to remove pigs outside the temple temenos. It should be remembered, however, that at the time when the ordinance was issued, Talmis, although situated southwards of the first cataract, belonged administratively (and to a large extent also culturally) to Egypt, not to the Meroitic Kingdom. Small faience amulets depicting pigs are known from the Middle Nile Valley and dated to the Meroitic times.²⁸ According to Marta Osypińska, an expert in animal husbandry in the Middle Nile Valley, there are no pig bone remains recorded, either

²⁵ *Editio princeps*: van Minnen, Sosin 1996. The papyrus was reprinted as SB XXIV 15936.

²⁶ Bagnall 1993: 29.

²⁷ For a general discussion on pigs in Christian Nubia and their bone remains, see Osypińska 2016; Osypińska 2018. For bone finds in Banganarti, see Osypińska, Żurawski 2020.

²⁸ Osypińska, Żurawski 2020.

in Lower Nubia,²⁹ or even more to the south, in finds dating back to the Meroitic and post-Meroitic periods.³⁰ Nevertheless, pig bone remains were found during the work of the EES mission in Qasr Ibrim. They have not yet been published, but we have first-hand information on this from Peter Rowley-Conwy, who participated in the excavations and is responsible for the publication of the osteological material obtained there. According to him, 'pig bones were (...) found from the Roman and Meroitic layers at Qasr Ibrim. In neither period (pigs) were the most common animal, but they were present in some numbers. In the Roman Period, sheep/goat were more common, while in the Meroitic Period cattle were more common. Numbers need to be treated cautiously because most of the deposits were not sieved, but it is certain that pigs were a significant (but not the largest) source of meat in both periods'.³¹ Significantly, Rowley-Conwy does not record the presence of pig bones in the earlier layers than those associated with the Roman military post. Comparing his information with the evidence provided by the papyri discussed here, one can suggest that in the times of the Roman military presence in Primis (the 20s BC) pigs were not bred in this part of the Nile Valley at all or were bred only on a small scale, not enough to meet the needs of the quite numerous Roman garrison. Therefore, gifts from Egypt in the form of one or more live animals must have been highly desirable. Perhaps some of the animals sent from Egypt were not consumed, but they joined the local, not very numerous, herd contributing to the continuation of breeding after the Roman soldiers left Primis.

Pigs bred in Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman times seem to have belonged mainly to the 'primordial' variety of *Sus scrofa f. domestica*, characterised by a long nose, steep back, and black bristles. Ludwig Keimer was of the opinion that some nobler varieties also appeared in Egypt along with the Greeks.³² Regardless of whether or not this was the case, the Egyptian pigs of the period were animals reaching at their mature age (36 months or more) approximately 75 cm at the withers, and therefore quite tall, but relatively light (maximum 45 kg). Pig bones from excavations at various sites in Egypt show that, however, they were only rarely allowed to reach this age; they were most often slaughtered within the first

²⁹ The power of this statement, however, is weakened by the fact that Lower Nubia is represented poorly in archaeozoological material. During the Nubian campaign of the 1960s and earlier, research on animal bone remains was not as popular as it is now, and today the area is inaccessible due to the flooding of the Lake Nasser.

³⁰ Letter to Adam Łajtar dated 12 April 2021. Osypińska quoted also an opinion of Louis Chaix, an archaeozoologist attached to the Swiss Mission in Kerma, a locality in the third cataract area, that he had never seen pig bones in the archaeological record from the Middle Nile Valley, but only occasionally observed bones of warthog.

³¹ Letter to Adam Łajtar dated 6 May 2014.

³² Keimer 1937.

18–21 months, when they weighed only 20–25 kilograms.³³ These observations align perfectly with what we learn from the Duke papyrus mentioned above: pigs collected by Aurelius Onnophris alias Lykarion for the visit of Alexander Severus and Iulia Mamaea, according to his report, were 50 pounds of weight, that is, c. 17–18 kilograms. In this context, it is worth noting that the second of our papyri specifies the animal being sent to Primis as χοιρίδιον or ‘piglet’. Such a small animal, weighting a dozen or so kilograms, could be easily transported in a cage made of palm bars or in a sack, with the only problem of the transporters being to provide it with water and a minimum of food.³⁴

The soldiers in Primis in the 20s BC were not the only pork lovers we know of in Roman Egypt. The consumption of pork by soldiers of Roman military posts in the Eastern Desert in the first and second centuries AD is well-attested both archaeologically and textually. Bone finds from excavations conducted over the last 40 years show that the soldiers serving at these posts would eat pig meat eagerly. As the possibilities of breeding pigs in the desert area are very limited, due to scarcity of water and food and the heat that kills pigs,³⁵ most of the pork had to be supplied from the Nile Valley.³⁶ From the documents on ostraca, we learn that both live animals and preserved meat were shipped. This first case is reflected in *O. Claud.* II 271.13 (a request to send a piglet), the latter can be found in *O. Did.* 379 (sending parts of a piglet) and 452 (sending one mina of pork).³⁷ All three documents are private letters, which indicates that the meat was supplied, as in the case of Primis, largely through private channels. Apparently, the phenomena observed in Primis prepare and foreshadow the customs known from a different, though not very distant, part of Egypt, one or two hundred years later.

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³³ Bertini, Cruz-Rivera 2014; Leguilloux 2003: 552–553.

³⁴ Until quite recently, in the Polish countryside, piglets of a dozen kilograms went to the market and back from the market put in a linen bag transported by bicycle, horse cart, or even a public transport bus (Adam Łajtar’s personal observation).

³⁵ Pigs do not sweat, thus they can lower their body temperature only by immersing themselves in a swampy pond and such a possibility does not normally exist in the desert.

³⁶ Bones of very small piglets and one *foetus* found in Krokodilo and Maximianon seem to indicate that breeding was occasionally attempted; cf. Leguilloux 2003: 553–554.

³⁷ Leguilloux 2003: 554 informs that a bottom of an amphora with a pig jaw in a block of salt was found on the site of Maximianon.

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Tomasz Derda
t.derda@uw.edu.pl

Adam Łajtar
a.lajtar@uw.edu.pl

Tomasz Płóciennik
t.plociennik@uw.edu.pl

Faculty of Archaeology
University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
00-927 Warsaw, Poland