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The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 32, 175-194

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2002

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Jacques van der Vliet

### GLEANINGS FROM CHRISTIAN NORTHERN NUBIA

WHEN DIOCLETIAN WITHDREW the Roman troops from the Dodekaschoinos in 298, a particularly turbulent episode in the history of the northernmost part of Nubia began. To the modern historian, working with a limited set of disparate data, it may seem as if this period came to an end only around 700, with the reign of the Makurian king Merkourios who welded the “corridor to Africa” into a powerful political unit. Yet, in the course of the 400 intervening years, the Dodekaschoinos had become part of an independent Christian kingdom, Nobadia, the political capital of which may have been situated initially at Primis, the present day Qasr Ibrîm, and then at Pakhoras (Faras).<sup>1</sup> In these centuries of transition, the ancient urban centres of the area, like Taphis (Tafa) and Talmis (Kalabsha), appear to have retained their importance. The following notes discuss some Greek and Coptic inscriptions that were part of this historical and geographical setting. Although primarily concerned with textual matters, they may also shed light on the culture and institutions of the early Christian Dodekaschoinos.

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<sup>1</sup> For a general picture of the developments see, most recently, D. A. WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile*, London 2002, p. 14 ff. On the process of christianisation in the area, a *Habilitationschrift* by S. G. RICHTER (Münster) and a doctoral dissertation by J. H. F. DIJKSTRA (Groningen) are forthcoming.

## 1. AROUMI FROM TAPHIS, ΔΡΑ (TIBILETTI BRUNO NO. 49)

The extensive Christian necropolis of Tafa-Ginari, which was excavated in the early 20th century by C.M. Firth, yielded an important find of Greek stelae, carelessly edited by their excavator.<sup>2</sup> The find was dispersed afterwards and only a few of the stelae could be traced and re-edited in recent years.<sup>3</sup> One of these was made for a woman called Aroumi whose apparently non-Greek name receives the addition ΔΡΑ for which, to the best of my knowledge, no satisfactory explanation has ever been provided.<sup>4</sup> Maria Grazia Tibiletti Bruno in the apparatus of her re-edition of the epitaph simply states: “ΔΡΑ = ἐκοιμήθη”, without further explanation. This over-simple solution was rightly questioned by Adam Łajtar in 1993 who, nonetheless, conceded that a verb is expected here.<sup>5</sup> This, however, is only partly correct. As will be seen in more detail below, Nubian stelae of the ἔνθα κατάκειται-type, to which category Aroumi’s epitaph belongs, normally use one of two verbal forms for describing the event of death, viz. ἐτελεύθη or ἐκοιμήθη, or no verb at all.<sup>6</sup> There is no reason, therefore, to consider ΔΡΑ as an unknown verb for “to die”, since no such verb is really demanded in this position.

Another possibility would be to interpret ΔΡΑ either as part of the name or as a surname. The former solution seems to have been adopted by Firth, who transcribed the name of the owner of the stela as ΔΡΟΥΜΠΔΡΑ. However, as Tibiletti Bruno’s more reliable re-edition shows, the element

<sup>2</sup> C. M. FIRTH, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia: Report for 1908-1909*, Cairo 1912, p. 48-50, pl. 2 and 51. For a brief general assessment, U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, “Note Nubiane, 2: La chiesa melkita di Nubia”, *Aegyptus* 12 (1932), pp. 309-316; cf. H. JUNKER, “Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens”, *ZAS* 60 (1925), pp. 111-148, passim; U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *La Nubia medioevale*, vol. I, Cairo 1935, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Listed by A. ŁAJTAR, “Three Greek Christian epitaphs from Lower Nubia in the collection of the Archaeological Museum in Cracow”, *Materiały Archeologiczne* 27.2 (1994), pp. 60-61.

<sup>4</sup> Text: FIRTH, *Report* (cit. n. 2), p. 49 (tomb no. 807); M G TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni Nubiane*, Pavia 1964, no. 49: re-edition after a photo and a copy by M. VANDONI (as Elephantine Museum, no. 1038); cf. A. ŁAJTAR, “On the provenance of the four Christian inscriptions: SB X 10515-10516, M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni Nubiane* 49, 56”, *ZPE* 95 (1993), pp. 243-44; IDEM, “Three Greek Christian epitaphs” (cit. n. 3), p. 61, no. 6.

<sup>5</sup> “Provenance” (cit. n. 4), p. 244.

<sup>6</sup> See JUNKER, “Grabsteine” (cit. n. 2), pp. 126-127, under 1, and the discussion below, under no. 2.

ⲁⲣⲁ is singled out as a separate element by a long superlinear stroke, which additionally marks it as an abbreviation or a non-Greek element.<sup>7</sup> Rather than surnames or filiations, stelae of the present type, either from Tafa-Ginari or from adjacent districts, tend to join titles or function-names to the name of the deceased, either ecclesiastical ones like “deacon”,<sup>8</sup> or civil ones like *meizoteros*.<sup>9</sup> When we compare the textual structure of the numerous epitaphs of the *ἐνθα κατάκειται*-type from Northern Nubia, it appears that the enigmatic ⲁⲣⲁ would exactly fit the position of such a title or function-name, following the name of the deceased and preceding the date of demise.

As a late antique title, the word ⲁⲣⲁ is actually well known. In the area of Thebes, it occurs in a series of 6th–8th century Coptic documents.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, its precise meaning is still obscure.<sup>11</sup> Its use is limited to the domain of local law or finance where, apparently, it functions as a traditional element, not obviously corresponding to any rank within the familiar hierarchies of the Byzantine Church or state administration. Its etymology, on the other hand, is hardly doubtful: the word is derived from the Ancient Egyptian title *iry-3*, originally designating a “doorkeeper”, later certain purely administrative functions as well.<sup>12</sup> If F. Ll. Griffith, the founder of Meroitic studies, was right in observing that the Egyptian title may be recognized as *are* in the titulature of late Meroitic functionaries from Karanog and Faras, this would attest its use in Lower Nubia in a period immediately predating the christianisation of the country.<sup>13</sup> The stela of Aroumi suggests that the title, in its form ⲁⲣⲁ, survived in both Southern Egypt and Northern Nubia. In fact, this would not be the only example of a tradi-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ŁAJTAR, “Provenance” (cit. n. 4), p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. FIRTH, *Report* (cit. n. 2), p. 45, tomb no. 37; cf. A. ŁAJTAR, “A Greek Christian inscription from Ginari, Lower Nubia”, *ZPE* 91 (1992), pp. 147–49 (Tafa-Ginari); TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* (cit. n. 4), no. 46 (Kalabsha?).

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion, under no. 3, below.

<sup>10</sup> For attestations and a brief discussion, see W. E. CRUM, *A Coptic Dictionary*, Oxford 1939, p. 14.b, s.v.

<sup>11</sup> As CRUM, loc.cit., despondently remarks: “context never instructive”.

<sup>12</sup> See, in particular, J. OSING, *Die Nominalbildung des Ägyptischen*, Mainz 1976, p. 396–97, who also discusses the semantic development of the title.

<sup>13</sup> See F. LL. GRIFFITH, “Meroitic funerary inscriptions from Faras, Nubia”, [in:] *Recueil d'études égyptologiques dédiées à Jean-François Champollion*, Paris 1922, p. 580–581.

tional Egyptian title remaining in use on both sides of the political frontier. The survival, in the same regions and in the same language domains (Coptic and Greek), of the more familiar religious title οὐνης, οὐεπ (Eg. *w'b*), designating a (pagan or Christian) priest, can be cited as a striking parallel.<sup>14</sup> That, among the women of Christian Nubia, Aroumi was not exceptional in playing a role in finance or administration, is otherwise well known.<sup>15</sup>

2. MANNA FROM KALABSHA  
(SB III 6089; TIBILETTI BRUNO, NO. 47)

The Leyden Museum of Antiquities houses, under inv. no. AM 22, a small Greek stela from Northern Nubia.<sup>16</sup> In spite of a rich bibliography, the name of the owner, a woman, is still a source of confusion. It is traditionally read as Manma, a reading accepted by G. Lefebvre in his authoritative 1907 *Recueil*, and adopted subsequently by Preisigke, in his *Namenbuch*. Lefebvre's text, including the reading Manma, was reproduced in SB V 8737. Already in 1926, however, F. Bilabel had published in SB III, under no. 6089, an impeccable edition of the stela after the reproduction in P. A. A. Boeser's monumental catalogue of the museum's Egyptian antiquities, identifying the owner's name correctly as Manna. It is therefore quite astonishing that, as late as 1964, Mrs. Tibiletti Bruno, who was aware of both SB entries, preferred to stick to Lefebvre's less accurate text. Foraboschi's *Onomasticon alterum* adds to the confusion by referring twice to the Leyden

<sup>14</sup> See CRUM, *Copt. Dict.*, p. 488.a, s.v. (Coptic, Egypt); *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum* III, no. 313, l. 16 (Greek, Nubia). For similar phenomena, see H. SATZINGER, "Sudan-Ägyptisch und Elephantine-Koptisch", *BSEGenève* 4 (1980), pp. 83-87; "Die Personennamen von Blemmyern in koptischen und griechischen Texten: Orthographische und phonetische Analyse", in E. EBERMANN & al. (ed.), *Komparative Afrikanistik* (Fs. H. G. Mukarovsky) (= *Beiträge zur Afrikanistik* 44), Vienna 1992, pp. 313-324.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. A. ŁAJTAR & J. VAN DER VLIET, "Rich Ladies of Meinarti and Their Churches", *JJP* 28 (1998), pp. 35-53.

<sup>16</sup> Text: L. J. F. JANSSEN, *Musei Lugduno-Batavi inscriptiones graecae et latinae*, Leyden 1842, p. 63, no. 6 (*editio princeps*); CIG IV, no. 9131 (A. KIRCHHOFF); E. REVILLOUT, "Les prières pour les morts dans l'épigraphie égyptienne", *RE* 4 (1885), pp. 23-24, no. 29; G. LEFEBVRE, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte*, Cairo 1907, no. 652; SB III 6089 (F. BILABEL); SB V 8737; TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* (cit. n. 4), no. 47. Photo: P. A. A. BOESER, *Beschrijving van de Egyptische verzameling in het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*, vol. 7: *De monumenten van den Saïtischen, Grieks-Romeinschen, en Koptischen tijd*, The Hague 1915, no. 32, pl. XVII. Cf. JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 114, under 3.

stela, once under Manma and again under Manna. The present note aims, first, at rehabilitating Bilabel's 1926 readings and, then, at briefly discussing date and provenance of the stela.

The stela is a plain, well dressed sandstone tablet,<sup>17</sup> 19.5 x 14 cm., inscribed with ten lines of Greek text. Irregular, slightly sloping uncials, crudely incised; broken-barred symmetrical *A*; the letters were filled with red paint. Simple crosses mark the beginning and the end of the text; the article in l. 2 has a dot over the η; the ι of the number in l. 4 and the names in l. 9-10 bears a diaeresis; καὶ in l. 9 and 10 is represented by a ς-like ampersand; the abbreviations of l. 3 and 5 are marked by an oblique stroke through the lower right leg of λ and κ.<sup>18</sup> For ease of reference, I give below my own complete text of the epitaph, which does not differ significantly from Bilabel's in *SB* III 6089; the apparatus notes the variant readings of the standard corpora of Lefebvre and Tibiletti Bruno only.

✠ Ἐνθα κατάκοι-  
 τε ἡ μακαρία  
 Μάννα · ἐτελ(εώθη)  
 4 μ'ἡ'(νὶ) Χοίαχ ἰ,  
 ἰνδ(ι)κ(τίωνος) ζ · ἀνά-  
 παυσον τὴν  
 ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ  
 8 [ε]ἰς κώλπησ' Ἀ-  
 [β]ραὰμ (καὶ) Ἰσα-  
 [ἀ]κ (καὶ) Ἰακώβ. ✠

1-2. κατάκοιτε: read κατάκειται | 3. Μάννα: Lefebvre, Tibiletti Bruno *Μανμα*; ἐτελ(εώθη): Lefebvre ἐτελ(εύτησεν) | 4. Χοίαχ: Tibiletti Bruno *Χοίακ* | 7. αὐτοῦ: read αὐτῆς | 8. [ε]ἰς κώλπησ: Lefebvre, Tibiletti Bruno *ἰς κ.*; read εἰς κόλπους (οσ, ἐν κόλποις).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Not marble, as stated by BOESER, *Beschrijving*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> For all details, see the excellent phototype plate in BOESER, *Beschrijving* (cit. n. 16). I thank Dr. M. J. RAVEN, curator of the Egyptian Department, for kindly allowing me to inspect the original.

<sup>19</sup> Exactly the same orthography in TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* (cit. n. 4), no. 44, a similar woman's stela with a certain provenance from Talmis-Kalabsha (see below).

The text comprises an epitaph of the type *ἐνθα κατάκειται ὁ μακάριος N.N.*, ending with a prayer which asks for rest for the deceased “in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”. The name of the owner is undoubtedly to be read Manna, not Manma.<sup>20</sup> The second *η* of the name does have a small rightward stroke at the upper right hand leg, but similar lapicide’s uncertainties can be observed in the preceding *η* and in those of l. 6; the letter is clearly distinct from the *μ* as it is written throughout the text. The ghost name Manma should be deleted from the *Namenbuch* and its successors.

Both Lefebvre and Tibiletti Bruno give “Nubia?” as the stela’s provenance. It is possible, however, to be more positive. The monument of Manna belongs to a large group of Christian funerary stelae, characterized by a similar opening formula: *ἐνθα κατάκειται*, “here lies ...”, introducing the name of the deceased. This epigraphic formula can be found, with many variants, all over the Roman and Byzantine world.<sup>21</sup> In Egypt proper, it never became very popular, and examples are few and far between.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, it can frequently be found in Northern Nubia where it always assumes the precise form which it has in the present stela, i.e. with ensuing *ὁ μακάριος/ἡ μακαρία N.N.* Indeed, Adam Łajtar’s claim that this particular form of the formula was exclusively characteristic of Northern Nubia (Nobadia) may well be justified.<sup>23</sup>

In his classic study of Nubian funerary epigraphy, Junker had observed that stelae of the type *ἐνθα κατάκειται ὁ μακάριος N.N.* may use, following this opening phrase, one of two verbs describing the event of death, either *ἐτελεώθη* (as in Manna’s epitaph) or *έκοιμήθη*, or no verb at all (as in

<sup>20</sup> For the not infrequent name Manna, see F. PREISIGKE, *Namenbuch*, Heidelberg 1922, col. 204; G. HEUSER, *Die Personennamen der Kopten*, Leipzig 1929, p. 98; D. FORABOSCHI, *Onomasticon alterum papyrologicum*, Milano 1967, pp. 186-87, s.v. (examples from 6th-7th cent.).

<sup>21</sup> Thus C. M. KAUFMANN, *Handbuch der altchristlichen Epigraphik*, Freiburg 1917, pp. 118-119, quotes the Greek epitaph of a Syrian from Trier!

<sup>22</sup> Thus already JUNKER, “Grabsteine” (cit. n. 2), p. 139; I am unable to add any Greek examples from Egypt to the three mentioned by him (LEFEBVRE, *Recueil* [cit. n. 16], nos. 65, 222, 423). Already REVILLOUT, “Prières” (cit. n. 16), p. 26-27, had referred to Coptic parallels (a small group of Sahidic epitaphs from the region of Abydos, 10th cent.; *SB Kopt.* I, nos. 496, 745, 746); although these open with the same phrase, they are generally much different and probably also much later than the Greek inscriptions.

<sup>23</sup> ŁAJTAR, “Three Greek Christian epitaphs” (cit. n. 3), p. 58.

the stela of Aroumi, discussed above), or, exceptionally, the full formula *τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο*.<sup>24</sup> Junker also pointed out that the stelae of this type with *ἐκοιμήθη* (or, with the formula *τέλει τοῦ βίου*) originated, without exception, from the cemetery of Tafa-Ginari (for which see above, under no. 1). On the other hand, the same cemetery has not produced any stela with the dying-expression *ἐτελεώθη* among its 37 epitaphs of the *ἔνθα κατάκειται*-type. Tafa is therefore not a likely provenance for the Leyden monument of Manna.

The literature mentions various provenances for stelae of the *ἔνθα κατάκειται*-type which either use the verb *ἐτελεώθη* or lack a verb for dying altogether, but are also unconnected with Firth's excavations in Tafa-Ginari. Several are assigned to Kalabsha, whereas individual pieces are said to have come from Dakka, Maharraqa and Qasr Ibrîm. That is a rather large region, covering most of the ancient Dodekaschoinos plus a site far to the south of it. Upon further consideration, however, most of these provenances are demonstrably spurious: that of the (lost) stone purportedly from Qasr Ibrîm has been questioned convincingly by Richter in his recent analysis of the Leipzig collection of monuments from that site;<sup>25</sup> the Maharraqa connection, claimed for a stone acquired in 1838 by Herzog (Duke Maximilian in Bayern and now in Schloss Banz, is definitely based upon insufficient evidence;<sup>26</sup> finally, the provenance of a third stela, now in Athens, was given as Dakka with a question mark by G. Lefebvre, *Recueil* (cit. n. 16), under no. 629, but his earlier edition of the stone specifies that it was bought in Luxor.<sup>27</sup> This leaves Kalabsha as the only reliable provenance,

<sup>24</sup> "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 126-127, under 1. For an exception, unknown to Junker and not affecting our further argument, see TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* (cit. n. 4), no. 59.

<sup>25</sup> T. S. RICHTER, "Die neun Stelen Ägyptisches Museum der Universität Leipzig Inv.-Nr. 680-688 mit der Herkunftangabe Qasr Ibrîm" [in:] S. EMMEL & al. (ed.), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses*, Wiesbaden 1999, vol. 2, pp. 296-297, Inv.-No. 680; not in TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* (cit. n. 4), but see MONNERET DE VILLARD, *La Nubia medioevale* (cit. n. 2), vol. I, p. 115; it is cited again below.

<sup>26</sup> See the editio princeps by W. HUSS, "Eine griechische Grabinschrift aus Nubien in Schloss Banz", *Berichte Historischer Verein Bamberg* 127 (1991), pp. 7-12 (cf. *SEG* XLI, no. 1688); the Duke's summary report of his stay in Maharraqa does not warrant, in my opinion, Huss' conclusions; according to D. WILDUNG, quoted *ibid.*, p. 7, the Duke's acquisitions originated from Karnak, Luxor, Debod, Kalabsha, Dakka and Abu Simbel.

<sup>27</sup> G. LEFEBVRE, "Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte", *BCH* 26 (1902), pp. 454-455, no. 17.

represented by four pieces in all: a group of three published in 1821 by Thomas Young (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, nos. 48, 54, 55) and an isolated one first notified by Arthur Weigall in 1908 (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, no. 44).<sup>28</sup> The former stelae were acquired in or shortly before 1818 by George Annesley, 2nd Earl of Mountnorris, from Henry Salt, the famous collector, and there is no reason whatever to doubt the trustworthiness of the information provided by Young in his *editio princeps*.<sup>29</sup> The fourth stela was found, by Weigall himself or under his supervision, south of the famous temple of Kalabsha, though apparently not *in situ*.<sup>30</sup> All four use ἐτελεύθη as the verb for "to die".

The name of Henry Salt (1780-1827),<sup>31</sup> the source of the three pieces acquired by the Earl of Mountnorris and published by Young, is associated with some further stelae bearing the formula ἐνθα κατάκειται-plus-ἐτελεύθη. In particular, two specimens presently in the Louvre (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, nos. 51 and 52) are known to have been acquired from Salt, apparently in 1826.<sup>32</sup> For these Louvre pieces, which closely resemble each

<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the provenance of the British Museum stela of ἀκκεῖνδαρπε (no. EA 602; TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* [cit. n. 4], no. 53), traditionally given as Kalabsha, although quite plausible in itself, is not based upon reliable information. See M. L. BIERBRIER, "Provenances gained and lost" [in:] *The Unbroken Reed (Studies A. F. Shore)*, London 1994, p. 66. The review of epigraphic material from Kalabsha, by Curto, in S. CURTO & al., *Kalabsha*, Rome 1965, pp. 81-91, there especially p. 85 and 89-91, urgently needs revision and completion.

<sup>29</sup> Th. YOUNG, "Observations on a fragment of a very ancient Greek manuscript on papyrus, together with some sepulchral inscriptions from Nubia, lately received by the Earl of Mountnorris", *Archaeologia* 19 (1821), pp. 156-160, with pl. IX-X; the three stelae in question are nos. III, IV and V in Young's publication (LEFEBVRE, *Recueil* [cit. n. 16], nos. 624-25; SB V 8720-8722). Apparently, they were not among the monuments donated to the British Museum by A. Lyttelton Annesley, heir to the Earl of Mountnorris, in 1854 and must have been dispersed with the rest of his collection, two years earlier, see BIERBRIER, "Provenances" (cit. n. 28), p. 66; on the collectors in question, W. R. DAWSON & al., *Who was who in Egyptology*, London 1995 (3ed.), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> See A. E. P. WEIGALL, "Upper Egyptian notes", *ASAE* 9 (1908), p. 106, no. 2; Weigall was at the time Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt. On the inscription, see further: G. LEFEBVRE, "Égypte chrétienne", *ASAE* 10 (1910), p. 65, no. 818; SB I 1600; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *La Nubia medioevale* (cit. n. 2), vol. I, p. 41, n. 3; CURTO, *Kalabsha*, (cit. n. 28), p. 85, no. 38.

<sup>31</sup> See D. MANLEY & P. RÉE, *Henry Salt: Artist, Traveller, Diplomat, Egyptologist*, London 2001.

<sup>32</sup> See now É. BERNAND, *Inscriptions grecques d'Égypte et de Nubie au Musée du Louvre*, Paris 1992, nos. 111 and 113. Perhaps, a third piece, BERNAND's no. 128 (LEFEBVRE, *Recueil* [cit. n.

other, no provenance is known, but their identical formulary and their common origin with Salt are strongly suggestive of a link with the Mount-norris pieces from Kalabsha. In fact, already in 1925, Junker had claimed for an even greater group of stelae, which all can be traced back to Salt, a common provenance from Kalabsha.<sup>33</sup> Although Junker's claim cannot be accepted unreservedly in all cases, the Salt connection does suggest that the Kalabsha area, rather than any of the neighbouring districts, was a major source of Christian epitaphs in the early decades of the 19th century.<sup>34</sup>

For the Leyden stela of Manna no precise provenance has ever been given nor am I aware of a connection with Salt. It is nevertheless remarkable that it was acquired in the same period as the other stelae mentioned above. It belongs to the ancient holdings of the Museum, more precisely to the d'Anastasi collection which arrived in Holland in 1828. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the stela of Manna was part of the same stream of antiquities that had carried the very similar pieces acquired by Salt from Northern Nubia to Western Europe and one of the sources of which was certainly located in Kalabsha. Extending this argument to the greater group of Nubian stelae of the *ἐνθα κατάκειται*-plus-*ἐτελεύθη*-type,<sup>35</sup> I would like to hypothesize that, in the absence of contrary evidence, most if not all of these originate from one of the cemeteries of Kalabsha. Given the fact that Talmis was a sizeable town and still important enough in the late 6th century to be the residence of an *exarkhos*,<sup>36</sup> these cannot have been less extensive than those of neighbouring Taphis.

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16], no. 670; not in TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni* [cit. n. 4]), also from the Salt-collection, can be added; it is, however, much damaged.

<sup>33</sup> "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 114 and 115-16. A. ŁAJTAR, in his review of BERNAND, *Inscriptions grecques du Louvre*, in *BiOr* 51 (1994), col. 571, overcautiously extends Junker's attribution to the greater Kalabsha-Tafa-region.

<sup>34</sup> Note that MONNERET DE VILLARD published, *La Nubia medioevale* (cit. n. 2), vol. I, p. 41, a Greek stela recorded at Kalabsha in about the same period (between 1822 and 1834) by James Burton; recently re-edited by A. ŁAJTAR, "Varia Nubica VI-VII", *ZPE* 137 (2001), p. 183-184.

<sup>35</sup> Altogether, but excluding the epitaphs from Firth's excavations in Tafa-Ginari, some 14 pieces, plus one with a different verb for "to die", two without such a verb and one much too damaged to permit conclusions.

<sup>36</sup> This exarkhate is attested by two inscriptions from Dendûr and Ikhmindî (the latter discussed below, under no. 4); cf. T. HÄGG, "Titles and honorific epithets in Nubian Greek texts", *Symbolae Osloenses* 65 (1990), pp. 160-161. In spite of Hägg's reservations, both

Indications for dating the Nubian group of stelae of the *ἐνθα κατάκειται*-type are scarce. Stelae with similar formulae from beyond the Nile Valley are usually not very securely dated either. In relatively recent literature, a closely related ensemble from Asia Minor is ascribed to the 5th-6th centuries;<sup>37</sup> specimens from Crete are dated to about the same period,<sup>38</sup> which is probably a bit early for Nubia. The very few instances from Egypt, cited above, do not have absolute dates preserved, apart from the apparently unrelated Coptic group from Abydos, which dates to the 10th century. Nubian examples, either from Taffa or from Kalabsha, usually bear only indiction dates.

Providentially, at least one stela of this group, the epitaph of a woman Drosis (Δρώσης), now in Turin (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, no. 43), does contain an absolute date, viz. A. D. 699. This stela, however, for which no exact provenance is known, exhibits a much more developed textual form than most Nubian monuments of this type, including the Leyden stone of Manna. Apart from an opening formula which is virtually identical to that of the Manna stela, the prayer section is far richer. God is addressed as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and the abode of the soul is not only situated, as usual, “in the bosom of our holy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (l. 6-8), but also “in a place of rest (ἀνάπαυσις)” (l. 6). Furthermore, an extensive second prayer ensues, asking for mercy for the deceased’s soul, which adds considerably to the length of the text (l. 9-13). If Martin Krause’s theory, based on Henri Munier’s material from Assouan, which claims a gradual development from a relatively simple towards an ever richer formulary, holds here as well, this would assign a typologically late date to the stela of Drosis.<sup>39</sup> Based on that assumption, the bulk of the Nubian *ἐνθα κατάκειται*-group, with its far simpler formulary, may need to be dated before 700, i.e. to the seventh or perhaps even the later sixth century. These unpretentious stelae, like that of Manna, would therefore document the earlier years of Christianity in Nobadia.

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inscriptions quite plainly give the impression that the *exarkhos* of Talmis was the highest representative of the Nobadian king in the area.

<sup>37</sup> See C. MANGO & I. ŠEVČENKO, “Some recently acquired Byzantine inscriptions at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1978), pp. 1-27.

<sup>38</sup> A. C. BANDY, *The Greek Christian Inscriptions of Crete*, Athens 1970, *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> For details, see M. KRAUSE, “Die Formulare der christlichen Gräbsteine Nubiens” [in:] K. MICHAŁOWSKI (ed.), *Nubia: Récentes recherches*, Warsaw 1975, pp. 76-82.

## 3. PAULOS FROM KALABSHA(?), MEIZOTEROS (SB KOPT. I 432)

Whereas no doubt can be possible about the Northern Nubian provenance of the six Greek funerary stelae originating from Henry Salt and published by Thomas Young in 1821, the case is somewhat different for the seventh piece in the lot, an epitaph in Sahidic Coptic. The Greek pieces clearly reflect local traditions in their material (sandstone), lay-out and formulary. The Coptic stela, on the other hand, is much different. It is a marble slab and bears a text which, though of a type not unfamiliar in Nubia, lacks indubitably local elements. Rather, as will be argued below, its specific combination of textual and formal features is reminiscent of a group of 8th-9th century stelae that may be assigned to northern Middle Egypt. Possibly, the stone was only secondarily added to the lot from Kalabsha, or Young's information may have been incomplete.<sup>40</sup> Yet it should be emphasized that no single element of the stone is in any way irreconcilable with a Nubian provenance. Below, the first complete edition of the text is given, together with a brief commentary and a photo of the monument which, hopefully, will stimulate further discussion.

The Coptic stela, together with three of the Greek pieces from the same source, was presented to the British Museum by A. Lyttelton Annesley, heir to the Earl of Mountnorris, in 1854.<sup>41</sup> Young's 1821 publication provides an excellent facsimile as well a partial reading of the text, but his work was virtually ignored by more recent scholarship.<sup>42</sup> My own text is based upon Young's facsimile, which permits an almost complete recon-

<sup>40</sup> Note that YOUNG, in his discussion of the Coptic stela, "Observations" (cit. n. 29), p. 160, does seem a bit vague ("found in the same neighbourhood", *scil.* as the other six stelae).

<sup>41</sup> British Museum inv. no. EA 825. For the acquisition, cf. above, n. 29. Not included in recent discussions of the Nubian holdings of the museum by W. V. DAVIES, "'Egypt and Africa' in the British Museum" [in:] IDEM (ed.), *Egypt and Africa*, London 1994, pp. 314-320 (see 314, under 1854), and BIERBRIER, "Provenances" (cit. n. 28), p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> Bibliography: YOUNG, "Observations" (cit. n. 29), p. 160, with pl. X *infra* (facsimile; partial transcription of l. 4-6; partial translation); H. R. HALL, *Coptic and Greek Texts of the Christian Period from Ostraka, Stelae, etc. in the British Museum*, London 1905, p. 11, no. 4, pl. 10 (incomplete facsimile and transcription of l. 8-14; single words from l. 1-4); JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 122 (supplements l. 8-14 after HALL; valuable discussion *passim*); M. R. M. HASITZKA, *SB Kopt. I 432* (reproduces JUNKER's text). Briefly mentioned in E. A. WALLIS BUDGE, *British Museum: A Guide to the Egyptian Galleries (Sculpture)*, London 1909, p. 300, no. 1155; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *La Nubia medioevale* (cit. n. 2), vol. I, p. 41, n. 4; CURTO, *Kalabsha* (cit. n. 28), p. 85, no. 40 (as "illegibile").

struction except for the date of demise in the last lines, where the stone is broken off. It was collated with digital photos of the stela.<sup>43</sup>

The stela is a white marble slab, measuring 39 x 33 cm. It is much worn in the centre (through re-use as a paving tile or quern) and both lower corners are broken away. There are remains of 14 lines of text, badly ruled; l. 14 (in smaller letters) is almost certainly the last line of the inscription. The epigraphic field is surrounded by broad plain margins, not preserved in the lower half of the stone. It is written in clear but rather coarse and unelegant uncials, less regular towards the end of the text; the script is characterised by a low and wide  $\mu$  and by a big  $A$  with a left looking head and a broken bar with a low central curl; both superlinear strokes and dots are used, and a *croix pattée* opens l. 1 (see plate).

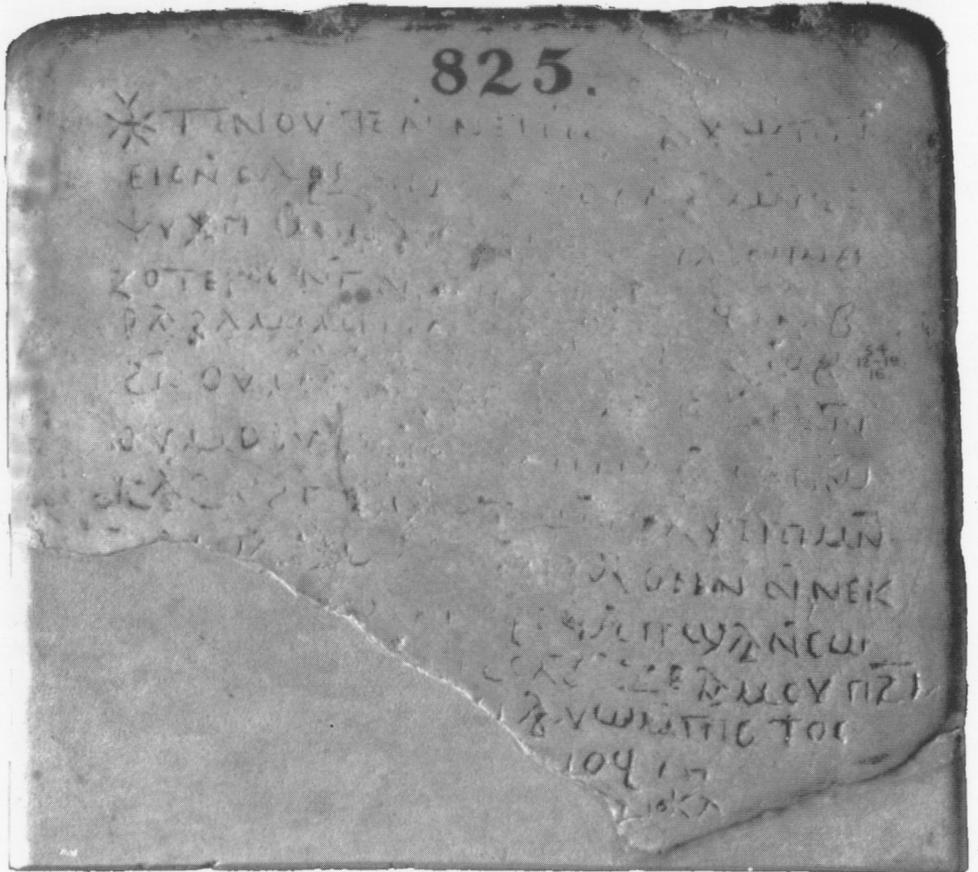
### Text

- \* ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΝΕΠ̄Π̄[Α] ΔΥΩ ΠΧΘ-  
 ΕΙC ΝCΑΡΖ ΝΙΜ Δ[ΡΙ] ΟΥΝΑ Μ̄Ν ΤΕ-  
 ΨΥΧΗ ΜΠΜΔ[ΚΑΡΙΟΣ Π]ΔΥΛΟΣ ΠΜΕΙ-  
 4 ΖΟΤΕΡΟΣ Ν̄ΓΝΘ[Χ]Γ̄ Θ̄Ν̄ [ΚΟΥΝ]Υ ΝΑΒ-  
 ΡΑΖΔΑΜ ΜΝ ΙC[ΔΔΚ] Μ̄Ν ΙΔΚΩΒ  
 Θ̄Ν̄ ΟΥΜΑ ΝΟΥ[ΟΤΟΥΕ]Τ̄ ΖΙΧ̄Ν  
 ΟΥΜΟΟΥ ΝΜ[ΤΟΝ] Π̄ΜΔ Ν̄ΤΑ ΠΕΜ-  
 8 ΚΑΘ ΝΘΗΤ ΠΩΤ̄ Μ̄Ν Τ̄ΛΥΠΗ Μ̄Ν  
 Π̄ΑΨΔΖΟΜ̄ [ΘΜ] ΠΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΝΝΕΚ-  
 ΠΕΤΟΥΔΔ]Β̄ [ΝΓΤ]ΡΕΦ̄ΜΠΨΔ ΝCΩ-  
 ΤΜ ΕΤΕΙCΜ]Η̄ ΕΤΘΟΛ̄Θ̄ ΧΕ ΔΜΟΥ Π̄Θ̄Μ-  
 12 ΖΑΛ ΕΤΝΔΝΟΥ]Υ ΔΥΩ Μ̄ΠΙCΤΟC  
 . . . . . ΜΤΟΝ Μ]ΜΟΥ ΕΠ̄[  
 ΔΠΟ] ΔΙΟΚΛ[

1. ΝΝΕΠ̄Π̄[Α]: Hall ἔν . . . | 4. beginning: Hall ζοτε . . . | 6. ΟΥΜΑ ΝΟΥ[ΟΤΟΥΕ]Τ̄: Young: ΟΥΜΑ ΕΟΟΥ . . . ; inconclusive traces in *lacuna* | 8 end-9 beginning: Junker, Hasitzka ΘΝ Τ]ΜΗ[ΤΡΡΟ ΝΜΠΗΥΕ] | 10. [ΝΓΤ]ΡΕΦ̄ΜΠΨΔ: Junker, Hasitzka [ΔΥΩ ΝΓΔΔΥ Ν]ΜΠΨΔ; space for ΔΥΩ is lacking; inconclusive traces in *lacuna* | 11. ΕΤΕΙCΜ]Η̄: Junker, Hasitzka

<sup>43</sup> These were kindly provided by Mr. M. MARÉE, M.A., of the British Museum, Egyptian Department, who also verified my readings of l. 3-4 on the original. I thank him most warmly for his cooperation.

PLATE



A tombstone for Paulos from Kalabsha(?), *meizoteros* (SB Kopt. I 432)

[εΤΣΜΗ]; -ϩο̅δ̅: Junker, Hasitzka -ϩλ̅ο̅δ̅; final -ϩ̅ⲙ̅: written in margin | 12: εΤΗΔΝΟΥΥ]ϥ: Hall [εΗΔΝΟΥΥ] | 13. εΠ[ : very uncertain; 1. εΠ[ΗΠ, or perhaps ΗΠ [ , "18"? | 13.-14. Junker, Hasitzka ΗΓΒΩΚ εϩΟΥΝ ΕΠΟΥ]ΗΟϥ ΗΠ[ε]Κ[ΧC.44

### Translation

✱ O, God of the spirits (πνεῦμα) and Lord of all flesh (σάρξ),<sup>45</sup> have mercy upon the soul (ψυχή) of the blessed (μακάριος) Paulos, the *meizoteros* (μειζότερος), and deposit him in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,<sup>46</sup> in a place of [verdure], at a water of [rest],<sup>47</sup> the place whence sorrow and sadness (λύπη) and sighing have fled away,<sup>48</sup> in the light of Your [saints],<sup>49</sup> [and make] him worthy to hear [that] sweet [voice] saying: 'Come, o [good] and faithful (πιστός) servant!'<sup>50</sup>

[He went to rest ? in] Ep[iphi? . . . since] Diocl[etian . . .

This liturgically inspired epitaph in flawless Sahidic consists of a long composite prayer for the deceased (l. 1-12), followed by a largely lost dating lemma (l. 13-14). The opening-formula offers an instance of the invocation "God of the spirits ...", which in its Greek guise is perhaps the most characteristic formula of Nubian epigraphy.<sup>51</sup> In Coptic, three other examples of this invocation are known from Nubia. These originate from Sakinya (To-shka-West),<sup>52</sup> Faras (a bishop's stela of A.D. 862)<sup>53</sup> and Ghazali,<sup>54</sup> and thus

<sup>44</sup> Apart from being irreconcilable with the remaining traces, Junker's ingenious reconstruction is hardly plausible. One would expect: ΗΓΒΩΚ εϩΟΥΝ ΕΠΡΑΨΕ ΗΠΕΚΧΟΕΙC. The indubitable remains of a date in l. 14 require a reconstruction as proposed here (dying-dating-lemma).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Num.* 16: 22; 27:16.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Lk* 16:22; *Mt.* 8:11; for the verb used here, see JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 129, under 1; 141.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ps.* 22:2.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Isa.* 35:10; 51:11.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Ps.* 109:3; and JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 140-41, under 2.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Mt.* 25:21/23; and JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 130, under 2; 140, under 1.

<sup>51</sup> Best known for its occurrence at the beginning of "prayer α" of JUNKER's classical study, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2); see furthermore, J. KUBIŃSKA, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes (Faras IV)*, Warsaw 1974, pp. 69-86 (who calls it "prière nubienne"), and A. ŁAJTAR, "Varia Nubica IV. Das älteste nubische Epitaph mit dem Gebet vom sogenannten Typus *Euchologion Mega?*", *ZPE* 113 (1996), pp. 101-108, where the designation "prayer of the *euchologion mega*-type" is preferred.

<sup>52</sup> TOGO MINA, *Inscriptions coptes et grecques de Nubie*, Cairo 1942, no. 78.

bear witness to its sporadic but geographically wide occurrence, covering both Nobadia and Makuria. However, instead of continuing with the common prayer formula “εκεῖμτον η-: grant rest to ...”, found in the other Nubian Coptic examples and in many Egyptian ones, for example from Esna, not far from the Nubian border,<sup>55</sup> the present inscription combines the invocation “God of the spirits ...” with a prayer formula of the type “ἀρι οὐνά μν: have mercy upon ...”.

Although funerary prayers with “have mercy upon ...” are not at all exceptional in Nubian Coptic epigraphy,<sup>56</sup> the typical combination with the present opening invocation is far more reminiscent of a group of funerary stelae from Saqqara in Egypt.<sup>57</sup> To the Saqqara pieces, a number of which bear 8th-9th century dates, others can be joined for which, in the absence of contrary indications, a similar provenance (northern Middle Egypt) may be postulated.<sup>58</sup> These bear a strong family likeness to the Kalabsha in-

<sup>53</sup> S. JAKOBIELSKI, *A History of the Bishopric of Pachoras on the Basis of Coptic Inscriptions* (Faras III), Warsaw 1972, p. 77, l. 16 ff.

<sup>54</sup> J. VAN DER VLIET, *I. Kbartoum Copt. 77*. For its distribution in the Nile Valley, see G. ROQUET, “Inscriptions bohâïriques du Dayr Abû Maqâr”, *BIFAO* 77 (1977), pp. 166-171 (from the list on p. 167, delete no. 3a); cf. C. WIETHEGER, *Das Jeremias-Kloster zu Saqqara unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inschriften*. (= *Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten* 1), Altenberge 1992, p. 133-34.

<sup>55</sup> See S. SAUNERON & R.-G. COQUIN, “Catalogue provisoire des stèles funéraires coptes d’Esna”, [in:] *Livre du centenaire: 1880-1980*, Cairo 1980, pp. 239-277, nos. 57 and 80.

<sup>56</sup> To the single Coptic example quoted by JUNKER, “Grabsteine” (cit. n. 2), p. 130 supra (cf. p. 143), many more could now be added, particularly from Sakinya (Toshka-West).

<sup>57</sup> See ROQUET, “Inscriptions” (cit. n. 54), p. 167; WIETHEGER, *Jeremias* (cit. n. 54), p. 134, n. 319.

<sup>58</sup> IBRAHIM KAMEL, *Coptic Funerary Stelae. Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée copte*, nos. 1-253, Cairo 1987, particularly nos. 75 and 76 (inv. nos. 3835 and 3836, both on marble and “bought from T. Flamakrian”; the former is mentioned, with a wrong number, by ROQUET, “Inscriptions” (cit. n. 54), p. 167, no. 16, who refers to earlier editions; the latter also in W. BRUNSCH, “Koptische und Griechische Inschriften in Kairo”, *EVO* 19 [1995], p. 99, under a wrong number 8636; cf. M. R. M. HASITZKA, A. ŁAJTAR & T. MARKIEWICZ, “Coptic inscriptions in Egyptian collections: Some notes on recent publications”, *JJP* 29 [1999], pp. 26-27, no. 51). Though mostly with different opening formulae, the small group presented by Sophia SCHATEN during the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies (“Die Sammlung des Gayer-Anderson Museums in Kairo: Christliche Grabsteine mit Inschriften”, in *Abstracts of Papers*, Leyden 2000, p. 91) may be joined to these, mainly on account of peculiarities of script and formulary. The latter date to the 9th century; one of them actually belongs to the Saqqara group with an opening of the “God of the spirits”-type (WIETHEGER, *Jeremias*

scription in that they show a certain preference not only for an identical opening formula, but also, in a purely formal sense, for marble as a support and a *croix pattée* at the head of the first line. They are, moreover, undecorated apart from one or more of these crosses and show a similar coarse and unrulled script with a preference for big, broken bar *A*'s. Textually there is great variation but, as in the Kalabsha piece, extensive and conscious borrowing from liturgical prayer is a conspicuous feature. The "family likeness" with this particular group of Egyptian stelae makes it impossible to accept an attribution to Kalabsha without reservations. On the other hand, such an impression of similarity alone is insufficient evidence to dismiss out of hand the Kalabsha provenance put forward by Young. No watertight compartments separated the Christian populations of Egypt and Nubia, and this is also apparent in their epigraphic habits. Moreover, towards the end of the first millennium, Christian funerary epigraphy in the Nile Valley at large showed a growing preference for ample liturgical formulae and, simultaneously, a gradual wearing away of regional variety and local peculiarities in the text form. A final verdict on the provenance of the stela of Paulos must therefore be postponed.

The remainder of the prayer (l. 4-12) consists of select phrases from the commemoration of the dead in the Egyptian liturgy.<sup>59</sup> They mostly belong to the standard repertoire of medieval funerary epigraphy both in Nubia and in Egypt.<sup>60</sup> Also the characteristic formula ("make him worthy to hear the sweet voice ...") which in l. 10-11 introduces the *Matthew* quote, is frequently found in later stelae from Nubia and Egypt, only the quote itself is here *Mt. 25:21/23*, instead of the more usual *Mt. 25:34*.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the dating lemma of the present epitaph (l. 13-14) does not survive. Comparison

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[cit. n. 54], no. 86; J. E. QUIBELL, *Excavations at Saqqara (1907-1908)*, Cairo 1909, p. 31, no. 11, pl. XLIV.1, right; cf. p. 100).

<sup>59</sup> See e.g. the references given by SAUNERON & COQUIN, "Catalogue provisoire" (cit. n. 54), p. 251-52.

<sup>60</sup> For Nubia, see JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), and *I. Kbartoum Greek and Copt.* (forthcoming, Leuven 2003).

<sup>61</sup> See, however, JUNKER, "Grabsteine" (cit. n. 2), p. 140 (the parallel quoted is M. CRAMER, *Die Totenklage bei den Kopten*, Vienna - Leipzig 1941, no. 8, l. 20-23); in the present-day Bohairic liturgy, *Mt. 25:14-23*, is the Gospel-reading in the burial service for priests (O. H. E. BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, Cairo 1967, p. 210), and *Matt. 25: 21/23* is quoted in the commemoration of a deceased bishop (*ibid.*, p. 168).

with the stelae from Egypt cited above suggests a date in or about the 9th century.

Should the monument of Paulos really come from Kalabsha, then it would add one more example to the meagre file of Nubian officials bearing the title *meizoteros* (or a related one).<sup>62</sup> As a lower official, the *meizoteros* is familiar from the Greek and Coptic documentary sources of late Byzantine and early Arabic Egypt.<sup>63</sup> Epigraphic attestations from Egypt are far less common.<sup>64</sup> In Nubia, the role and functions of the *meizoteros* prove difficult to define, mainly for lack of helpful contexts. In most cases, but not here, the Nubian titles *meizôn*, *meizoteros* or *prôtomeizoteros* receive a further specification, like “of the palace” or “of Nobadia”, or are combined with some other rank or title, for example admiral or eparch. Here, however, *meizoteros* appears without any further qualification. Another *meizoteros* without further qualifications is found in a Greek funerary stela which, though traditionally ascribed to Qasr Ibrîm, quite probably originates from the Kalabsha region too.<sup>65</sup> These variations in usage suggest that in Nubia the title *meizoteros* was borne by persons of very different rank and quality whose status was not necessarily in the first place defined by this title, but rather by the context in which they exercised their functions (e.g. whether or not attached to the palace) or by their other functions (e.g. eparch). The owners of the two stelae just mentioned may then represent *meizoteroi* on an unmarked, unspecific level, perhaps indeed, as frequently in Egypt, that of local administration. If the traditional provenance of his stela can

<sup>62</sup> Recent discussions: HÄGG, “Titles” (cit. n. 36), p. 162; S.T. RICHTER, “Neun Stelen”, p. 296; A. ŁAJTAR, *I. Khartoum Greek*, under no. 21. Their facts and arguments are not repeated here.

<sup>63</sup> See A. STEINWENTER, *Studien zur koptischen Rechtsurkunden*, Leipzig 1920, p. 41-45; G. ROUILLARD, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte byzantine*, Paris 1928, p. 69-71; E. R. HARDY, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt*, New York 1931, p. 104-05; A. GROHMANN, “Der Beamtenstab der arabischen Finanzverwaltung in Ägypten in früh-arabischer Zeit” [in:] *Studien zur Papyrologie und antiken Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Fs. F. Oertel), Bonn 1964, p. 129-31.

<sup>64</sup> I know of no other example than LEFEBVRE, *Recueil* (cit. n. 16), no. 62 (stela of *apa Ôl*, A.D. 693, reputedly from Damanhour, but much resembling stelae from the Fayoum); for a useful discussion of epigraphic evidence from outside the Nile Valley, see D. FEISSEL, “Notes d'épigraphie chrétienne (IV)”, *BCH* 104 (1980), p. 461-62.

<sup>65</sup> Stela of Epiphanius, formerly Leipzig Inv.-Nr. 680; see T. S. RICHTER, “Neun Stelen” (cit. n. 25), pp. 296-297; a stela of the *ἐνθα κατάκειται*-type, the provenance of which was briefly discussed above (under no. 2).

be maintained, Paulos may have been an “alderman” of early-medieval Talmis.

#### 4. BUILDING THE TOWN OF IKHMINDI (SB VIII 10074)

Already in the Autumn of 1843, Richard Lepsius had admired the “Roman” fortifications of the town of Ikhmindî (Mehendi), at a short distance from Maharraqa (Hiera Sykaminos), just past the southern frontier of the Dodekaschoinos.<sup>66</sup> In 1958, Italian archaeologists discovered a foundation inscription commemorating the erection of these walls under King Tôkiltôeton “of the people of the Nobades”.<sup>67</sup> Through indirect evidence, this event can be dated to the late sixth century. In the years following the *editio princeps* by S. Donadoni in 1959, some discussion arose about the text, particularly about the correct rendering of l. 12-13 which read: ἐπλήρωσεν (for ἐπλήρωσεν) τὴν οἰκοδομητὴν τὴν πολλῶν (scil. on 21 Epiphi of a 3rd indiction year). Donadoni had commented upon the latter part of this construction: “naturalmente si può intendere come una forma di endiadi o un accusativo interno; ma val la pena di ricordare che nelle epigrafi nubiane tale particolare uso di un accusativo è frequente nella epigrafia funeraria ... (examples follow)”.<sup>68</sup> Thus, according to Donadoni, one should correct τὴν πολλῶν into τὴν πόλιν (for, more properly, τῆς πόλεως).

In a footnote to a short article published in 1961, Jean Bingen finds this “special use” of an accusative “assez éloigné de la tenue grammaticale de notre inscription”. He proposes, with due hesitation, a correction into τὴν πολλήν as “la plus simple et du même ordre que les autres négligences

<sup>66</sup> R. LEPSIUS, *Briefe aus Aegypten, Aethiopien und der Halbinsel des Sinai*, Berlin 1852, pp. 113-115.

<sup>67</sup> Text: S. DONADONI, “Un’epigrafe greco-nubiana da Ikhmindî”, *La parola del passato* 69 (1959), pp. 458-465 (= *Cultura dell’Antico Egitto*, Rome 1986, pp. 513-520); *SEG XVIII* 724 (cf. *XX* 702); J. BINGEN, “Un roitelet chrétien des Nobades au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *CdÉ* 36 (1961), pp. 431-433 (= *Pages d’épigraphie grecque: Attique – Égypte [1952-1982]*, *Epigraphica Bruxellensia I*, Brussels 1991, pp. 160-162); *SB VIII* 10074; F. W. DEICHMANN, “Die Bauinschrift von Ikhmindî” [in:] F. W. DEICHMANN & P. GROSSMANN, *Nubische Forschungen* (= *Archäologische Forschungen* 17), Berlin 1988, pp. 81-88. Photo: J. LECLANT, “Fouilles et travaux en Égypte, 1957-1960”, *Or* 30 (1961), fig. 38, pl. XL (cf. p. 193); facsimile: A. STENICO, “Ikhmindî. Una città fortificata medievale della Bassa Nubia”, *Acme* 13 (1960), p. 62, fig. 4. The stone is kept in the museum of Assouan (Bingen) or Elephantine (*SB*).

<sup>68</sup> DONADONI, “Epigrafe” (cit. n. 67), p. 462.

d'orthographe phonétique que présente le texte", in itself a perfectly valid argument.<sup>69</sup> Bingen's cautious footnote met with wide acclaim. The correction τήν πολλήν found its way into the *Sammelbuch* and the *SEG*, and was still defended with fervour by the most recent commentator of the text, F. W. Deichmann, as late as 1988.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, however, publications by Maria Grazia Tibiletti Bruno and later ones by Tomas Hägg and Adam Łajtar have paved the way for a better understanding of the Greek of Nubia. Even more importantly, the progress made in recent years in the study of linguistic pluralism gradually gave rise to a less helleno-centric, more sophisticated attitude towards language in medieval Nubia.<sup>71</sup> Christian Nubia, which had never been part of the Byzantine empire, was a multilingual society where Greek was only one of two and later three literary languages and where it was subject, in a varying degree, to the influence of the local vernaculars, one of which, Nobiin, came to be used in written form (Old Nubian). The peculiarities of spelling and syntax manifest in local Greek sources are not in contradiction with the apparent fact that at the same time a generally good standard of written Greek could be maintained, not just in the 6th century but as late as the 13th century. The variations that can be observed represent different registers of written communication rather than more or less successful approaches to a classical ideal. In the light of more recent scholarship, it can hardly be denied that Donadoni's comparison with other Nubian inscriptions and their "Nubian" particularisms was entirely pertinent.

The two phenomena which Donadoni had to postulate for his interpretation of l. 12-13 of the Ikhmindī text, to wit the *accusativus pro genitivo* and the doubling of the intervocalic -λ-, are not just "frequente", but part of the normal make-up of Nubian Greek. Of regular occurrence in the naming lemmata of epitaphs, the first of them has almost become a touch-

<sup>69</sup> BINGEN, "Roitelet" (cit. n. 67), p. 432, n. 1; note that Bingen refers his suggestion to a lengthy footnote and avoids to insert it into his apparatus or translation.

<sup>70</sup> DEICHMANN, "Bauinschrift" (cit. n. 67), p. 85. Cf., however, the *Bulletin épigraphique*, in *REG* 75 (1962), p. 217, no. 362, and S. DONADONI, "Les débuts du christianisme en Nubie", [in:] *Actes du symposium international sur la Nubie, mars 1965*. (= *Mémoires de l'Institut d'Égypte* 59) Cairo 1969, p. 29, n. 35.

<sup>71</sup> A pioneer study is M. BECHHAUS-GERST, *Sprachwandel durch Sprachkontakt am Beispiel des Nubischen im Niltal* (= *Sprachkontakt in Afrika* 3), Cologne 1996.

stone for the Nubian origin of an inscription.<sup>72</sup> Tibiletti Bruno was able to join even pre-Christian Greek examples from the Dodekaschoinos to her discussion of the Christian texts.<sup>73</sup> For the doubling of the intervocalic -λ-, it may suffice to quote σελλένη for σελήνη, which in later funerary inscriptions has become more or less a standard spelling, next to e.g. θέλλοντος for θέλοντος (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, no. 37), or δοῦλλούν for δούλου (Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni*, no. 22). Judged by the standards of Nubian Greek, Donadoni's proposed correction of τὴν πολλιν into τὴν πόλιν (for τῆς πόλεως) appears not merely justifiable, but quite natural. That it also yields a better sense can hardly be denied.

In addition to Bingen's philological argument, an objection of a more general nature against Donadoni's interpretation was raised in 1988 by F. W. Deichmann. In his opinion, it would be hardly imaginable that Ikhmindī, which he considers to be a mere "Fliehbürg", could ever have been called a πόλις, even "im Sinne der Spätantike"<sup>74</sup> Here, again, it would have been preferable to look for information in indigenous, local sources, rather than to apply standards valid elsewhere. A small group of Northern Nubian legal documents in Coptic, datable to the reign of King Khaël (around A.D. 800), was apparently drawn up by a priest of the main church in ΜΩΖΩΝΔΙ or ΜΩΖΩΝΔΙ for inhabitants of that place.<sup>75</sup> There can be no doubt about the identity of Mōhondi with modern Mehendi or Ikhmindī.<sup>76</sup> In the best known of these documents, which show a clear awareness of the distinction between village (†με) and town,<sup>77</sup> Mōhondi-Ikhmindī is explicitly called a

<sup>72</sup> Already in 1981, T. HÄGG, "Two Christian epitaphs in Greek of the 'Euchologion mega' type" [in:] T. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH (ed.), *Late Nubian Cemeteries The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia*, vol. 6, Solna 1981, p. 58, note to l. 23, had quoted the Ikhmindī inscription in this context, but, referring to Bingen's article, remained hesitating to adopt Donadoni's interpretation.

<sup>73</sup> M. G. TIBILETTI BRUNO, "Di alcune caratteristiche epigrafi funerarie cristiane della Nubia", *Rendiconti Istituto Lombardo, Accademia di Scienze e Lettere. Classe di Lettere* 97 (1963), p. 522 and 527.

<sup>74</sup> DEICHMANN, "Bauinschrift" (cit. n. 67), p. 85.

<sup>75</sup> Presently in Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, no inventory numbers known; partly published by J. KRALL, "Ein neuer nubischer König", *WZKM* 14 (1900), pp. 233-242; similar documents in W. E. CRUM, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1905, nos. 447-456.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. KRALL, "König" (cit. n. 75), p. 241; STENICO, "Ikhmindī" (cit. n. 67), p. 31, n.1.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. CRUM, *Catalogue British Museum* (cit. n. 75), p. 216, no. 452, doc. 2, l. 2

νοικ (l. 2).<sup>78</sup> Deichmann's argument cannot, therefore, be considered as valid. The Ikhindi inscription commemorizes how, under the Nobadian king Tôkiltôeton, "the construction of the town was accomplished" on 21 Epiphi of a third indiction year.

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<sup>78</sup> KRALL, "König" (cit. n. 75), p. 234; this text reprinted in *SB Kopt.* I 37.