

Worp (K.A.) (ed.) Greek papyri from Kellis: I: (*P. Kell. G.*) Nos. 1 -90 (Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph No. 3) (Oxbow Monograph 54) Pp. ix + 281; illus; 90 pl. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995. £45.00. ISBN: 0 946874 97 2

The Dakhleh Oasis project and the excavations at Ismant el-Kharab, the ancient Kellis, have aroused a great deal of interest. The discovery of large numbers of papyri and wooden writing tablets in three houses on the site offers the prospect of relating documentary sources to a properly excavated site. Further interest was aroused when preliminary readings showed Manichaean influences.

This volume contains an introduction to the site, ninety texts with plates, a full and informative commentary, and translations of most texts. The texts are mainly fourth-century and most come from house 3 with smaller numbers from houses 2 and 1. The texts begin to illuminate the fascinating social relationships of the probable inhabitants of these three houses, provide a valuable insight into fourth-century Kellis, and suggest that Kellis may have been a rather unusual village.

The site plan shows that rooms that would more naturally seem to be part of house 1 were built into house 2. It seems possible that the owner of house 2 ceded land at the rear of house 3 to the owner of that house (*P.Kellis G.* 38) and the location of this land may indicate that the owner of house 2 originally owned all three houses. One of the main people attested in the house 2 documents is a Pausanias who (*P.Kellis G.* 38) is described as a former magistrate of the *metropolis*. and, according to a certain Gena (*P.Kellis G.* 5), is a *kurios* and displays 'good birth', though the relationship between Pausanias and others attested in the documents remains unclear.

*P.Kellis G.* 63 of house 3 has clear Manichaean elements and *P.Kellis G.* 69 may also attest a Manichaean official. Apparently, at least 21 of the Coptic letters have similar elements. Other letters do not suggest a religiously unusual community. *Prebuteroi* of the Catholic Church appear in three texts (*P.Kellis G.* 24, 32, 58) suggesting that at least some of the inhabitants regarded themselves as part of mainstream Christianity. In *P.Kellis G.* 48 (dated to 355) a slave-owner manumits his slave woman by Zeus, Ge and Helios on account of excess of Christian spirit. Apart from the nomenclature, which shows strong local characteristics, there is little evidence for paganism.

The main family of House 3, that of Pamouris, held property in Aphrodito in the Antaeopolite nome in the Nile valley and were at various times resident in that village. It was common for villagers to hold property in several different locations but the connection between Aphrodito and Kellis seems unusual since several residents of Kellis seem to have formed a separate community in Aphrodito (*P.Kellis G.* 30; 32; 42; 43; 44). This is mainly attested in loans between members of the family of

Pamouris and others registered in Kellis but the preservation of these texts at Kellis shows the continued use of the Kellis houses.

Pamouris petitioned the *praeses* of the Thebaid concerning the theft of an ass which seems to have occurred some time previously (*P. Kellis G. 20*). As is common in petitions, Pamouris represents himself as powerless, throwing himself on the mercy of the official. The circumstances, however, suggest that Pamouris may have been rather more influential than he admits. Pamouris was opposed to a 'big man', 'powerful in the neighbourhood' but Pamouris maintained hopes of redress since 'times of turmoil' had ended. It is tempting to relate these tumultuous events to the revolt of Domitius Domitianus. In any case, Pamouris attempted to tar this 'big man' with recent problems and provide the *praeses* with an opportunity to demonstrate that the bad times were over. The rhetoric is clever and shows the interplay of local and provincial politics and the way in which a seemingly ordinary inhabitant of a remote Oasis village could exploit these tensions.

Pamouris again summoned official help when he petitioned over a dispute (*P. Kellis G. 21*) during which Pamouris' wife was badly beaten. Pamouris obtained the help of a former magistrate of Hermopolis Magna which is shown not by any formal intervention but by his scribing the petition for Pamouris. Again the impression is formed that this was no simple villager.

Thirty years later, a petition of an Aurelius Gena (*P. Kellis G. 23*) seems to show a more obviously unsuccessful clash. Gena became involved in a dispute over liturgies with a dependent of a local magistrate and estate owner. After the arrest of the dependent, the magistrate descended on the unfortunate Gena, beat him, drove his brother from the village, and stole various pigs. Gena petitioned from his death bed (apparently). Some hope that Gena may have gained redress stems from *P. Kellis G. 24* of the previous year in which Gena appears to have mobilised at least 33 person, three of whom were Church officials, to petition for Gena's safety.

Many questions remained unanswered, such as why are there so many carpenters when there is so little evidence of carpentry and whether the emphasis on animals in the texts reflects a greater emphasis on pastoralism than that of valley settlements, and individual texts remain puzzles, but answers and more problems will emerge with the full publication of the site. In the meantime, this volume offers a valuable insight into the complexities of life in fourth-century Kellis.

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