

## A LATIN POTTER'S SEAL IMPRESSION

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The sherd which contains the Latin seal impression here discussed was found August 13, 1968, in Area C, Square 3, Locus 4, at Heshbon. It bears the Object number 211. This locus consists of a layer of wash on the western slope of the *tell* containing Arabic, Byzantine, Roman and some Hellenistic pottery, and among the objects an early Arabic coin. The sherd measures 80 × 56 mm. It is part of a wide handle of a huge bowl of which the mouth had a diameter of 43 cm.

The seal impression applied to the soft clay before firing consists of a rectangular frame, 48 × 22 mm. in size, in which there is a text of two lines. All letters and strokes are impressed into the clay, in spite of the optical illusion presented by the photograph. The narrow side of the frame was placed close to the edge of the rim and runs almost parallel to it. The text is fairly well preserved and can be read in part.

Most of the thousands of stamped Latin impressions on vessels as well as on bricks and tiles that have been found among the debris of the ancient world are "trade-marks." Usually they contain only the name of the manufacturer, either in the nominative or genitive.<sup>1</sup> The proposed reading of the Latin Heshbon seal is:<sup>2</sup>

Ċ · BĒLLICI  
ZMĀRAGDI

The dots above the letters indicate defective letters, regarding which the following remarks are to be made:

*Line 1.* The first letter C is not quite clear but fairly certain.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., R. Cagnat, *Cours d'épigraphie latine* (3d ed.; Paris, 1898), pp. 316, 317.

<sup>2</sup> The reading is based on a photograph.

The stamp seems to have been defective in this respect.—The following sign is an “interpoint” commonly used as a word divider.—The second letter is a B. The lower part of the bottom curve is damaged, but the remaining traces make the reading certain.—The E is problematical. The shape resembles a C, but the reading requires an E, which may have had the familiar form of the Greek ε. However, the horizontal stroke in the center and the lower curve have been lost.

*Line 2.* The remaining traces of the third letter fit an A, which the reading requires.—Of the fourth letter the top of the R is gone, but the very rare K, the only other possibility, can be excluded.

The seal contains a typical Roman name consisting of (1) *praenomen*, (2) *nomen gentile*, and (3) *cognomen*. The *praenomen* Gaius always appears as the abbreviation C. The *nomen gentile* Bellicus or Bellicius is well attested, both forms occurring indiscriminately.<sup>3</sup> The genitive form -ci may be the usual contraction of a fuller -cii. The *cognomen* Zmaragdus or Smaragdus occurs frequently in Roman as well as in Greek inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> However, the Heshbon sherd seems to be the only example where Zmaragdus appears in combination with Bellic(i)us. It is attractive but perhaps far-fetched to suppose that Gaius Bellic(i)us Zmaragdus was a descendant (of a freedman?) of the illustrious Bellic(i)i who flourished in the first and second centuries A.D. Although the social status of our unknown Latin pottery manufacturer cannot be determined, it is obvious from the tripartite structure of the name that he was not a slave.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. Groag and A. Stein, eds., *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, I (2d ed.; Berlin, 1932), 361-363. Clay stamp impressions of manufacturers named Bellic(i)us are listed in *CIL*, XIII, 3, 1, No. 10010/284 (on pottery vessels), and *ibid.*, XV, 1, No. 887 (on bricks).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the index to H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae* (Berlin, 1892-1916), and Louis Robert, *Noms indigènes dans l'Asie-mineure gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1963), pp. 275, 276.