GALBA’S CARTOUCHES AT AIN BIRBIYEH

Olaf E. Kaper

Introduction*

Over the past twenty five years the excavations in the Dakhleh Oasis, Western Desert of Egypt, have yielded an important collection of epigraphic material in hieroglyphs from the temples of this area. Among other things, there is now a collection of more than one hundred cartouches with imperial names from the oasis. These contain new historical information but they also exhibit some rare features. The names of the emperors are often shorter than usual, and they invert the regular order of the names when compared to the names found in the Nile Valley. Moreover, several rare and even unique names have been found in Dakhleh.1 In the present article, I wish to present and discuss one of these: the name of Galba, which has been found recently in the temple decoration at Ain Birbiyeh. The find of Galba’s name in Dakhleh is of great significance, because of its rarity and its unusual features.

There are four temples in the Dakhleh Oasis where decoration from the Roman period is currently in evidence. All of these have been excavated recently.2 In the following list, some brief information on the temples’ history of excavation is given as well as the dates associated with their decoration in the Roman period. It shows a region undergoing rapid growth in the second half of the 1st century AD.

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1 I first presented an overview of the imperial names occurring in the Dakhleh temples in Kaper 1998, 139–158, but the excavations of subsequent years have added many additional names. Some of this material was discussed in more detail in Kaper 1997, notably in chapter 1. Further publications on the imperial names are in preparation.

2 Each temple has been investigated by team members of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, which has been investigating the oasis since 1978; on this project, cf. van Zoest and Kaper 2006.
1. The temple of Amun-nakht at Ain Birbiyeh has been excavated and conserved by Anthony J. Mills and Adam Zielinski since 1985. The names of emperors inscribed on its walls are Augustus, Galba, Titus, Domitian and Hadrian.

2. The temple of Tutu at Ismant el-Kharab has been excavated by Colin A. Hope since 1991. The names of the following emperors have been attested on its walls: Hadrian (uncertain), Antoninus Pius and Pertinax.

3. The temple of Amun-Re at Deir el-Hagar was cleared of sand and debris and restored by Anthony J. Mills and Adam Zielinski between 1992 and 1995. The emperors mentioned in its relief decoration are Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian and Hadrian.

4. The temple for Thoth at Amheida has been the focus of ongoing excavations since 2004 by a team directed by Roger S. Bagnall. Thus far, the emperors Titus and Domitian have been attested on the loose blocks of this structure, but it is clear that building works continued after their reigns, even though the names of the emperors in question are as yet unknown.

A fifth temple stood at Mut el-Kharab. This was dedicated to Seth and it has been under excavation since 2001 by Colin A. Hope. It has appeared from these excavations that the temple was rebuilt in Ptolemaic and Roman times, but no decorated stones of this phase of the building have been found in situ as yet, nor have any cartouches of the Roman period been found.

**Ain Birbiyeh Temple**

The temple of Ain Birbiyeh (Dakhleh Oasis Project site no. 31/435-K5-1) was first noticed by Bernardino Drovetti in 1819. He reported seeing “les ruines d’un temple, dont il ne paroit plus que les murs de