

PARTHIAN OSTRACA FROM THE CENTRAL BUILDING COMPLEX
OF OLD NISA¹

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More than 2700 ostraca were discovered during excavation of the wine storage of the Northern Complex of Old Nisa, together with a group of documents which originated from the excavations of the Central Temple and Palace Complex. The first ostrakon was discovered in 1934, at Old Nisa, in the excavation to the south-west of the Building with the Square Hall and consisted of a small fragment of a bowl with some signs of Aramaic writing. Freiman, a specialist in the field of the Old Iranian and Middle Iranian languages, concluded that the inscription was Parthian, probably of the first centuries AD. Another find, a khum, discovered in 1946, during excavations of a room of the north-eastern construction of the Central Complex, also had a Parthian inscription. Its photograph was sent to Freiman, but the results remain unknown. A strongly retouched photograph is published in the first volume of the “The Works of the Southern-Turkmenistanian Archeological Complex Expedition,”² but the reading of the inscription is not given. Livshits’ view was that the inscription obviously contained a genealogy of an Arsacid king (four such texts were later discovered during excavations of the wine storage of the Northern Complex); this is indicated by several words that could be seen on the photograph: (2) [*r*]š*k* *MLK*’ . . . (3) *BR*[*Y*] *r*(š)*k* *M*(*L*)[*K*]’ (4) *MN kršty* (.) “The king Arshak . . . son of the king Arshak, [delivered?] from Karsht.”

The new finds of the Parthian ostraca in the ruins of the rooms of the Central Complex were made only 50 years after the first find. More than two dozen were found at the time of clearing the waste dumps, connected with repair works in the Building with the Square Hall and in the Tower-like Structure. During repair of the Building with the Square Hall, the waste from the Square Hall was taken outside the building and placed at the foot of the south-western part of the platform. Ostraca are found here along with the fragments of broken brick, old painted plaster, and other construction waste. The total number of ostraca

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² *Trudy* 1949, 50.

discovered in this waste dump is 13, which include fragments of bowls, jugs, khum and tile. No one whole piece of an ostracon has been found here.

The second collection of ostraca was discovered in the waste heap, connected with repair works on the Tower-like Structure. Here were found 7 ostraca, which were also fragmented. The other two ostraca are related to the Tower-like Structure, one of which was discovered by Bader in 1991 during the clearing of the waste heap, lying near the western corner of the Tower-like Structure; and the second one (in 2002) was found by Pilipko during the clearing of the section adjacent to the Tower-like Structure from the South-West.

Ostraca were also discovered in the Building with the Round Hall. During excavations of the section, adjacent to the northern aperture of the Round Hall, Italian archaeologists have found two small fragments.³ In the archival documents of JuTAKE one succeeded in discovering a short record of another ostracon, which was found in the north-eastern aperture of the Round Hall.

The North-Eastern Structure has so far only produced two finds of the Parthian texts. One is the afore-mentioned khum which has a form typical of the Arsacid period, and its archaeological dating is within the boundaries of the 2nd century BC - 2nd century AD.

Another ostracon was found in a small room which also contained many khums, adjacent to the North-Eastern Structure from the North-East. Its text records an amount of flour kept in a storehouse.

In contrast to the ostraca found during excavations of the wine storage, the texts published here for the most part do not date to the Arsacid era. It should be noted that at the present time there are unresolved problems regarding the dating of the Nisean structures and of the separate layers. Very few of the securely dated artefacts have been found at the site of Nisa. The undisturbed layers, connected to the time of the functioning of these buildings, were also scarce. Under these conditions, the data on composition of the archaeological complexes of the Arsacid period, chronology of chains in the structure of the Nisean Complex, and more exact dating of some categories of finds (architectural terracotta, sculpture, ostraca), must serve as a base for their dating.

I would suggest that the Central Complex was built in the 2nd century BC, while its complete overhaul was carried out in the first half of the 1st century

³ Morano 1996, 139-145. The inscription on the ostracon 94CH3, as indicated V.A. Livshits, should be read as: (1) 'L YR H' [(2) GDY(t) [(3) t(.) "at the year [...] was distributed [through?] T..."; on the ostracon 94CH5: (1)] prypty. (2) y(?)š tršpk [(3)] wr/d ["To Friapat (?) ... soured (wine) ..."