

# The Last Demotic Inscription

Eugene Cruz-Uribe

In the course of my work at the temple of Isis on Philae Island, I was able to record a number of new Demotic graffiti.<sup>1</sup> These graffiti were located in all areas of the temple and I see them as a potentially significant addition to the corpus of Demotic texts found at the temple. Griffith, who published the first group of these texts,<sup>2</sup> noted GPH 377, which is located on the roof of the pronaos of the temple.<sup>3</sup> That text was actually a pair of texts, one being a short Demotic graffito and the other being a longer Greek text. This text was considered to be the last Demotic graffito, as the companion Greek text was dated to 15 Choiak year 169 = 11 December AD 452.<sup>4</sup> GPH 365 is now considered the last Demotic text.<sup>5</sup> In Griffith's publication the date of GPH 365 was read as 6 Choiak 169 = 2 December AD 452.<sup>6</sup> The date, however, has now been correctly reread as *sw 16*, which gives us a date of 12 December AD 452.<sup>7</sup>

The subject of this short paper is to return to the subject of what was the last Demotic inscription and offer a new alternative in honor of Sven Vleeming so he may enjoy reviewing this thesis and hopefully not include it as an entry in his next *Berichtigungsliste* volume.

Thus far it is certain that GPH 365 is the last dated Demotic inscription that has been recorded. In my study of the texts at Philae I have pondered the question of the placement of graffiti in the temple and how their location may give us additional information on why they were found where they were.<sup>8</sup> In my examination of the temples on Philae Island, I also considered my earlier thesis that the pious Egyptians had a tendency not to write graffiti in an 'active' portion of a temple.<sup>9</sup> Thus I noted the location of many of the Demotic graffiti around Philae temple, but also around many other temples that have Demotic (or other ancient Egyptian) graffiti. These observations brought some very clear items to the forefront. In these temples there was a near complete lack of any ancient Egyptian graffiti in the rear areas of the temple on the inside close to the sanctuary.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the mammisi at Philae gives an excellent example. Almost 500 of the Demotic texts found at Philae are located in and around the mammisi. On the interior of the mammisi there are three rooms. The sanctuary and the inner vestibule are decorated, but have no graffiti. The outer vestibule (also called Chamber 1 in the Demotic publications) has no decorations, but all of the walls are covered in Demotic graffiti.

The exceptions to this rule in various temples were few in number. The first were found at the temple of Kalabsha. Griffith<sup>11</sup> and Bresciani<sup>12</sup> had recorded a number of Demotic texts in and around the temple complex.

- 1 E. CRUZ-URIBE, *The Demotic Graffiti from the Temple of Isis on Philae Island* (Atlanta, 2016). Approximately 530 new Demotic graffiti were recorded in this project. The individual graffiti are noted below as GPH.
- 2 F.L. GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus (Les temples immergés de la Nubie)*, Oxford, 1935–1937).
- 3 GRIFFITH, *Dodecaschoenus*, p. 106. His description of its location on the 'raised eastern border of the hypaethrum' is correct, but the location shown on his figure (p. 101) is incorrect.
- 4 GRIFFITH, *Dodecaschoenus*, p. 106; M. DEPAUW, *A Chronological Survey of Precisely Dated Demotic and Hieratic Sources* (Trismegistos Online Publications 1.0, Leuven, 2007), p. 246.
- 5 For a convenient photograph of this graffito see S. CAUVILLE – M. IBRAHIM ALI, *Philae: Itinéraire du visiteur* (Leuven, 2013), p. 252.
- 6 GRIFFITH, *Dodecaschoenus*, pp. 102–103, pl. 54, followed by DEPAUW, *Chronological Survey*, p. 246. See also A. BURKHARDT, 'Zu späten heidnischen Priestern in Philae', in: P. NAGEL (ed.), *Graeco-Coptica: Griechen und Kopten im byzantinischen Ägypten* (Halle, 1984), pp. 77–83. The writing of *sw 6* was included in ERICHSEN, *Demotisches Glossar*, p. 708.
- 7 F. HOFFMANN, *Ägypten: Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Berlin, 2000), pp. 240–242. K.-TH. ZAUZICH, 'Demotische Texte römischer Zeit', in: G. GRIMM – H. HEINEN – E. WINTER (eds), *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposions 26.-30. September 1978 in Trier* (AegTrev 2, Mainz am Rhein, 1983), p. 77, had read *sw 6* but gave a date of 11 December AD 452.

- 8 CRUZ-URIBE, *Demotic Graffiti Philae, passim*, esp. in the Introduction chapter.
- 9 E. CRUZ-URIBE, *Hibis Temple Project, 3: Graffiti from the Temple Precinct* (San Antonio, 2008), pp. 218–224.
- 10 I make the distinction between ancient Egyptian graffiti and graffiti from other groups (such as Greek), though there are few if any of those types of graffiti as well.
- 11 GRIFFITH, *Dodecaschoenus*, pp. 36–38.
- 12 E. BRESCIANI, *Graffiti demotiques du Dodecaschoene: Qertassi – Kalabcha – Dendour – Dakka – Maharraqa* (Cairo, 1969), especially the locational plan on pl. 21.



GPH 939

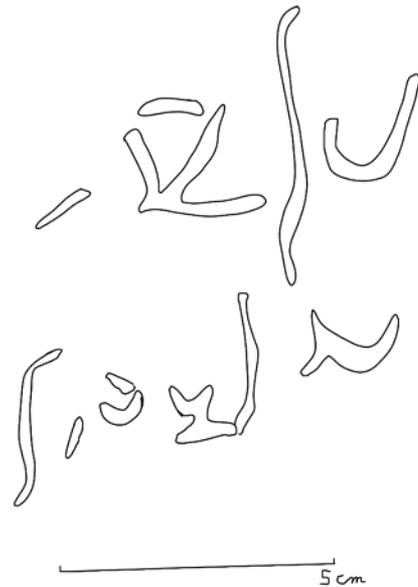


FIGURE 1 Line drawing of GPH 939

In 2009 my colleague, S. Vinson (Indiana University – Bloomington) and I examined the temple in detail and found several additional graffiti. Two of these were found in the outer vestibule on the east wall north of the gate.<sup>13</sup> No graffiti were found anywhere else in the inner vestibule nor in the sanctuary. As these graffiti are two rooms removed from the sanctuary, they would be comparable to the numerous graffiti found on the columns of the pronaos at Philae temple as well as those found in the mammisi.

The other exception was found in room VII just outside of the sanctuary at Philae.<sup>14</sup> On the east wall next to the door leading to room IX, we find a small two line graffito 138 cm above the floor (fig. 1 and photograph). I have numbered this GPH 939 in my catalogue.<sup>15</sup> The text is barely 6 cm wide and reads: ‘Petiese son of Petosiris’. The orthography is not distinctive, but clearly dates to the later Roman period at Philae. We have no titles or anything else, so we know nothing about who this Petiese was.<sup>16</sup>

The question I am raising is what is this text doing here? Dijkstra has summarized the extensive literature on the

reuse of the pronaos as a Christian church dedicated to St Stephen, probably beginning in the sixth century AD.<sup>17</sup> What is clear is that the gateway leading from the pronaos to the naos area of Philae temple was blocked off in the construction project which converted the pronaos into a Christian church. My figure 2 shows the location of the various Demotic graffiti and the sealed up door. It is tempting to speculate that, at some point after the traditional temple was closed in 538 by the Byzantine officials, Petiese came to visit Philae temple, probably as a person coming up from Nubia. He stopped in, and finding the central access to the rear of the temple closed off by the wall of the Christian church, he went around to the west door of the naos and entered into the naos area and made homage to Isis by recording his small graffito.

There is no way of knowing the exact date when the text was written, but it is logical to assume it happened after the closure of the temple and thus decorum was maintained by one of the last pilgrims still practicing the traditional cult of Isis. If this is an accurate hypothesis, then we

13 See PM VII, p. 12, area 32. They called this room the ‘outer vestibule’. Bresciani called this room C. Vinson and I will publish these in a later study.

14 PM VI, p. 230 (plan), p. 241, no. 337.

15 CRUZ-URIBE, *Demotic Graffiti Philae*, p. 247.

16 There are four other occurrences of individuals named Petiese son of Petosiris: GPH 243, 557, 584, and 679.

17 J. DIJKSTRA, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion* (OLA 173, Leuven, 2008), pp. 306–315; IDEM, ‘The Fate of the Temples in Late Antique Egypt’, in: L. LAVAN – M. MULRYAN (eds), *The Archaeology of Late Antique ‘Paganism’* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 4221–4230, fig. 7.