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The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 23, 29-32

1993

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Gerald M. Browne

A PAPYRUS DOCUMENT IN COPTIC AND OLD NUBIAN

Like Zbigniew Borkowski, to whose memory this volume of studies is dedicated, I began my career in documentary papyrology. Over the years, my interests have taken me elsewhere, but now, prompted by the kind invitation of the editors of *JJP* to honor him, I am pleased to offer a small token of respect for an old and trusted friend, prematurely taken from us. The text which I here publish joins my current pursuits to those which I once had and which, fortunately, I have never forgotten: may their conjunction provide a tribute worthy of Zbigniew's memory.

I present here an edition of a linguistic oddity, a papyrus fragment in Fayumic Coptic and in Old Nubian (Fig. 2). The papyrus, from a private collection, measures 6 cm. in breadth by 7 cm. in height. It is inscribed on one side, and the writing runs against the fibers. The sheet is broken off at the top, left and right; the amount of text lost cannot be determined. On the back, there is but a single isolated stroke, running parallel to the fibers; it is apparently either iota or a pen trial.

The hand is somewhat labored and rather idiosyncratic: the scribe characteristically reverses λ (as λ) and γ (as γ). Exact parallels to the writing I have been unable to find, but in general style it is not unlike the third, fourth and fifth hands in a Greek document of 616 A.D., published as P. Lond. II 483: see lines 95-99 and the atlas of plates, Vol. II 116, and note in particular λ at the beginning of line 97. Unskilled writing such as this is notoriously difficult to date precisely, and apparent parallels may be deceptive. I am therefore reluctant to insist on a seventh-century date for the fragment, and I am unwilling to exclude the eighth century from consideration. But even so, it is clearly one of the earliest specimens of Old Nubian, if not the earliest, and it is probably chronologically prior to what is the oldest dated monument in that language, the Greek stele of Stephanos Eñitta with Old Nubian insertions, erected in 797 A.D.: see S. JAKOBIELSKI, *A History of*

the Bishopric of Pachoras on the Basis of Coptic Inscriptions (Faras III), Warsaw, 1972, p. 47 n. 64¹. It is also, I believe, the only papyrus to offer Old Nubian: the rest of the corpus, apart from inscriptions and graffiti, is on parchment, paper or leather. Whether the text was drafted in Egypt or in Nubia cannot be determined: a scribe employing Fayumic Coptic in Nubia would — in view of the extensive *Binnenwanderung* in the area — be no more incongruous than a Nubian writer in Egypt.

The inscribed side of the sheet bears two columns of writing, of which only two faint traces remain of the first. The first six lines of column II offer a list of names, strung paratactically together for a purpose we can no longer grasp. A series of four horizontal dashes below line 2 may serve to divide the list. The presence of the word **NEZΛA†** “the children” in lines 2 and 5 shows that this portion of the text was conceived in Fayumic Coptic: the word **ZΛA†** is that dialect’s equivalent to Bohairic **SPOT†**, and it derives from Ancient Egyptian *h*drw (see P. JERNSTEDT’S note in Push² 2.2). It is significant that in line 2 (and possibly in 5) the word is linked to **NAZPΔOY**; this rare personal name occurs in Fayumic (see W. CRUM, *Coptic Manuscripts ... from the Fayyum*, London, 1893, 46.1-2).

Below line 6, four horizontal dashes herald the beginning of a new section, in which the writer, now using Old Nubian, identifies himself and refers to a plurality of addressees. The features that reveal the linguistic affinity of this section (lines 7-9) may here be surveyed (see the commentary for further details): **ΔIOY** “I”, the first person singular pronoun followed by annective **-OY** appears in line 7; **OYPOH** “and you”, the second person plural pronoun joined to the conjunction **-OH**, is found in the next line; and line 9 offers **OYPIO** “in you”, again the second person plural pronoun, this time attached to the postposition **-ΛO** (appearing as **-IO** after **-P-**). For all these features, see my *Introduction to Old Nubian* (“Meroitica” 11), Berlin, 1989, §§3.7.1 (personal pronouns), 3.6.5a (annective **-OY**), 3.10 s.vv. **-ΛO** and **-OH** (for the spelling **-OH** see §2.1 and IN II 16 i 6, iv 7 and v 9), 2.5.6b (**-P-ΛO** → **-PIO**).

¹ JAKOBIELSKI refers to the as-Sebu^c graffiti as being the earliest dated text in Old Nubian (see also p. 36, n. 11), but the graffiti does not in fact bear a date: what the original editor read as **EM ΦΙΑ ΕΛΙ ΕΤ ΟΔ** and translated as “year of the martyrs 511 (A.D. 795) ... year 91” should read **EMΦΙΑ ΕΛΙ ΕΤΑΔ**, to be construed with **ΕΤΩ ΠΕΤΡΟ Ρ ΧϞ** ... in the preceding line: “I, Peter, being Priest of Christ ... have today set (this) up”; see my article *Griffith’s Old Nubian Graffito 4*, forthcoming in “Etudes et Travaux”.

² For the abbreviations of editions of Coptic texts, see A. A. SCHILLER, *A Checklist of Coptic Documents and Letters*, BASP 13 (1976), pp. 99–123. In addition, for Old Nubian texts I use the sigla set forth in my *Literary Texts in Old Nubian*, “Beiträge zur Sudanforschung” 5, Vienna 1989, p. 3.

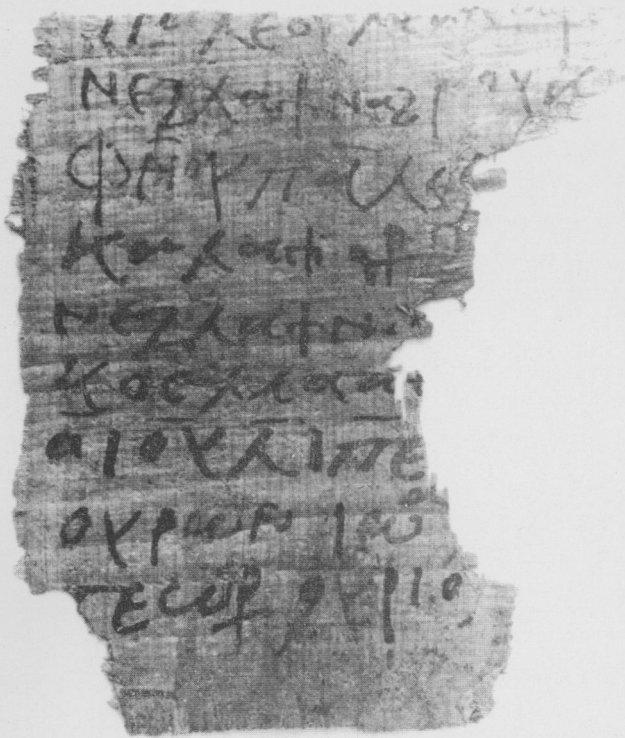


Fig. 2. Papyrus (from a private collection)

The text as a whole is probably the remnant of a private letter in Old Nubian, in which the Fayumic list of names was inserted. Conceivably it could be a contract, with lines 7-9 giving the subscription of one of the parties, but — unless we have a later, unofficial copy — I should then expect a change of hand starting in line 7. For a similar bilingual letter, I note in particular IN inv. 82.1.25/20 (which I am currently preparing for publication), where one line of Arabic is inserted in the body of the text, itself written in Old Nubian.

Col. i

Col. ii

(↑)

ΠΑΛΕΟΥ ΜΑΚΑΡΕ . [
 ΝΕΖΛΑ† ΝΑΖΡΑΟΥ ΚΑΛ[Α†(?)

]. 5

ΦΗΟΥ ΠΑΛΕΟΥ [
 ΚΑΛΑ† ΟΡΠ() [
 ΝΕΖΛΑ† ΝΑ[ΖΡΑΟΥ(?)
 ΚΟΣΜΑ ΔΑ[ΡΩΝ(?)

].

ΔΙΟΥ ΛΙΠΕ[ΡΑΛΙΣ(?)
 ΟΥΡΩΝ ΙΩΔ[
 ΓΕΩΡ ΟΥΡΙΟ. [
 [-]

“Paleou, Makare ..., the children of Nahraou, Kalati(?) ..., Phêou, Paleou ..., Kalati, Orp() ..., the children of Nahraou(?) ..., Kosma, Aaron(?) ... I, Liberalis(?) ... and you, John ..., George, in you ...”

1. ΠΑΛΕΟΥ: see G. HEUSER, *Die Personennamen der Kopten*, Leipzig, 1929, pp. 23 and 69 (ΠΑΛΑΥ, ΠΑΛΗΥ).

2. See above, Introd., and for the omission of genitival Ν→ see Bal I, p. 107.

ΚΑΛΑ†(?): cf. line 4.

3. ΦΗΟΥ: HEUSER, p. 10, lists ΦΗΥ.

4. ΚΑΛΑ†: not known to me elsewhere.

ΟΡΠ() the scribe first wrote ΟΡ, with a stroke of abbreviation (cf. line 9 and Bal II 381.4), then — presumably because he felt that more of the name had to be indicated — added Π, raised above the line. Possible resolutions are ΟΡΠ(ΛΕΝΤ) (see HEUSER, pp. 22, 44, 58, 60 and 61) and ΟΡΠ(ΑΗΣΕ) (cf. ΩΡΠΑΗΣΕ in ST 354.2).

7-9. See above, Introd., for a grammatical analysis of these lines.

7. λπεραλις(?): i.e. λβεραλις? λ and π interchange in Old Nubian; cf. e.g. SC 1.2 αρχηπειλικος.

8. ιωδ): only the lower portion of the stroke of abbreviation remains; cf. e.g. Push 15.1.

9. γεωρ: i.e. γεωργε/γεωργι/γεωργιος.

The letter after ογριο could be λ, μ or π.

[Urbana-Champaign]

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"Palaon Makate" ... the children of Nahrton, Kalait (?) ... Palaon
Palaon ... Kalait, Oip (?) ... the children of Nahrton (?) ... Kōmat,
Aton (?) ... I, Libertilla (?) ... and you, John ... George, in you ..."

1. Palaon; see G. Huxley, *Die Personennamen der Kopten*, Leipzig, 1929, pp. 23
and 69 (Palaon, Kaiti).

2. See above, Introd., and for the omission of genitive κ - see Bal I, p. 107.

3. Palaon; cf. line 4.

4. Palaon; see Huxley, p. 10, line 4.

5. Palaon; not known to me elsewhere.

6. Palaon; the scribe first wrote οβ with a stroke of abbreviation (cf. line 9 and Bal II
381A), then — presumably because he felt that more of the name had to be indicated —
added it raised above the line. Possible readings are οβλακ(η) (see Huxley, p. 22,
44, 52, 60 and 61) and οβλακ(η) (cf. Bal II in 21 354-5).