

CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THE TOPOGRAPHY OF AL-USHMÛNAIN
FROM ARABIC PAPYRI

BY

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The town of Ašmûn, the old Hermupolis Magna, the Greek name of which appears in the arabic Vita of Pachomios as Ermûbûlis ⁽¹⁾ *أرموبولس*, is for the first time mentioned in *PERF* no. 585₄ (dated 75 A. H.). As is shown by the epithet *مدينة*, it was already in that year the capital of the district (*kûra*), as also Hmunu was the capital of the “nome of the hare”. This place is frequently mentioned in the course of the IInd and IIIrd Century of the Hġra ⁽²⁾. The latest documentary evidence for Ašmûn is *PERF* no. 909 (dated 320/21 A. H.). Apparently the town was divided into an Upper- and Lower-town, *أشمون أعلى* and *أشمون أسفل*, as also the district of Ašmûn was divided at a very early date into two subdistricts, which were separate administrative units, and bore the same name. This partition into two districts continued in the IIIrd Century of the Hġra ⁽³⁾. There is no evidence whether either of these district-capitals (Upper- and Lower Ašmûn) is identical with the modern al-Ušmûnain,

⁽¹⁾ Cf. J. MASPERO et G. WIET, *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte*, *MIFAO*, XXXVI (Cairo 1919), p. 20.

⁽²⁾ Cf. *P. Heid.*, III, 21; *P. Ryl. Arab.*, IV, nos. 1₃, 2₃, 3₃, 4₁, 5°, VI, no. 5₃, XV, nos. 34₃, 62₄; *PERF* no. 837₃ (273 A. H.); *PER Inv. Ar. Pap.* 960 ¹/₃ (IIIrd Century of the Hġra), 980₁ (244 A. H.) 1841₄ f. (267 A. H.), 1792₂ (IInd Century of the Hġra); *PSR* no. 243 ¹/₆ (212 A. H.); *P. Berol.* 12789₂ (287 A. H.), etc.

⁽³⁾ Cf. A. GROHMANN, *Probleme der arabischen Papyrusforschung*, I, *Archiv Orientalní*, III (1931), p. 385 ff.

clearly resulting from joining both capitals into one. But the name al-Ushmûnain, already occurs about the middle of the IInd Century of the Hîgra and is more frequently used about the IIIrd and during the IVth Century, in the course of which it entirely supersedes the old name Ašmûn.

Unfortunately we do not learn much from the Arabic papyri about this old district capital.

It appears that it was divided into four sections, according to the four cardinal points, *الْجَانِبُ الشَّرْقِيّ*, *غَرْبِيّ*, *بَحْرِيّ* and *شَرْبِيّ* being mentioned in papyri of the second half of the IInd Century of the Hîgra⁽¹⁾. That means—in comparison with the Ptolemaic period—seemingly a more definite subdividing of the town-area, which in this Greek epoch was only divided into an East- and West-half.

In the West-section a street of Muḥammad 'Abbās is situated, and a contract of sale, dated 441 A. H. (1055 A. D.) preserved in the Egyptian Library, mentions a hill in the northern section looking down to the Chapel of the Holy Virgin; not far from this place the well called as-Sa'îdî was situated as well as a Muslim cemetery called Bû Târbon, in which the Roman name Turbo has obviously survived⁽²⁾. In the east-section of Ašmûn the "Church of the Apostles" *كنيسة بسطلس* was situated, furthermore the quarter (or street) of Ibrahîm ibn Ishâq ibn Musakka, where also a mosque was to be found⁽³⁾. Of course al-Ušmûnain possessed also a Great-Mosque, mentioned in a paper of the Rainer Collection in Vienna. The great marked had its place in the quarter of a mosque, the name of which is unfortunately not mentioned⁽⁴⁾. The site of the "Street of the two monuments" *خطّ الأثرين*, furnished

⁽¹⁾ *PERF* no. 837, (273 A. H.); *PER Inv. Ar. Pap.* 1841, f. (267 A. H.); *P. Hambg. Arab.* no. 12 b line 1 f. (p. 50, 58); A. GROHMANN, *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, I, no. 64, f. (p. 216).

⁽²⁾ For *TOYPBΩN* see now A. VOGLIANO, *Secondo Rapporto degli scavi condotti dalla missione archeologica d'Egitto della R. Università di Milano nella zona di Madinet Mādī (Campagna inverno e primavera 1936-XIV*)* Milano 1937, p. 45.

⁽³⁾ *PERF* no. 837, f. (273 A. H.): *منزلا لهذا المسجد المنسوب في هذا الكتاب بخط يعزى: بابرهيم بن احق بن مسكة بمدينة اشمون في الجانب الشرق منها*

⁽⁴⁾ *MPER* II/III (1887), p. 89.

with a public fountain, and the "Street of Tabarî's bath" *خطّ حمام طبري* are also not known, as no further details are offered by the documents⁽¹⁾. In a paper, dated 674 A. H. (1276 A. D.) and belonging to the Rainer Collection there is a question of a communication, which, at the same level as the "Way of the Cross" leads to the "al-Hāgg̃ Ḥalīl ibn Ḥasan-Street", also called "Cross-Street"⁽²⁾. The name "Cross-Street" obviously points to the Christian sphere, and the street was further on named after a Muslim citizen of that town. A Church of Abū Quzmān (St. Cosmas) gave its name to a district of which nothing further is known⁽³⁾. The same is the case with the finance-office, which, of course, was well known to any citizen of the town, and we also not know, where the High Tribunal (*مجلس الحكم العزيز*) is to be searched for⁽⁴⁾.

The town was famous for the manufacture of cloth bearing its name. The manufactory *طراز أشمون* is already mentioned in two papyri of the IInd or IIIrd Century of the Hîgra and in a paper of the IVth Century, all preserved in the Egyptian Library⁽⁵⁾. It is significant of the rôle played by al-Ušmûnain in commerce, that this town had a special pound standard-weight *الرطل الاشموني*⁽⁶⁾. Finally it may be noticed that Ušmûnî-cheese was a well known product of Egyptian agriculture⁽⁷⁾.

According to the model of Roman towns in Egypt, domanial grounds appertained to the area of the City. Such "domains in the town" (*الضياع*)—this clearly means belonging to the *évopía*—are occasionally mentioned in the papyri. The agents of the magnates had their residence here, and here the auction of domanial grounds to lessees was effected⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, II, no. 138, 10, pp. 205, 207.

⁽²⁾ *PERF* no. 1322.

⁽³⁾ *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, II, no. 126, 7, pp. 180, 238.

⁽⁴⁾ *MPER* II/III (1887), p. 89.

⁽⁵⁾ *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, II, no. 117 f. (p. 153 f.) and *P. Cair.* B. É. Inv. no. 710.

⁽⁶⁾ *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, II, p. 173.

⁽⁷⁾ *PER Inv. Chart. Ar.* 7038, *الجبن الاشموني*.

⁽⁸⁾ *PER Inv. Chart. Ar.* 7000, 7016 b, l. 1; *PSR* 243, 251.

As capital of a district, which in times was very extensive, Ašmûn or al-Ašmûnain was also the residence of a post-master صاحب بريد أشمون, who was at the same time the local head of the Secret police, and a commander of high military rank (*walî al-ḥarb*)⁽¹⁾, who possibly had to control the garrison in this important district, which had different strongholds, as Qaṣr south of Ašmûn and Qaṣr Pesla on the right bank of the Nile. That this part of Upper-Egypt was regarded in some respects as a frontier district, is shown by the fact that ships coming from the Thebais had to pay a toll (τελώνιον) at Hermupolitana Phylake, the modern Derwa Sarâbamûn⁽²⁾.

It must be confessed that what we can learn of topographical details about the town of Ašmûn and its district from Arabic papyri still resembles scattered pieces of mosaic rather than a complete picture of the town. Still it is to be hoped that further finds of papyri will complete our knowledge of the town in the early Arabic period. Unfortunately the Arab *stratum* of al-Ušmûnain has been completely destroyed by the *Sabbâḥîn*, as far it is not covered by the modern village, so that the verification of the data of the papyri on the spot is no longer possible.

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⁽¹⁾ *P. Ryl. Arab.*, IV, nos. 1, (136 A. H.), 2, (133 A. H.), 3, (127 A. H.), 4, (134 A. H.), 5; *MPER* II/III (1887), p. 89.

⁽²⁾ Cf. G. MASPERO, *Notes au jour le jour IV*, *PSBA*, XIV (1892), pp. 196-200.