

Łajtar, Adam

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Adam Łajtar

THREE CHRISTIAN EPITAPHS IN GREEK
FROM THE REISNER EXCAVATIONS
IN THE AREA OF GEBEL BARKAL (NORTHERN SUDAN)

On the margin of the excavations of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, carried out by G. A. Reisner at the beginning of this century in the area of Gebel Barkal (ancient Napata), the royal capital of Kush, some important discoveries of Christian remains were also made. The most significant of the finds concerned Nuri, a locality on the left bank of the Nile opposite Gebel Barkal, the site of one of the royal necropoleis of Kush.¹ There, Reisner found a stone church erected largely of spolia from the royal tombs. The building with its longitudinal plan and characteristic central dome was constructed in the early period of the Nubian church architecture (7th-8th century)² and was rebuilt at a later time (9th-10th century). Christian graves in the neighbourhood of the church should be considered as contemporary with the building. Two stone stelae with Christian epitaphs in Greek were discovered in the debris near the church, most probably dragged from a neighbouring necropolis; they are discussed below as

¹ The results of the Reisner excavations in Nuri have been published by D. DUNHAM, *Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, II. *Nuri*, Boston 1965.

² The plan and a brief description of the church in Dunham, *op. cit.*, p. 271, fig 216, pl. 65. Dunham provides no information that could help date the erection of the church. The chronology given here has been established on the grounds of typological criteria by P. GROSSMANN, *Elephantine*, II. *Kirche und Spätantike Hausanlagen im Chnumtempel. Beschreibung und typologiesche Untersuchung* (= *Archäologische Veröffentlichungen* 25), Mainz am Rhein 1980, pp. 88-91. I am indebted to Prof. Włodzimierz GODLEWSKI, Warsaw, for drawing my attention to Grossmann's work and discussing with me the church's archaeology.

nos 1 and 2. An isolated find of a Greek Christian epitaph from Gebel Barkal is discussed here as no 3.

The present whereabouts of these three Greek Christian epitaphs are unknown; neither at Khartoum nor in Boston, they are presumed lost. Their photographs taken by Reisner during the excavations are still kept together with the rest of the documentation in Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.³ The present edition of these inscriptions has been prepared based on these pictures. I am highly indebted to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and personally to Dr. Timothy Kendall from the Museum's Egyptian Department for providing me with the records and the permission to publish them. I also thank Miss Iwona Zych for correcting my English.

The following abbreviations have been used in this paper in addition to those commonly accepted:

- Gignac* F. Th. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I, Phonology*, Milano 1976
- Junker* H. Junker, "Die griechischen Grabsteine Nubiens", *ZÄS* 60, 1925, pp. 114-148
- KSB I* M. R. M. Hasitzka (ed.), *Koptisches Sammelbuch I (= Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek XXIII)*, Wien 1993
- Kubińska* J. Kubińska, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes (= Faras IV)*, Warsaw 1974
- Lefebvre* G. Lefebvre, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes*, Le Caire 1907
- Monneret de Villard* U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia medioevale I*, Le Caire 1935
- T. B.* M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni nubiane*, Pavia 1964

³ These are, in fact, the photos published by Dunham, *op. cit.*, pl. LXXI A (ours no 1) and LXXI B = S. M. BURSTEIN, "A Christian Greek Inscription from Nuri in the Sudan" [in:] ID., *Graeco-Africana. Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia*, New Rochelle 1995, p. 224 (ours no 2).

1. EPITAPH OF AN UNKNOWN PERSON
(IOANNES THE PRESBYTER?) – PL. I

Found on January 29th, 1917, at the southeastern corner of the church in Nuri, “among other large stones lying in sand against the bracing wall”;⁴ field no B 2912.

Rectangular slab of gray sandstone. The upper part of the slab is missing, as is the lower right hand corner and a smaller section of the lower left hand corner. The surface of the slab is badly worn, particularly down the middle from top to bottom, causing the letters to be largely effaced in this part. There seems to have been a grid serving as a frame for the inscription; the photo reveals traces of vertical lines running parallel to the side edges and horizontal ones between particular lines of the text. The letters are round and resemble the so-called Nubian majuscule to a degree, possibly its early version. In view of the inscription’s bad state of preservation, it is difficult to judge its language in terms of grammatical correctness. It seems that the text was relatively free of the orthographical confusions resulting from phonetical transcription (the only such error to be noted with all certainty is *έντα* for *ένθα* in line 8), which are otherwise very common in Nubian inscriptions in Greek. On the other hand, the composition of the prayer for the dead (see below) suggests that its author possessed a certain literacy in Greek.

Unpublished.

Cf. D. Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush II. Nuri*, Boston 1965, p. 272 (description) and pl. LXXI A (photo).

[καὶ τὸν]
 ἄδην καταπατήσας καὶ
 ζῶ|ην τῷ κόσμῳ χ|αρ-
 ισάμε|νος| ἐν κόλ|ποι|ς 'Α-
 4 βραὰμ καὶ 'Ισ|αὰκ| καὶ
 'Ιακώβ, [ἐν τόπῳ] φω-
 τινῶ ἐ|ν τόπῳ χ|λώ-
 ης, ἐν [τόπῳ ἀνα|ψύξ|εως,
 8 ἔντα [ἀπέδρα] ὀδύνη καὶ|
 λύπη καὶ [στε|ναγμοὶ
 ἀνάπ|αυσο|ν τ|ὸν δοῦ|λ]-

⁴ Reisner’s field diary.

12 [ο]ν σου . . . ν . . . [.]
 [ἔ]τη τῆς ζωῆς α[ὐτοῦ]
 [number]

Translation: “[. . . and] trodden down hell and given life to the world, rest Your servant . . . in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place in a place of verdure, in a place of refreshment, from which pain and grief and lamentations had fled away. The years of his life were [number].”

The inscription is practically a prayer for the rest of the dead man’s soul. Only lines 12-13 giving his years of life are not connected syntactically with the rest of the text.

The prayer we have in our inscription from Nuri is an adaptation of the long prayer for the dead encountered on some 30 epitaphs from Nubian territories between the first and the sixth cataracts on the Nile, from Dendur in the north to Soba in the south, and dated from the second half of the 8th to the first half of the 13th century A.D.⁵ The same prayer is known in the Greek Orthodox Church where it is still recited over the dead during the funerary liturgy.⁶ As such it has been transmitted uninterruptedly in the manuscript tradition of Greek euchologia — the oldest of them being Vatic. Barber. Graec. 336 of the 8th cent. A.D. — hence its designation “Prayer of the Euchologion Mega Type”.⁷

⁵ The list of inscriptions in A. ŁAJTAR, *ZPE* 113, 1996, pp. 104-108.

⁶ Discussions of the prayer using both epigraphical evidence from Nubia and data from Byzantine manuscripts are to be found in following works: W. WEISSBRODT, *Ein aegyptischer christlicher Grabstein mit Inschrift aus der griechischen Liturgie im Königlichen Lyceum Hosianum zu Braunsberg und ähnliche Denkmäler in auswärtigen Museen*, part one [in:] *Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen am Königlichen Lyceum Hosianum zu Braunsberg*, Winter-Semester 1905/6, part two [in:] *op. cit.*, Sommer-Semester 1909; Kubińska, pp. 69-86; V. BRUNI, *I funerali di un sacerdote nel rito bizantino secondo gli euologi manoscritti di lingua greca* (= *Publicazioni dello Studium Biblicum Franciscanum. Collectio Minor* 14), Jerusalem 1972, pp. 146-158; T. HÄGG, “Two Christian Epitaphs in Greek of the »Euchologion Mega« Type” [in:] *The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia*, VI, *Late Nubian Cemeteries*, Solna 1982, pp. 55-56; A. ŁAJTAR, “Greek inscriptions from the Monastery on kom H in Old Dongola” [in:] *The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism. Acts of the International Colloquium Held in Cracow-Tyniec, 16-19th November 1994*, Cracow 1995, pp. 51-52.

⁷ Introduced by Hägg, *loc. cit.* In his classification of Nubian funerary prayers Junker, p. 124, distinguished this prayer as his type *a*.

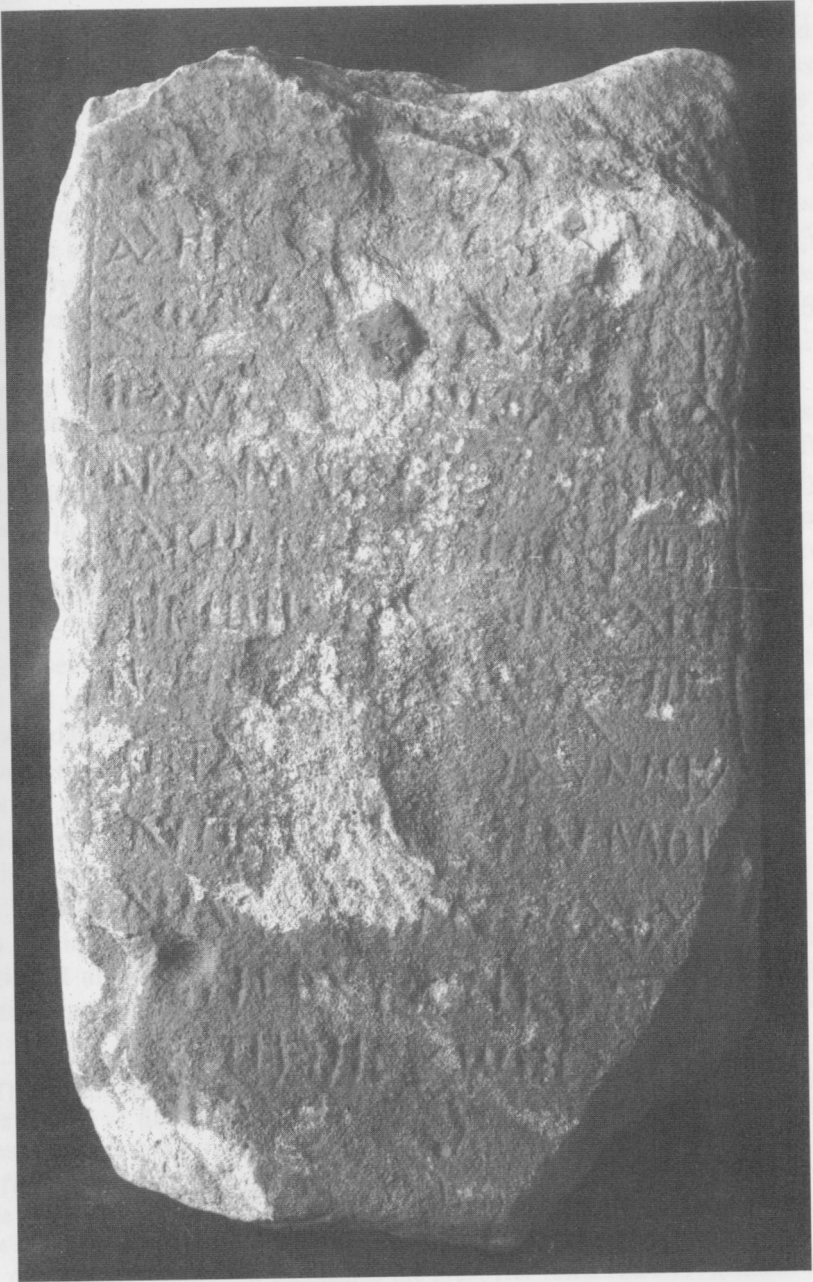


Plate I. Epitaph of an unknown person (Ioannes the Presbyter?)
(photo: courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The prayer in its Nubian version ⁸ runs as follows: ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός, ὁ τὸν θάνατον καταργήσας καὶ τὸν ἄδην καταπατήσας καὶ ζωὴν τῷ κόσμῳ χαρισάμενος, ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δέινου ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ, ἐν τόπῳ χλόης, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως, ἔνθα ἀπέδρα ὀδύνη καὶ λύπη καὶ στεναγμός· πᾶν ἁμάρτημα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθέν λόγῳ ἢ ἔργῳ ἢ κατὰ διάνοιαν ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος συνχώρησον, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ζήσεται καὶ οὐχ ἁμαρτήσῃ· σὺ γὰρ μόνος πάσης ἁμαρτίας ἐκτὸς ὑπάρχεις καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη σου δικαιοσύνη εἰς τῶν αἰῶνα, κύριε, καὶ ὁ λόγος σου ἡ ἀλήθεια· σὺ γὰρ εἶ ἡ ἀνάπαυσις καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δέινου καὶ σοὶ τὴν δόξαν ἀναπέμπομεν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι.⁹

The person who composed our inscription from Nuri introduced some changes in the prayer. First of all he shortened it considerably. He cut off the second part with the request for the remission of the sins and retained only the first one, i.e. the invocation to God and the request for the dead to be granted with various places of eternal life. He remodelled this, transferring the verb of request together with the name of the deceased from the place after the invocation to the very end of the prayer. Both the shortening and the compositional changes seem to have been done intentionally, with full understanding of the sense and with knowledge of Greek grammar, which is not always the case in Nubian adaptations of the Euchologion Mega type of prayer.¹⁰ The resulting composition is hardly a prayer of the Euchologion Mega type. It is rather a new quality, a unique composition prepared for this particular gravestone and only modelled on the prayer in question.

This composition can be dated only approximately. The original prayer of the Euchologion Mega type was composed probably in the 6th century in Syria. Its introduction to Nubia cannot be determined with any accuracy. As mentioned already in this paper the oldest Nubian epitaphs containing the prayer in question date from the second half of the 8th century.¹¹ The inscrip-

⁸ The Byzantine version differs from the Nubian one in two points: it has *διάβολον καταπατήσας* vs. *ἄδην καταπατήσας* and is deprived of the request for the soul of the deceased to be rested in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

⁹ This is a theoretical reconstruction of the text based on the data yielded by the whole group of inscriptions. Particular items present different variants of the prayer and it is difficult to accept any single one as a model.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., the epitaph of Stephanos the presbyter (died A.D. 797), found in Old Dongola (A. ΛΑΪΤΑΡ, *Aegyptus* 72, 1992, pp. 113-129).

¹¹ These are: epitaph of Kel, daughter of Osk[] (died 785) and the epitaph of Stephanos the presbyter (died 797) both from the Polish excavation in Old Dongola. The

tion from Nuri, where the a prayer is an adaptation of the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type, can hardly be earlier than this date. On the other hand, the external appearance of the stela and the lettering of the inscription do not give the impression of being chronologically late. As far as I know, a grid to make a frame for the inscription on the stela was a habit in Nubia only in the 8th-10th century. As for the Nubian majuscule it appears to us in its full form at the turn of the 10th century, but there is nothing to counter its existence a century or two earlier on. Additionally, one should note that the expression τὰ (δὲ) ἔτη τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ placed at the very end of an inscription, as is the case here, is characteristic of epitaphs dated to the last three centuries of the first millennium, particularly those coming from the area of Dongola.¹² All this inclines me to believe that our epitaph from Nuri dates from the second half of the 8th-10th century.

Notes to the reading should be discussed at this point.

- 1 Nubian epitaphs containing the prayer of Euchologion Mega type always start with the prayer. Thus, we should supplement at the beginning of our inscription from Nuri: [† ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός, ὁ τὸν θάνατον καταργήσας καὶ τὸν] ἄδην κ[αταπατήσας κτλ. This gives 50-60 letters missing before ἄδην depending on whether *nomina sacra* were used and καὶ was abbreviated or not. Since particular lines of the inscription contain ca 20 letters, one can suppose three lines of the text to have been lost but the disposition of the text in these three lines is impossible to ascertain.
- 1-2 The reading κ(αὶ)||ζωήν with κ(αὶ) abbreviated as in line 8 is also possible.
- 5-6 After ΦΩ|TEINΩ one can see a vertical stroke which makes one wonder whether it is an *epsilon*, which letter in this inscription is slightly rounded as a rule. If not, this could be a *ny* erroneously inserted in final position. For this phenomenon, which is very well attested in the language of Greek papyri of the Roman and Byzantine periods, see *Gignac*, pp. 111-114. In Nubian epitaphs with the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type the form ΦΩTEINΩΝ (with variants) appears in *T. B.* 8, 12, 14 and 16.

epitaph of Kel remains unpublished; for a preliminary discussion see S. JAKOBIELSKI, A. OSTRASZ, *Kush* 15, 1967/68, p. 133 (a); for the epitaph of Stephanos see A. ŁAJTAR, *Aegyptus* 72, 1992, pp. 113-129. The epitaph of one Markos discovered in Dendur in North Nubia, for which the date 765 has been suggested, comes most probably from 12th century; cf. A. ŁAJTAR, *Varia Nubica IV: Das älteste nubische Epitaph mit dem Gebet vom Typus Euchologion Mega?*, *ZPE* 113, 1996, pp. 101-108.

¹² Cf. A. ŁAJTAR, *Aegyptus* 72, 1992, p. 128.

- 8 Read *ἐνθα*; for interchange of voiceless and aspirated dentals see *Gignac*, p. 86; for Nubian attestations of this phenomenon see M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Di alcune caratteristiche epigrafi funerarie cristiane della Nubia* [in:] *Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere. Rend. Lett.* 97, 1963, p. 521. The spelling ENTA (for *ἐνθα*) appears in *T. B.* 8, 14 and 15.
- 9 The reading *στεναγμοί* seems to be indubitable. The prayer of the Euchologion Mega type has the singular *στεναγμός* in this place. It is difficult to decide whether this is a purposeful interchange or a mistake on one of the stages of text transmission. In the epitaph *T. B.* 1 (Old Dongola, date unknown) we encounter ΣΤΕΝΑΓΜΟΙΣ in this place.
- 11 Ἰούνην is not excluded but in this case the name would be written faultily (*omikron* instead *omega*). Near the end of the line, immediately before the break in the stone, one can see the left part of a letter that resembles a *pi*, but slightly bigger than the rest of letters. This could be the abbreviation Ϡ [= *πρ(εσβύτερον)* in view of the syntax] but the matter is far from sure.

2. EPITAPH OF IOANNES (PL. II)

Found on February 6th, 1917, in debris to the south of the church in Nuri; field no C 7474.

Upper part of a rectangular slab made of sandstone to judge by the photo. Broken diagonally, the two pieces fitting together. Edges chipped, small chips also on the surface. The surface bears a fine grid framing the inscription. The letters are deeply cut and clear, but not very neat. Letter forms, rather angular than round, appear to be early.¹³ In any case, the inscription is palaeographically earlier than the introduction of Nubian majuscule at the turn of the 10th century, supplanting other letter forms. *Nomina sacra* are used in the text according to the common rules, *καί* is abbreviated by crossing out diagonally the lower stroke of *kappa* and trema is always put above the initial *iota*. The Greek of the inscription is practically without mistakes; one notes only *ἐκειμήθη* instead of *ἐκοιμήθη* in line 2. On the other hand, a comparison of the introductory formula with similar epigraphical formulae from Nubia allows us to assume that the person who composed the inscription possessed some knowledge of Greek.

¹³ The lettering of this inscription may be compared to that of the Dongola epitaph of Petros, the eparch of Nobadia (died 798); cf. A. ŁAJTAR, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 5, 1991, p. 165, pl. 1.

After the photo, S. M. Burstein, "A Christian Greek Inscription from Nuri in the Sudan" [in:] id., *Graeco-Africana. Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia*, New Rochelle 1995, pp. 221-229, with photo on p. 224. Cf. D. Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, II. Nuri, Boston 1965, p. 272 (description) and pl. LXXI B (photo).

† † †

Ἰωάννης ὁ τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ
 δοῦλος ἐκειμήθη
 ἐν τῇ κελεύσει θε(ο)ῦ κ(υρίο)υ
 4 παντοκράτωρος ἐν
 μηνὶ Παχῶν κῆ. κα[ι]
 νῦν, θε(ε)ε ἀγαθέ, ἀ[νάπαν]-
 σου τῆν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ]
 8 ἐν κόλποις Ἀβρα[ὰμ κ(αὶ) Ἰ]-
 σαὰκ κ(αὶ) Ἰακώβ, εὐ[. . .]
 []

Translation: "Ioannes, the servant of Christ, fell asleep by the order of God the Lord, the omnipotent One, in the month Pachon (day) 28th. And now You, Good God, rest his soul in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob []".

The inscription consists of two parts. Part one, lines 1-5, states the fact of the death of one Ioannes and gives the date of this event; part two, from the end of line 5, is a prayer for the rest of the soul of the deceased man. According to the present state of our knowledge about Greek epitaphs from Nubia such a two-part composition was characteristic of early epitaphs, from the 11th century at the very latest.¹⁴ This fact together with palaeographical criteria (cf. *supra*) suggest a dating for this inscription towards the end of the 1st millennium (second half of 8th/10th century).

Part one expresses the opinion that Ioannes died by the order of God who manages everything and consequently has the right to call up a human being from this world. Similar ideas appear frequently on Nubian epitaphs, both in Greek and in Coptic, even in the introductory parts preceding the prayers. Sometimes they assume the form of long phrases with rhetorical figures, but are normally expressed with standard formulae θεοῦ θέλουτος τέλει τοῦ βίου

¹⁴ In fact, this is the composition of the majority of Nubian epitaphs, excluding epitaphs with the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type.



Plate II. Epitaph of Ioannes
(photo: courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

ἐχρήσατο, θειᾷ προνοίᾳ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα (ϠΙΤῆ ΤΕΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΝΤΑϠΜ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄ΜΟϠ Ν̄ΟΙ), νεύσει καὶ βουλήσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα (ϠΜΠΟΥΩΨ ΝΤΑϠΜ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄ΜΟϠ Ν̄ΟΙ) and νεύσει καὶ κελεύσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα (ϠΙΤῆ ΤΕΚΕΛΕΥΣΙϠ ΝΤΑϠΜ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄ΜΟϠ Ν̄ΟΙ) set always at the text's beginning.¹⁵ What we have in our inscription from Nuri closely resembles the last of these formulae but is composed more freely.

Until now the formula νεύσει καὶ κελεύσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα was encountered in Nubia only once, namely in the epitaph of Petros, the Eparch of Nobadia (died 798), recently discovered by the Polish Mission in Old Dongola.¹⁶ On the contrary, its Coptic counterpart ϠΙΤῆ ΤΕΚΕΛΕΥΣΙϠ Μ̄ΠΠΟΥΤΕ ΝΤΑϠΜ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄ΜΟϠ Ν̄ΟΙ is very common. It characterizes a group of epitaphs from Ghazali,¹⁷ a monastery in the closest vicinity of Nuri, and appears also in the epitaphs of Iesu, Bishop of Sai,¹⁸ as well as in the epitaph of priest Marianos from Faras.¹⁹ This disproportion between Greek and Coptic attestations of the formula "by the order of God died this and this" is most probably a case of arbitrary statistics. Ghazali, a large monastic complex closely connected with Egypt, produced mostly Coptic epitaphs, as did Nobadia with its capital in

¹⁵ On introductory formulae in Nubian epitaphs making reference to divine order or divine will as a cause of death see A. ŁAJTAR, "Terracotta funerary stele of the monk Ioannes from Old Dongola", *Nubica* III/2 (in press). Analogical formulas appear also, although not as often as in Nubia, in funerary inscriptions from other areas of the Christian world; the attestations from Corycos in Cilicia, Constantinople, Macedonia and Italy are collected by D. FEISSEL, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine du III^e au VI^e siècle* (= *BCH Supplement VIII*), Athènes-Paris 1983, commentary to no 135. One can add to these an epitaph from Saqqara in Lower Egypt, J. E. QUIBELL, *Excavations at Saqqara 1908-1909/1909-1910*, Cairo 1912, p. 91, no 292; *non vidi*, cit. after C. WIETHEGER, *Das Jeremias-Kloster zu Saqqara unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inschriften* (= *Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten*, 1), Altenberge 1991, p. 417, no 317 (βουλήσ(ει) δεσπότου θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη κτλ.) and a fourth century epitaph from Pisidian Antioch, W. M. RAMSAY, *Cl. Rev.* 33, 1919, p. 2 (θεοῦ προνοία καὶ ἱερῶν ἀγγελῶν συνουδία μεττοικήσαντα) εἰς [ο]ὐρανὸν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων κτλ.).

¹⁶ A. ŁAJTAR, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 5, 1991, p. 157-159.

¹⁷ R. LEPSIUS, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien* VI, pl. 103, nos 44, 47, 49 (these inscriptions are reprinted now in *KSB* I, nos 492, 493, 494 respectively); J. W. BARNES [in:] P. L. SHINNIE, H. N. CHITTICK, *Ghazali. A Monastery in the Northern Sudan* (= *Sudan Antiquities Service. Occasional Papers*, 5), Khartoum 1961, nos 1, 31, 39 (these two inscriptions are greatly supplemented), 43, 54.

¹⁸ *KSB* I 429.

¹⁹ S. JAKOBIELSKI, *A History of the Bishopric of Pachoras* (= *Faras* III), Warsaw 1972, pp. 125-127.

Faras; excavations in Old Dongola, where cultural and language patterns were in favor of Greek, may change this picture. In fact, the idea that a particular man's death is a realization of the plans of God — the creator of mankind — was apparently just as familiar in Greek as well as Coptic epitaphs from Nubia. Appropriate formulae were developed in much the same words in both languages to express this idea.

Both in the Dongola epitaph of Petros, the Eparch of Nobadia, beginning with *νεύσει καὶ κελεύσει τοῦ θεοῦ* and in the majority of Coptic epitaphs opening with *ΘΙΤῆ ΤΕΚΕΛΕΥΣΙΣ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ*, God is qualified as the one who created everything (*δημιουργήσας τὰ πάντα, ΠΑΘΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΟΣ ΜΠΤΕΡΡ*). *παντοκράτωρ* as a designation of God is paralleled only by the epitaph of one Solomon from Ghazali²⁰ among the epitaphs with the formula "by the order of God". God is otherwise frequently designated as *παντοκράτωρ* in Nubian epitaphs.²¹

The second part of our epitaph from Nuri, the prayer for the dead, displays a composition which is typical of the majority of Nubian funerary prayers on stone, including the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type. After an invocation to God, it lists places of eternal life with which God is requested to present the soul of the deceased man. Only the designation of one place and the very beginning of the second one has been preserved on the stone. The request for the soul to rest *ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ* immediately following the invocation is surely the most characteristic element of all Nubian funerary prayers. It remains in the distinguished position at the head of the list in other texts just like in this inscription. In the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type and some other prayers under its influence, it is followed by *ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ κτλ*, but three other designations of the place of eternal rest are also attested as the second item on the list: *ἐνθα ἀπέδρα λύπη* (so!),²² *ἐν παραδείσῳ τρυφῆς*²³ and *ἐν σκηναῖς τῶν δικαίων*.²⁴ Which of these possibilities should be chosen in our case, it is impossible to say, the more so as other designations beginning

²⁰ KSB I 493.

²¹ See, e.g., three epitaphs of bishops of Faras quoted below, notes 32, 33, 34.

²² T. B. 32.

²³ In an epitaph from Chandaq in the vicinity of Dongola, Monneret de Villard, p. 238; the reading improved by A. ŁAJTAR, ZPE 94, 1992, pp. 217-220. Analogical sequence of elements is to be found also in some epitaphs from Egypt and in Coptic funerary liturgy; the references are quoted in my article cited in this note.

²⁴ In three inscriptions from Ginari in Northern Nubia, C. M. FIRTH, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia. Report for 1908-1909*, vol. I, Cairo 1912, p. 47: Grave 397, p. 49: Grave 907 and p. 50: right column, first inscription from the top.

with ἐν οἴκῳ (e.g., ἐν τῇ λαμπρότητι τῶν ἁγίων, ἔνθα εὐφραινομένων ἐστὶν ἡ κατοικία ἐν σοι) are also not excluded.

Thought provoking is the designation ἀγαθός ascribed to God in the invocation at the beginning of the prayer.²⁵ This is the first time that it appears alone as a genuine epithet of God in Greek inscriptions from Nubia. Until now it has been attested only in combination with φιλόανθρωπος, in the formulaic expression ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος coming in the second part of the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type where the remission of sins is requested. No doubt under the influence of this very prayer it appears also, still in combination with φιλόανθρωπος, in two Greek epitaphs with other types of prayers²⁶ and possibly in some Coptic epitaphs as well.²⁷ ἀγαθός as a genuine epithet of God is on the contrary often in Coptic inscriptions from Nubia. The example quoted by Burstein²⁸ can be supplemented by several others, mainly from Northern Nubia.²⁹ The high frequency of the God's epithet ⲁⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ in Coptic

²⁵ It goes back to the New Testament where it refers both to God the Father and to Jesus Christ (see, however, the response of Jesus in Mt. 19.17: εἰς ἐστὶν ὁ ἀγαθὸς [namely God the Father] and still more clearly in Lk. 18.19: εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἰς ὁ θεός). In later Christian usage the designation ἀγαθός referred mostly to the first person of the Holy Trinity.

²⁶ Lefebvre 650 (T. B. 35): ἀγαθὲ φιλόανθρωπε διὰ τοὺς παμπληθ(εῖς) οἰκτειροῦσού σου τὴν ψυχὴν τῆς δούλης σου ... ἀνάπανσον κτλ. and Lef. 661 (T. B. 43): σύ, κ(ύρι)ε, ὁ θεός, ὁ μόνος ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος καὶ οἰκτοῖρμος (sic!) οἰκτοῖρσον (sic!) καὶ ἐλέησον τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῆς κτλ.

²⁷ G. S. MILEHEM, *Churches in Lower Nubia*, Philadelphia 1910, p. 20, pl. 7: an epitaph from Debeira in which God is qualified as ⲁⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ ⲁⲓⲱ ⲡⲙⲁⲓⲣⲱⲙⲉ; similarly in a badly damaged epitaph from Ghazali, LEPSIUS, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Aethiopien* VI, pl. 103, no 43 [ⲡⲁⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ ⲁⲓⲱ] ⲡⲙⲁⲓⲣⲱⲙⲉ; for the supplement is credited Junker, p. 121.

²⁸ Jakobielski, *op. cit.*, p. 121 (epitaph of Bishop Aron).

²⁹ KSB I 460 (from Arminna); T. MINA, *Inscriptions coptes et grecques de la Nubie*, Le Caire 1942, no 90 (from Sakinya); Monneret de Villard, p. 167 (from Tamit); Junker, p. 129 and 131 with note 5 (three epitaphs from Qasr Ibrim kept with the Institute of Egyptology of the University of Leipzig, referred to as Ibrim 682, 687 and 688). ⲁⲓⲁⲛⲟⲥ as epithet of God appears frequently in Coptic inscriptions from Egypt; cf. e.g. H. MUNIER, *Aegyptus* 11, 1930-31, pp. 445-446, no 105, p. 448 f., no 110, pp. 449-451, nos 112-113 (all examples from the monastery of St. Simeon in Aswan) as well as M. CRAMER, *Archäologische und epigraphische Klassifikation koptischer Denkmäler des Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York und des Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.*, Wiesbaden 1957, nos 49 (from Saqqara) and 50 (from Deir el Genadla near Asyut with references to other epitaphs from the area in question making use of this epithet).

inscriptions from Nubia might suggest that its appearance in our inscription from Nuri is due to Coptic influence, but the matter is hardly obvious.

- 1 'Ιωάννηο Burstein. *Sigma* at the end of the name was possibly corrected from *omikron*, but it seems to be clear.
- 2 Burstein prints ἐκοιμήθη (an overlooking?). This is what should be expected, but what is written on the stone is clearly ΕΚΕΙΜΗΘΗ. In later Greek, “οι” and “ει” were merely orthographical variants of what was pronounced as “i,” thus their frequent interchange in script. For this phenomenon see *Gignac*, pp. 267-273; for its attestations in Greek inscriptions from Nubia see Tibiletti Bruno, *op. cit.*, pp. 518-519.
- 5 Burstein prints μηνὶ Παχών κϰι and translates “in the month Pachon on the twenty-second”. Two vertical strokes after *kappa* most probably represent *eta*, thus: Pachon the twenty-eight. An alternative reading would be ΚΓ (23) and a separation point, but this reading seems less probable to me.

At the end of the line Burstein reads κϰι ωφ[υ] and tries to explain this as an abbreviation of the name 'Ιωάννης. But the appearance of a name, no matter whether of the deceased or of someone else, is hardly to be explained in this place. Here, after the day of the month of Ioannes' demise, we would expect the year of this event, given according to the indictional system or an era. However, the fragments of two letters preserved on the stone in the place in question cannot be recognized as belonging to any formula introducing the year in Nubian inscriptions. Besides, the lacuna at the end of this line seems to be too small for a year number together with its introductory formula. With regard to this, I should think that the year of Ioannes' death was not given at all and that the prayer for his soul had started already with the end of line 5. The reading καλί that I have suggested above is easily supportable on paleographical grounds. καὶ νῦν at the beginning of a sentence reflects speaking style; on the sentences beginning with καί in ancient Greek see S. Trenkner, *Le style καί dans le récit attique oral*, Bruxelles 1948 (*non vidi*).

- 8-9 'Αβραάμ 'Ι|σαὰκ 'Ιακώβ ἐν ... κϰι ωφ[υ] Burstein. The conjunction καί is indispensable between the names of the patriarchs and in the texts from Nubia it always appears in this position. In fact it is present on the stone in line 9 between the names of Isaac and Jacob in the abbreviated form κ(αί) and I supplement this form also in line 8 between the names of Abraham and Isaac. κϰι ωφ[υ] printed by Burstein before the lacuna in line 9 looks very much like a print mistake.

3. EPITAPH OF ELISABETH

Found in Gebel Barkal.³⁰

Rectangular slab apparently made of sandstone. Preserved completely except for small chips at the right hand edge and some holes in the surface, but not affecting the letters. The letters deeply cut and clear but not very neat. They are inscribed within a grid consisting of vertical grooves along the side edges and horizontal ones between particular lines of the text. The lettering is angular and resembles to some extent that of the epitaph of Ioannes discussed above. One should take note of the *nomen sacrum* ΘΩ in line 8. The Greek of the inscription is full of orthographical and morphological confusions (particular cases are discussed below). No doubt neither the person who composed the text nor the stonemason understood what the former wrote and the latter cut.

After the stone, G. A. Reisner, *Harvard African Studies* 1, 1917, pp. 197-198 pl. I (*non vidi*): transcription in majuscule with a notice that the inscription might be “in Old Nubian or in some language of the Bega group” (M. L. Saint Paul-Girard, *BIFAO* 20, 1922, pp. 111-112: recognized the inscription as Greek and made an attempt at the reading; *SEG* II 883; W. M. Calder, *Cl. Rev.* 40, 1926, p. 127: read lines 3-8; *SB* V 8758; *Monneret de Villard*, p. 257; H. Junker, “Die griechische Grabinschrift von Geber Barkal”, *ZNTW* 37, 1939, pp. 281-285: established the complete text of the inscription; *SB* V 8948).

Cf. J. and L. Robert, *Bull. épigr.* 1940, 206 (review of Junker’s article); *Kubińska*, pp. 28-29 (on the formula νεύσει καὶ βουλήσει); S. M. Burstein, “A Christian Greek Inscription from Nuri in the Sudan” [in:] *id.*, *Graeco-Africana. Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia*, New Rochelle 1995, p. 223 (photo).

† Νεύσει καὶ
 {βι}βουλή τῆ
 παντιτικ-
 4 τωρος κόσ-
 μον τὸν ᾗ-
 κοσ(μο)ν κοσ-
 μηισαν-

³⁰ I did not have access to the *editio princeps* of the stela by G. A. REISNER in *Harvard African Studies* 1, 1917, pp. 197-198, thus I am not aware of the circumstances of the discovery of this stone.

8 τι θ(ε)ῶ ἐκη-
 μήθη μηνὶ
 Χιὰχ Ἐλισαβέτ·
 ἀνάπαυσον

Translation: “By the inclination and will of God the creator of everything who has arranged disorder into order Elisabeth died in the month of Choiak. (God), rest (her)”

Similarly as the epitaph of Ioannes discussed above, also the present epitaph of Elisabeth is composed of two parts: 1) the introductory formula stating the fact of Elisabeth’s death and giving its date; 2) the prayer for the soul of the deceased woman. However, in this case the prayer has been maximally reduced to the sole request ἀνάπαυσον. This is surely the shortest prayer in Nubian epitaphs.³¹

With respect to the form and content of the introductory part, our epitaph of Elisabeth represents the group discussed above in connection with the epitaph of Ioannes. It is built up with help of the formula νεύσει καὶ βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα supplemented by the description of the creative work of God. In this shape the formula in question appear only here but the very close νεύσει καὶ βουλήσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκοιμήθη ὁ δεῖνα is to be found in three epitaphs of bishops of Faras: Ignatios (died 802),³² Kollouthos (died 923)³³ and Stephanos (died 926).³⁴ βουλή instead of βουλήσει goes back most probably to New Testament, *Act. Apost.* 13.36 where of David’s death it is said τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλή ἐκοιμήθη. The expression κόσμον τὸν ἄκοσμον κοσμήσας is paralleled by κοσμοῦσα τὸν ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀκοσμίαν in Dionysius Araeopagita, *De divinis nominibus* 8. 9 (PG III 897B) (with reference to God’s power) and τὸ ἄκοσμον κοσμεῖται in the same author, *De ecclesia hierarchia* 2.3.8 (PG III 404C) (with reference to baptism).

³¹ Compare other very short prayers in Nubian epitaphs: Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 48, Grave 437 (ὁ θεός, ἀναπαύσει αὐτήν, ἀμήν) and p. 48, Grave 651 (ἀναπαύσει αὐτόν, ὁ θεός, ἀμήν)(both inscriptions come from Ginari) as well as *Lefebvre* 655 (ἀνάπαυσον αὐτήν ὁ θεός).

³² *Kubińska*, pp. 26-27, no 4: νεύσει (καὶ) βουλήσει θεοῦ παντοκράτορος τοῦ τὴν ἔξουσίαν ἔχοντος ζωῆς (καὶ) θανάτου ἀπεδήμησεν κτλ.

³³ *Kubińska*, pp. 32-33, no 5: νεύσει καὶ βουλήσει τοῦ πανσόφου θεοῦ παντοκράτορος τέλει τοῦ βίου κτλ.

³⁴ *Kubińska*, pp. 34-35, no 6: νεύσει καὶ βουλεύσει τοῦ παντοκράτορος θεοῦ τέλει τοῦ βίου κτλ.

- 1-2 Νευσι ? καὶ | Βιβούλη Saint-Paul Girard, who understood this as two female names in the dative; this reading is repeated in *SEG* II 883, *SB* V 8758, by W. M. Calder and U. Monneret de Villard.

ΝΕΥΣΙ (for νεύσει) at the beginning of l. 1 is due to iotacism. As for ΒΙ-ΒΟΥΛΗ in l. 2 Junker, *ZNTW* 37, 1939, p. 285 suggested that it could have been either a stonecutter's mistake or a contamination of βουλή — “will” with βεβουλευμένα — “plan”, “decision”. The case is difficult to judge.

- 3-4 Γιάν[υη] τι[α]τάκ[τορος] (for δι[α]τάκ[τορος]) Saint-Paul Girard and after him *SEG* II 883, *SB* V 8758, U. Monneret de Villard.

Read παντοτέκτορος. The spelling ΠΑΝΤΙΤΙΚΤΩΡΟΣ could have arisen through the confusion of the stems τεκτ- and τικτ- and then the attraction of τικτ- facilitated by the fact, that both neighbouring syllables have the same consonant “τ”. Before παντοτέκτορος one would expect the article τοῦ. ΤΗ at the end of line 2 is most probably not a mistake for τοῦ but the feminine article in the dative τῇ referring to νεύσει καὶ βουλή.

As Junker, *ZNTW* 37, 1939, p. 285 pointed out, the term παντοτέκτωρ seems not to have been attested in our sources, but in Manasses, *Compendium Chronicum* (Bonn), line 50, the very similar παντοτέκτων appears

- 5 τ[οῦ]τ[ο]ν Saint-Paul Girard, *SEG* II 883, *SB* V 8758 and U. Monneret de Villard.

- 6-8 νο(σ)|μίσαν|τι, θῶ Saint-Paul Girard who considers νομίσαντι to be a mistake for νομισάση (false gender, masculine instead of feminine) and sees in θῶ the acclamation ἐν θεῶ; after him *SEG* II 883, *SB* V 8758 and U. Monneret de Villard.

Read κοσμήσαντος θεοῦ. The dative instead of the genitive is difficult to explain in this place. It is maybe due to the interchange of ου and ω(ι) in final position, a phenomenon frequently attested in later Greek (see *Gignac*, pp. 208-209) and then the attraction of θεῶ exerted over the participle referring to it? Interestingly enough, a similar mistake appears at the beginning of the Dongola epitaph of Petros, the Eparch of Nobadia, frequently referred to in this paper:³⁵ νεύσει καὶ κελεύσει τῶ τὰ πάντα δημιουργήσας θ(ε)ῶ. The spelling ΗΙ in ΚΟΣΜΗΣΑΝΤΙ is due to iotacism.

- 8-9 Read ἐκοιμήθη. For interchange of “οι” and “η” which in later Greek were only orthographic variants of “ι” see *Gignac*, pp. 265-266.

- 10 Junker suggested the reading Χιὰχ (ε') Ἐλισαβέτ (with haplography of *ep-silon*). This is possible, but by no means sure.

Read Ἐλισαβέθ; for interchange of voiceless and aspirated dentals see commentary to the inscription no 1, line 8. Apart from this inscription the name

³⁵ A. ΛΑΪΤΑΡ, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 5, 1991, pp. 157-159.

Elisabeth has been encountered in Nubia also in an epitaph now in the Museo Egizio in Torino,³⁶ an epitaph in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Aegyptische Abteilung³⁷ (both inscriptions are surely from Northern Nubia) and an epitaph from Ginari now in the Archaeological Museum in Cracow.³⁸ *Junker*, pp. 120-121 restores it also in a very damaged epitaph from Ghazali;³⁹ owing to its size, the restoration is open to discussion.

Several conclusions emerge from the above presentation of the three epitaphs from Nuri and Gebel Barkal. They may be formulated only after taking into account two factors: 1) the chronology of the inscriptions which has been established on the ground of palaeographical and typological criteria to the 8th-10th century, and 2) the particular geographical position of the Gebel Barkal area in the heart of the Christian kingdom of Makuria, not far from its capital of Dongola on one side and in the immediate vicinity of the large monastic centre in Ghazali on the other.

It may not be a coincidence that all three epitaphs found by Reisner in the Gebel Barkal area are in Greek. Most of the written sources that are known from Old Dongola so far are in Greek (at least for the period in question); Coptic inscriptions are exceptional and are found only in monastic context.⁴⁰ The situation to be observed in Ghazali is quite different with the majority of the known epitaphs being written in Coptic.⁴¹ The combined data from Dongola and Ghazali indicates that in the early history of Christian Makuria Greek was used as the medium of written communication, apparently in all walks of life with the sole exception of monasticism, where both languages, Greek and Coptic, existed side by side. Our three epitaphs from Nuri and Gebel Barkal,

³⁶ *Lefebvre* 660.

³⁷ Inv. 13724. Published by R. KOERNER, "Eine griechisch-christliche Grabinschrift aus Nubien", *AfP* 18, 1966, pp. 44-45.

³⁸ Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 47: Grave 302. Rediscovered in the Archaeological Museum in Cracow and republished by A. ŁAJTAR, *Muzeum Archeologiczne w Krakowie, Materiały Archeologiczne XXVII*, 2, 1994, pp. 56-58.

³⁹ *Lefebvre* 607.

⁴⁰ Two Coptic epitaphs recently found by the Polish Mission in the monastery on kom H against some twenty examples in Greek from both Polish excavations and earlier finds.

⁴¹ It is often difficult to define the language of small fragments of grave stelae from Ghazali published by Barns in the book of Shinnie and Chittick (*cf.* note 17). The estimated proportion between Greek and Coptic epitaphs there is 1 : 2 in favour of the Coptic.

obviously commemorating people not connected with a monastery, would follow this rule in spite of their being written in the neighbourhood of Ghazali.

The quality of the Greek used in the inscriptions, even if the last epitaph comes from an illiterate hand, can be considered as quite good, when judged in reference to Nubian realities. This is surely due to the early date of the inscriptions — in the 8th-10th centuries Nubian Greek was not so corrupt yet — but it seems also to be a characteristic of Makuria. In view of the prevailing literacy in Greek, the language used there was of better quality than in Northern Nubia (Nobadia) where Greek shared the position of a medium of written communication with Coptic (and later with Old Nubian). One notes that inscription no 3, though much corrupted, contains a *hapax legomenon* παντοτέκτωρ. Rare words, literary quotations and transpositions are very common in epitaphs from Old Dongola, particularly where the redactors were not restricted by existing formulae and prayers. The term παντοτέκτωρ in the epitaph of Elisabeth is yet more proof of the learned character of the funerary epigraphy in Old Dongola.

The epitaph with the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type deserves special attention, providing that the date I have suggested on palaeographical grounds (8th-10th cent.) is correct. As stated above, the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type appears in Nubia for the first time in epitaphs from Old Dongola dated to the second half of the 8th century. In northern Nubia (Nobadia), it is attested only from the beginning of the 11th century onwards as is also the case of the southernmost of three Nubian kingdoms — Alodia. The chronology of the appearance of the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type in Nubian epitaphs points to the leading role played by Dongola in the adoption and propagation of the prayer in question in the whole Nubian church. Now, the prayer contained in our epitaph from Nuri is not a servile repetition of the prayer of the Euchologion Mega type, but its creative transformation. This testifies to an intimate knowledge the prayer current in Old Dongola by the end of the first millennium and confirms the thesis, formulated above, about Dongola's priority in the propagation of the said prayer.

[Warszawa]

Adam Łajtar

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