

Ochała, Grzegorz

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The Journal of Juristic Papyrology 39, 133-160

2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Grzegorz Ochała

THE ERA OF THE SARACENS IN NON-ARABIC TEXTS FROM NUBIA*

INTRODUCTION

THE USE OF DIFFERENT chronological systems in Nubia between the sixth and fifteenth centuries is a well recognised phenomenon. However, no comprehensive studies of the particular ways of dating have been conducted so far. The present article sums up the results of the analysis carried out on one of these systems, namely, the Era of the Saracens, also called the Era of the Hegira. This dating method, being the only one in

* The present article is a modified version of a chapter of the doctoral thesis ‘Chronological Systems of Nubian Kingdoms’ in preparation by the author, a holder of the scholarship of the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The author would like to thank all those who have read and commented upon different versions of this text: Włodzimierz GODLEWSKI, Joost L. HAGEN, Adam ŁAJTAR, Alexandros TSAKOS, Jacques VAN DER VLIET. The author is also deeply indebted to Joost HAGEN, Gabriele MIETKE, Tonio Sebastian RICHTER, and Olivia ZORN, for supplying him with photographs and/or transcripts of texts discussed here, and to Iwona KOZIERADZKA-OGUNMAKIN for correcting his English.

The following abbreviations are used throughout: *CSBE*² = R. S. BAGNALL & K. A. Worp, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, 2nd ed., Leiden – Boston 2004; MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya* = U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Le iscrizioni di cimitero de Sakinya (Nubia)*, Le Caire 1933; MINA, *Inscriptions* = T. MINA, *Inscriptions coptes et grecques de Nubie*, Le Caire 1942.

Nubia not originating from Late Antique and Byzantine traditions, is attested in a group of thirty-one documents comprising eighteen Arabic, eleven Coptic, and two Greek-Coptic texts. It is these non-Arabic documents that are the subject of the present paper. The group is quite small¹ but merits a special attention in the sociocultural context of Christian Nubia. This paper is an attempt to show how this purely Muslim chronological system could have found its way into the Christian Kingdom of Makuria. The presentation of the material has a considerable value in the discussion, as these documents have not been studied from such a perspective so far. The discussion will be aimed at proving that these written sources, indeed, form a, more or less, homogeneous group, a fact that will allow some general conclusions on Egyptian-Makurian contacts.²

The Era of the Hegira is based on a pre-Islamic lunar calendar. A tradition attested in far later sources holds that the Era was introduced in AD 638 by Umar ibn el-Khattab (the second caliph, AD 634–644) as a commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. His arrival to Medina took place on 8 Rabi el-Awwal (20 September AD 622), but the beginning of the Era was established on 1 Muharram (15 July AD 622), that is the beginning of the Islamic lunar year.³

¹ The database of Nubian written sources bearing any signs of counting time comprises over 700 records at the moment, but the number will undoubtedly increase with the publishing of new finds and all the unpublished material.

² The term 'Egyptian' is used throughout as the designation of a person inhabiting Egypt, regardless of his/her faith.

³ G. ENDRESS, *Islam. An Historical Introduction*, Edinburgh 2002, pp. 150–154. ENDRESS notes that the starting point of the Era was changed in the Ottoman period to 16 July owing to 'a slight shift in the real phases of the moon vis-à-vis the moon calendar'. Some scholars give this date as the correct one for the beginning of the Era, cf. G. S. P. FREEMAN-GRENVILLE, *The Islamic and Christian Calendars AD 622–2222 (AH 1–1650). A Complete Guide for Converting Christian and Islamic Dates and Dates of Festivals*, Reading 1995, p. 4. The dates discussed in this paper have been calculated according to the tables in V. GRUMEL, *La chronologie [= Traité d'études Byzantines 1]*, Paris 1958, pp. 280–296, and with a help of calendar conversion computer programs (e.g. <<http://www.nabkal.de/kalrech.html>> and <<http://emr.cs.it.edu/home/reingold/calendar-book/Calendrica.html>>) with 15 July as the starting

The Era quickly found its way to practical use. The earliest known appearance of the Era is a coin minted in Damascus, bearing the date AH 17 (AD 638).⁴ Having conquered Egypt,⁵ the Arabs forbade the use of the most common chronological systems based on regnal years of the emperors, consulates, and post-consulates.⁶ Nevertheless, the Hegira dates were not widely employed in Greek documents. It is worth to mention that in the existing examples the Era is used not as a means of exact dating of the document's issue but as a 'fiscal' year defining the period for which the taxes are owed; for dating purposes the indictional system and the Era of Diocletian were employed.⁷

Coptic texts with double dating, according to the Eras of Diocletian (later called the Era of the Martyrs) and the Saracens, appear in Egypt from the first half of the eighth century onward. Roger S. Bagnall and Klaas A. Worp have listed forty-two such texts (six documents, eleven grave stelae, and twenty-five literary manuscripts), dated between the eighth and twelfth centuries.⁸

SOURCES

The earliest-known use of the Hegira date from the present-day Sudan comes from the site of Khor Nubt, where more than a hundred Arabic grave stelae were found.⁹ The oldest one is dated to AH 207–209

point. However, since the Islamic calendar is based on the monthly observation of the moon, dates calculated by modern scholars should be understood as approximate.

⁴ ENDRESS, *Islam* (cit. n. 3), p. 153.

⁵ The earliest example of the Islamic dating in Egypt is a bilingual (Greek–Arabic) text *PERF*, no. 558 (= *SB* VI 9576), dated to AH 22 (AD 643).

⁶ K. A. WORP, 'Hegira years in Greek, Greek–Coptic and Greek–Arabic papyri', *Aegyptus* 65 (1985), p. 107.

⁷ WORP, 'Hegira years' (cit. n. 6), pp. 107–115.

⁸ *CSBE*², pp. 68–86.

⁹ G. OMAN, Vincenza GRASSI & A. TROMBETTA, *The Book of Khor Nubt. Epigraphic Evidence of an Islamic–Arabic Settlement in Nubia (Sudan) in the III–IV Centuries A.H./X–XI A.D.*, I: *Preliminaries and Transcription of the Texts*; II: *The Photographs*, Napoli 1998.

(AD 822–824), and the latest to AH 339 (AD 950). The site, situated about a hundred kilometers southwest of Port Sudan, was populated by Arabs, and therefore cannot be considered ‘Nubian’ or ‘Makurian’, and as such is excluded from the discussion. Arabic stelae from the middle Nile Valley are also not included in this paper, the reason being that they represent cultural and religious values from outside the Nubian Christian tradition.

As has already been mentioned, only thirteen examples of the use of the Saracen Era in non-Arabic texts come from Christian Nubia.¹⁰ This set of texts comprises nine grave stelae, two ostraka, and two official documents. The first two categories have private character and the last one can be called ‘administrative’, or even ‘governmental’. The documents are presented below in typological and chronological order.

Four out of the nine presented tombstones come from the site of Sakinya. The discussion on these texts should begin with a few words on the site itself. Sakinya (Toshka West) was a cemetery located not far north of Arminna.¹¹ The number of the tombstones coming from this site overwhelmingly exceeds the amount of grave stelae found at any other Christian site in Nubia: 314 grave stelae in all (67 Greek, 247 Coptic). Surprisingly, in this number only nine tombstones are dated annually, among which as many as four contain Hegira dates; the remaining ones contain nothing but a monthly date and, occasionally, an indiction year. These are: the epitaph of Hellene, daughter of Ešapeti,¹² epitaph of Taurosa, son

¹⁰ Leslie S. B. MACCOULL & K. A. WORP, ‘The Era of the Martyrs’, [in:] M. CAPASSO, Gabriella MESSERI-SAVORELLI & R. PINTAUDI (eds.), *Miscellanea Papyrologica in occasione del bicentenario dell’edizione della Carta Borgiana* [= *Papyrologica Fiorentina* 19], Firenze 1990, p. 396, and *CSBE*², p. 79, mistakenly attribute another object containing a Hegira date to Nubia – a funerary stela *SBKopt.* 1746, coming from el-Baliana, near Abydos (see L. STERN, ‘Sahidische Inschriften’, *ÄZ* 16 [1878], p. 26; W. TILL, ‘Die koptischen Grabsteine der ägyptisch-orientalischen Sammlung des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien’, *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 13 [1955], pp. 175–176).

¹¹ For a general information on the site and characteristic of the epigraphic material, see MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, pp. I–VIII; MINA, *Inscriptions*, pp. V–VIII.

¹² The object is stored in the Turin Museum, Suppl. n. 18163. Editions: MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 214, pl. IX, 2; MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 313; S. PERNIGOTTI, ‘Stele cristiane da Sakinya nel Museo di Torino’, *OA* 14 (1975), no. 20, pl. XVI.

of Petiallam,¹³ epitaph of Mari, daughter of Isounta,¹⁴ and epitaph of Petrosinta, daughter of Miššeta.¹⁵

There are several premises that allow regarding the first three tombstones as a closely related group. Even a glimpse at the photographs of the objects gives an impression of them being executed in the same workshop or even by the same craftsman. They are all made of terracotta, which is striking as only 16 out of 314 Sakinya epitaphs were made of this material, and their similarity is also indicated by the shape of the plaques. The palaeography of the texts allows the supposition that they might have been incised with one hand.

The texts of the three epitaphs are nearly identical, particularly in the beginning prayers, further proving their close connection. They all belong to a small sub-group within the group of sixty-four Sakinya stelae beginning with the $\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{Y}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{H}}$ formula.¹⁶ A distinctive feature of this sub-group, com-

¹³ The object is stored in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, inv. no. 6839. Editions: MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 216, pl. VIII, 2; MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 315, pl. xv, 1. Mentioned: W. TILL, 'Die Veröffentlichungen der «Société d'Archéologie copte»', *Or* 17 (1948), pp. 357–358; MACCOULL & WORP, 'The Era of the Martyrs' (cit. n. 10), p. 395; *CSBE*², p. 78, with n. 69.

¹⁴ The object is stored in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, inv. no. 6840. Editions: MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 215, pl. IX, 1; MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 314, pl. XIV, 2; W. BRUNSCH, 'Koptische und griechische Inschriften in Kairo', *EVO* 18 (1995), pp. 86–87; *SBKopt.* II 1210. Mentioned: A. ŁAJTAR, 'Griechische und koptische Inschriften im Koptischen Museum Kairo: Eine Fortsetzung', *JJP* 28 (1998), p. 27; MACCOULL & WORP, 'The Era of the Martyrs' (cit. n. 10), p. 395; *CSBE*², p. 78, with n. 70.

¹⁵ The object is stored in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, inv. no. 6834. Editions: MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 221, pl. VIII, 1; MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 320, pl. XVI, 2. Mentioned: TILL, 'Die Veröffentlichungen' (cit. n. 13), pp. 357–358; M. F. LAMING MACADAM, 'Inscriptions', [in:] O. G. S. CRAWFORD, *Castles and Churches in the Middle Nile Region* [= *Sudan Antiquities Service Occasional Paper* 2], Khartoum 1953, p. 47; MACCOULL & WORP, 'The Era of the Martyrs' (cit. n. 10), p. 395; *CSBE*², p. 79.

¹⁶ The full text of the formula reads as follows:

ΟΥΔ ΠΕ ΠΙΝΟΥΤΕ ΒΟΗΘΟΣ ΝΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ· $\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{A}}\overline{\text{Y}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{H}}$ ΜΗ ΑΤΜΟΥ ΖΙΧΜ ΠΚΑΖ· ΝΤΙΖΕ
 ΔΕ ΑΝΗΤΟΝ ΝΜΟΦ/ΑΝΗΤΟΝ ΝΜΟΣ ΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ/ΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΑ ...
One is God, helper in everything. Do not grieve, for there is no immortal on earth.
In this way died the blessed ...

As has been suggested by Jacques VAN DER VLIET, it is the second part of the formula that is its distinctive element.

prising one sandstone stela and eight terracotta ones,¹⁷ is the addition of the word $\lambda\alpha\lambda\upsilon$ creating the phrase $\mu\bar{\eta}\ \lambda\alpha\lambda\upsilon\ \bar{\eta}\alpha\tau\mu\omicron\upsilon\gamma$, ‘no one is immortal’.¹⁸

The similarity of their dating formulae is the last and decisive proof of the three tombstones’ close connection:

– Epitaph of Hellene

Π. 10–12: $\varepsilon\bar{\eta}\ \sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \chi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\tau\alpha\varphi\tau\epsilon\ \mu\bar{\eta}\varepsilon\upsilon\omicron\tau\ \varepsilon\pi\eta\phi$
 I. 17: $\alpha\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \sigma\alpha\ \sigma\varphi\gamma$.

(...) *on day twenty-fourth of the month of Pauni (...), (in the year) from the Saracens 293* (= 18 June AD 906);

– Epitaph of Taurosa

Π. 7–8: $\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \zeta\ \mu\bar{\eta}\varepsilon\upsilon\omicron\tau\ \varepsilon\pi\eta\phi$
 Π. 16–17: $\alpha\pi\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\ \chi\kappa\gamma\ \alpha\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \sigma\alpha\tau\alpha\kappa\ \sigma\varphi\gamma$.

(...) *on day 6 of the month of Epeiph (...), (in the year) from Diocletian 623, (in the year) from the Saracens 293* (= 30 June AD 906 or 907);

– Epitaph of Mari

I. 8: $\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \dots\bar{\eta}\ \mu\bar{\eta}\varepsilon\upsilon\omicron\tau\ \varepsilon\pi\eta\phi$
 Π. 12–13: $\alpha\pi\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\ \dots\chi\kappa\ \acute{\gamma}\ \alpha\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \sigma\alpha\tau\alpha\kappa\ \sigma\varphi\gamma$.

(...) *on day 10 of the month of Epeiph (...), (in the year) from Diocletian 623, (in the year) from the Saracens 293* (= 4 July AD 906 or 907).

¹⁷ MINA, *Inscriptions*, nos. 27, 28, 29, 313 (here, epitaph of Hellene), 314 (here, epitaph of Mari), 315 (here, epitaph of Taurosa), 317, 319 (sandstone).

¹⁸ In the $\mu\bar{\eta}\ \lambda\alpha\lambda\upsilon\ \bar{\eta}\alpha\tau\mu\omicron\upsilon\gamma$ sub-group, there are four securely dated epitaphs: three terracotta ones (MINA, *Inscriptions*, nos. 313–315, presented above), dated to AD 906/7, and the sandstone one (MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 319), dated to AD 987. Thus, it seems reasonable to date the whole assemblage to the tenth century.

The three stelae bear the same Hegira date – year 293 (AD 907). In addition, the epitaphs of Taurosa and Mari bear the same date according to the Era of Diocletian – year 623 (AD 906). The daily dates of the texts fall within roughly two weeks and a half, between 18 June and 4 July.

A seemingly strange form of the Greek preposition ἀπό, written ἀποϚ,¹⁹ is a clear proof of the close relation between the three tombstones; they are the sole attestations of this form in the corpus of Nubian epigraphy. Apart from the afore-mentioned, the form is also found in two ostraka from Debeira West.²⁰ The close connection between the three stelae proves, so far, to be beyond discussion.

It remains to comment on the dates of the epitaphs. The epitaph of Hellene is the first in which the Era of the Saracens was used. The designation of the Era, usually either written in full (ΣΑΡΑΚΕΝΩΝ or other orthographic variants) or abbreviated to ΣΑΡΑΚ, in this epitaph is abbreviated to just two letters ΣΑ. The use of this otherwise unattested form must have been caused by the lack of space: the text began with nicely incised big letters just becoming progressively smaller in the lower part of the stela. The date given in the last line is written virtually on the raised border of the tombstone, in much smaller letters than in the first line. The lack of space might have also been the reason for not including the Diocletianic date in the text, present in the two later epitaphs. The abbreviation used for the Hegira dates in these two epitaphs is a more common

¹⁹ The interchange of *o* and *ou* is not a common phenomenon in Greek texts from the late period, cf. F. T. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 1: *Phonology* [= *Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità* 55/1], Milano 1976, pp. 211–214, and the list of the examples therein. According to Gignac, the interchange of *o* and *ou* occurs rarely in the final position; it is much more often in the initial and middle positions. On the other hand, this phenomenon appears frequently in Coptic non-literary texts from Middle and especially Upper Egypt, cf. H. E. WINLOCK & W. E. CRUM, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes* 1, New York 1926, p. 240; P. E. KAHLE, *Bala'izab. Coptic Texts from Deir el-Bala'izab in Upper Egypt* 1, London 1954, p. 83. Interestingly, the form ἀποϚ appears several times in dating lemmata of Egyptian Coptic sources; moreover, in two examples the form introduces a Saracen date: A. VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d'Égypte*, 1: *Les colophons coptes des manuscrits sabidiqes*, fascicule 1: *Textes* [= *Bibliothèque de Muséon* 1], Louvaine 1929, nos. LIX and CXIII (B), dated to the end of the tenth century.

²⁰ See below, pp. 148–149.

form $\Sigma\text{Α}\text{Ρ}\text{Α}\text{Κ}$, suggesting that the dating according to the Era of the Saracens was not mechanically copied from the earlier tombstone of Hellene. On the other hand, however, the identical use of $\text{Α}\text{Π}\text{Ο}\text{Υ}$, right next to the correct form of the preposition, shows that the redactor could have been influenced by another source in which the analogous formula was used.

It is impossible to explicitly state whether the Era of Diocletian or the Era of the Hegira gives the correct date of demise. However, since the Era of Diocletian/the Martyrs was the most popular dating method in Christian Nubia, and certainly very well known even to ordinary citizens, it would seem logical to follow this system in the dating of the discussed texts as well. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the date was $\text{Α}\text{D}$ 906 or 907, all three stelae appear to have been made in the same year.

The fourth Sakinya tombstone, the epitaph of Petrosinta, daughter of Mišseta, is also made of terracotta. However, it differs from the three already presented tombstones not only physically (it is rather ovoid than rectangular, wider towards the bottom and round-topped) and palaeographically, but also textually. Although the epitaph begins with the words $\text{ΟΥ}\text{Λ}\ \text{Π}\text{Ε}\ \text{Π}\text{Η}\text{ΟΥ}\text{Τ}\text{Ε}$, it continues in a manner that has only one parallel among the Sakinya tombstones – the epitaph of Ioannes, a priest of the Church of Archangel Gabriel, son of Petekesare.²¹ One can also notice that the orthography, grammar, and syntax of the epitaph of Petrosinta are much worse than in the above-discussed texts. Another distinguishing feature is the writing of the dating formula, introduced by the forms $\text{Α}\text{Π}\text{Ο}\ \text{Δ}\text{Ι}\text{Ο}\text{Κ}\text{Λ}\text{Ι}\text{Τ}$ and $\Sigma\text{Α}\text{Ρ}\text{Α}\text{Γ}\text{Ε}\text{Ι}\text{Ν}\text{Ο}\Sigma$. All of the above points to the fact that this text could have originated from a different workshop.

As for the date of the epitaph of Petrosinta, some considerable problems arise. The dating formula reads as follows:

Π. 8–9: $\text{Μ}\text{Π}\text{Ε}\text{Ι}\text{Ε}\text{Ω}\text{Β}\text{Ω}\text{Τ}\ \text{Π}\text{Α}\text{Ω}\text{Π}\text{Ε}\ \text{Κ}$

Π. 15–17: $\text{Α}\text{Π}\text{Ο}\ \text{Δ}\text{Ι}\text{Ο}\text{Κ}\text{Λ}\text{Ι}\text{Τ}\ \text{Χ}\text{Λ}\text{Θ}\ \text{Φ}\text{Η}\text{Λ}\text{Ω}\text{Φ}\text{Ο}\text{Π}\text{Ε}\ \Sigma\text{Α}\text{Ρ}\text{Α}\text{Γ}\text{Ε}\text{Ι}\text{Ν}\text{Ο}\Sigma\ \text{Τ}\text{Ε}$.

(...) in the month of Pauni, (day) 20 (...) (in the year) from Diocletian 639, may it happen, (in the year from) the Saracens 305.

²¹ *MINA, Inscriptions*, no. 321.

The meaning of the two letters κι²² following the name of the month requires reconsidering. Togo Mina interpreted them as a numeral reading '20+10', giving the date of Pauni 30.²³ However, this interpretation is nonsensical, as such a writing of numerals was never used in antiquity. More likely, the first letter should be regarded as the numeral, and the *iota* with trema as a reading error for the Coptic article τ, connected with the following word ⲛⲓⲮⲬⲏ.²⁴ Provided the above reasoning is correct, the daily date would be Pauni 20 (14 June).

The annual dates should be calculated as follows:

- 639 from Diocletian = 29 August 922 to 29 August 923,²⁵
- AH 305 = 24 June 917 to 13 June 918.

Ever since the *editio princeps*, this six-year inconsistency has caused many problems. The reading of the Hegira date evolved from τϭ by Ugo Monneret de Villard,²⁶ through Togo Mina's τϭ (corrected to τϥ in the apparatus), to Walter Till's τϥ,²⁷ which, in fact, is the correct reading. However, the attempts to make the dates agree failed to succeed because, as Miles F. Laming Macadam rightly observed,²⁸ the only Hegira date that would fit year 639 from Diocletian is AH 311 (τϭⲁ). Unfortunately, neither the Diocletianic nor the Hegira date can be corrected so as to agree with each other.

No reasonable explanation or reconstruction of the date can be proposed. It can be suggested, though, that the Diocletianic date should be considered valid for this epitaph.

The exact provenance of the next four tombstones is unknown, but for all of them a Lower Nubian provenance can be safely assumed. The

²² MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 221, reads the first letter as κ, but compared with other *khis* and *kappas* in this inscription, the reading can be easily rejected.

²³ MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 320, commentary to l. 9.

²⁴ The above suggestion is owed to Jacques VAN DER VLIET, who also notes that such mistakes occur sometimes in Coptic manuscripts.

²⁵ Year 639 from Diocletian was a leap year, lasting one day longer.

²⁶ MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Sakinya*, no. 221.

²⁷ TILL, 'Die Veröffentlichungen' (cit. n. 13), p. 358.

²⁸ LAMING MACADAM, 'Inscriptions' (cit. n. 15), p. 47.

epitaph of Abraam, son of Eilnen,²⁹ the earliest in this group, is exceptional as this is the only stela in which a language other than Coptic was used. A clear division of the text can easily be noticed: the invocation of God and the prayer for the soul of the deceased is in Greek, whereas the personal data (the name of the deceased and the date of his death) is in Coptic. Such a composition suggests that Coptic was the more natural language at least for the redactor, if not for the deceased. The redactor used a standard formulaic Greek prayer, which he should have known by heart. This is indicated by the incorrect spelling and declining of some words. At the same time, the Coptic part is correct from both orthographical and grammatical points of view.

The dating lemma reads as follows:

Π. 12–14: ΦΑΜ ΚΒ ΣΑΡΑΚΗΝΟΣ ΣΥΛΑ ΔΙΟΚΛ ΧΚΘ

Ι. 18: ΝΟΥΨΟΟΥ ΝΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ.

(...) *on Phamenoth 22, (in the year from the) Saracens 291, (in the year from) Diocletian 629 (...), on Sunday.*

Two possible dates of Abraam's demise, based on the Eras of the Hegira and Diocletian, are 18 March AD 904 and 913, respectively, thus giving a nine-year discrepancy. From the palaeographical point of view, neither

²⁹ The object is stored in the Staatliche Museen, Neues Museum, Berlin, inv. no. 13716. Editions: W. WEIBRODT, 'Ein aegyptischer christlicher Grabstein mit Inschrift aus der griechischen Liturgie im Königlichen Lyceum Hosianum zu Braunsberg und ähnliche Denkmäler in auswärtigen Museen', erster Teil: *Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen am Königlichen Lyceum Hosianum zu Braunsberg, Winter-Semester 1905/6*, zweiter Teil: *Sommer-Semester 1909*, p. 17, no. 10; G. LEFEBVRE, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte*, Le Caire 1907, no. 647; H. LECLERCQ, 'Égypte', [in:] *DACL 1/I*, Paris 1921, p. 2492; Maria Grazia TIBILETTI BRUNO, *Iscrizioni nubiane*, Pavia 1964, no. 22; *SBKopt.* 1 734. Mentioned: V. GRUMEL, 'Notations chronologiques de plusieurs inscriptions chrétiennes d'Égypte et de Nubie', *Byzantion* 35 (1965), p. 89; A. ŁAJTAR, 'Terracotta funerary stela of the monk Ioannes from Old Dongola', [in:] S. JAKOBIELSKI & P. O. SCHOLZ (eds.), *Dongola-Studien. 35 Jahre polnischer Forschungen im Zentrum des makuritischen Reiches [= Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica 7]*, Warsaw 2001, p. 332; MACCOULL & WORP, 'The Era of the Martyrs' (cit. n. 10), p. 395; *CSBE*², p. 78, with n. 71.

the Hegira nor the Diocletianic date can be corrected so as to make the dates agree.

Until the article by Venance Grumel in 1965, all the editors followed the Diocletianic year in the dating of the text. The French scholar first paid attention to the last element of the date – the day of the week. He has shown that it was Sunday on 18 March AD 904 (the Saracen date) and Thursday on 18 March AD 913 (the Diocletianic date).³⁰ Therefore, he accepted the Hegira date as the correct one.

However, another possibility can be considered, as such a wide discrepancy between the dates may not be accidental. This miscalculation of the dates may be due to the redactor's only vague knowledge of the Era of the Saracens, mistakenly taking it for a solar calendar, and its starting point in AD 622. The dates AD 622, the starting year of the Era, and 291, which stands in the text, when added up give the expected numeral 913.

Some Egyptian documents of a fiscal character in both Greek-Arabic³¹ and Arabic³² seem to confirm the above hypothesis. In those texts Hegira dates treated as regular solar years appear as a means of dating, and in those cases AH I was counted from 15 July AD 622 until 14 July AD 623. The Arabs seem to have been using the lunar calendar for the dating purposes alone, and for the reckoning of tax-years the solar year was employed.³³ This solar year is introduced in Arabic texts by the word *haragiya*, meaning 'land-tax',³⁴ whereas in the Greek parts of Greek-Arabic documents the date is devoid of any designation. Such practice seems reasonable from the Arab administration's point of view, as it must have been difficult to introduce the ever-moving lunar calendar in yearly calculations of ground taxes in the country where the whole economy was based on the solar year.³⁵ Those Egyptian documents are evidence of the phenomenon,

³⁰ GRUMEL, 'Notations' (cit. n. 29), p. 89.

³¹ For a list, see WÖRZ, 'Hegira years' (cit. n. 6), p. 114.

³² W. DIEM, *Eine arabische Kaufurkunde von 1024 n. Chr. aus Ägypten* [= *Schriften der Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung* 16], Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 23–28.

³³ L. CASSON, 'Tax-collection problems in early Arab Egypt', *TAPA* 69 (1938), pp. 275–279.

³⁴ A. GROHMANN, *Arabische Chronologie* [= *HdO* 1.2,1], Leiden – Köln 1966, p. 30.

³⁵ For the discussion of the efforts undertaken by the Arab administration of Egypt in

but, being of a very specific and specialised character, they can hardly be regarded as analogous to the discussed epitaph. Unfortunately, no examples are attested of grave stelae dated in the same way.

Attractive as it may appear, the above hypothesis still does not solve all the problems with the dating of the epitaph, as the day of the week stands in disagreement with the remaining elements of the date. No reasonable explanation can be proposed that would make all four elements of the dating formula agree.

Some premises allow regarding two further epitaphs, the one of Eisak³⁶ and the one of Mina,³⁷ as a homogeneous group. Firstly, Ludwig Borchardt bought them both at the same time in Lower Nubia.³⁸ Secondly, their physical appearance is quite similar: they are both crudely executed on irregularly hewn sandstone slabs; the edges of both tombstones are slightly raised forming the epigraphic fields. Thirdly, the palaeography of the texts also indicates their close connection: the letters are rather roughly carved, which points to the lapicides' lack of skills; the identical shape of *rbo*³⁹ in both epitaphs is otherwise unattested in Nubian epigraphy. Fourthly, in both epitaphs the identical formula is used and similar grammatical and orthographic mistakes occur (especially problems with verbal forms). Last

order to adjust the Hegira year to the solar tax-year, see DIEM, *Eine arabische Kaufurkunde* (cit. n. 32), pp. 23–28.

³⁶ The object was once stored in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin, inv. no. 9995, but has been missing since World War II (the information owed to Gabriele MIETKE, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin, who has kindly sent an archive photograph of the stela). Edition: Maria CRAMER, 'Drei koptische Grabsteine aus Unternubien', *ZNTW* 37 (1939), pp. 21–23.

³⁷ The object was once stored in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin, inv. no. 9941, but has been moved to the Bode Museum, Berlin, the same inventory number (the information owed to Gabriele MIETKE, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin, who has kindly sent an archive photograph of the stela). Jacques VAN DER VLIET informs that the object bears the (old) number: Ägyptisches Museum No. 13718. Edition: CRAMER, 'Drei Grabsteine' (cit. n. 36), pp. 21–23. Mentioned: MACCOULL & WÖRZ, 'The Era of the Martyrs' (cit. n. 10), p. 397; *CSBE*², p. 80, with n. 81.

³⁸ CRAMER, 'Drei Grabsteine' (cit. n. 36), p. 20.

³⁹ The vertical stroke turns sharply right and up at the bottom, forming a kind of hook.

but not least, both stelae were prepared for monks; curiously enough, the word ‘brother, monk’ was written CAN , a form that appears to be attested nowhere else in the corpus of the Coptic Nubian epigraphy.⁴⁰ All the above evidence proves beyond doubt that the two stelae come from the same monastic cemetery. Moreover, they most probably were prepared in the same (monastic) workshop, but not by the same craftsman, the latter assumption being based on some palaeographic differences.

The dating lemmata of the tombstones read as follows:

– Epitaph of Eisak

l. 8: $\text{C}\alpha\text{P}\alpha\text{K}\text{I}\text{N}\text{O}\text{C}\ \tau\text{O}$

(...) (*in the year from*) *the Saracens 370* (...);

– Epitaph of Mina

ll. 6–8: $\alpha\text{P}\omega\ \Delta\text{I}\text{O}\text{K}\lambda\text{I}\text{C}\ \chi\text{P}\text{H}\ \text{C}\alpha\text{P}\alpha\text{K}\text{N}\text{O}\text{C}\ \tau\ \text{H}$

l. 10: $\epsilon\text{P}\epsilon\phi\ \text{I}$

(...) (*in the year*) *from Diocletian 688*, (*in the year from*) *the Saracens 3[.]8*, (...) (*in the month of*) *Epeiph 10* (...).

The dating of the first tombstone poses hardly any problem,⁴¹ as the Era of the Hegira is the only chronological system used in the text: $\text{AH}\ 370$ lasted approximately from 17 July AD 980 until 6 July AD 981.

As for the other tombstone, the Diocletianic year and the daily date allow dating Mina’s demise to 4 July AD 972. The reading of the Saracen year is uncertain. The *editor princeps* proposed to read the middle sign as an

⁴⁰ This word appears also as a graffito scratched next to a depiction of a boat in one of the houses in Debeira West (P. L. SHINNIE & Margaret SHINNIE, *Debeira West. A Medieval Nubian Town*, Warminster 1978, fig. 8), but its context and meaning are unknown.

⁴¹ CRAMER, ‘Drei Grabsteine’ (cit. n. 36), p. 22, notes that *gamma* in the numeral in l. 8 is uncertain. Indeed, some traces are visible on the photograph of the object, but it cannot be asserted whether they form a letter or are just damage to the stone.

ο (ΓΟΗ, ΑΗ 378 = 21 April AD 988–10 April AD 989);⁴² Bagnall and Worp, on the other hand, suggest that the reading could be corrected to ΤΞΒ (ΑΗ 362 = 12 October AD 972–1 October AD 973).⁴³ However, neither of these readings can be verified with the photograph, as the text is obliterated in the place of the middle sign. Although both propositions disagree with the Diocletianic date, the chronological proximity of the two tombstones allows regarding all three dates as equally probable, falling as they do within roughly twenty years in the 970s and 980s.

The next tombstone to be discussed is the epitaph of an unknown provenance, belonging to one Elisabeth. In 1925 Hermann Junker listed this inscription among the Lower Nubian tombstones in the possession of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, no information is available concerning the circumstances of the acquisition of the stela.

The dating lemma reads as follows:

Π. 5–7: ΠΑΧΩΝ C III Δ. C CΑΡΑΚΥ ΤΞC

(...) *Pachon 6, the 6th indiction, (in the year from) the Saracens 366* (...).

The following interpretation of the date depends on two corrections introduced to the *editio princeps*. Firstly, the reading ΠΑΧΩΝC has been corrected to ΠΑΧΩΝ C, as the former leaves the month devoid of a numeral, an indispensable thing in the commemoration of the deceased. In the corpus of Nubian funerary epigraphy there are only several stelae that lack a numeral after the month, but in most cases this has been caused by damage to the

⁴² CRAMER, 'Drei Grabsteine' (cit. n. 36), p. 21.

⁴³ CSBE², p. 80, with n. 81. The letter Η is clearly visible on the stone, but the visual similarity of this letter to a κ allows for such a correction of the last sign.

⁴⁴ The object had once been stored in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin, inv. no. 13843, but was destroyed during World War II (the information owed to Olivia ZORN, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, who has kindly sent an archive photograph of the stela). Edition: CRAMER, 'Drei Grabsteine' (cit. n. 36), p. 20. Mentioned: H. JUNKER, 'Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens', ZÄS 60 (1925), *passim*, p. 132 (the misread dating lemma).

objects. Moreover, such form of the name of this month is not attested in Nubian Coptic epigraphy; the word is written either in its Greek form ΠΑΧΩΝ or in two Coptic variants, ΠΑΣΑΝC or ΠΑΩΩΝC.⁴⁵

Secondly, an important correction can be introduced to the Saracen year. Maria Cramer interpreted the middle sign in this numeral as an *omikron* with a horizontal stroke above. From a palaeographical point of view, this sign can also be read as a *ksi*, in which the supralinear stroke is an integral part of the letter in its typical form.⁴⁶ The lack of the lower curved part of a typical *ksi* can be explained in terms of the stonecutter's misunderstanding of the text prepared by the redactor: the lower part of the *ksi* could have been confused with a stroke above a *nomen sacrum* one line below.

Thus, Elisabeth died on 1 May AD 977. This date is also the beginning of the sixth indiction (extant on the stone)⁴⁷ in one of the variants used in Egypt.⁴⁸ Provided the above interpretation is correct, the tombstone is the only grave stela in the discussed group where all the dating elements coincide perfectly.

The epitaph of Petrone, daughter of Kettiote?, is the latest tombstone in the discussed group. It was found in Qasr Ibrim, presumably on Cemetery 193.⁴⁹ Its dating lemma reads as follows:

⁴⁵ In Coptic texts from Egypt the form ΠΑΧΩΝC occurs occasionally. The only attestations of the form written with *omega* from both Egypt and Nubia are: MINA, *Inscriptions*, no. 15, l. 11 (epitaph of a woman Iochabeli from Sakinya, which, by the way, could be corrected in the same way as the discussed text), and *CPR* IV 112.d, l. 1. Another possible explanation is that the form ΠΑΧΩΝC is a mixture of Greek and Coptic traditions.

⁴⁶ Cf., e.g., *I. Khartoum Copt.* 4, l. 18; 18, l. 8.

⁴⁷ The stela is the only one from the discussed group that contains an indiction date, a fact that is quite surprising as this chronological system was fairly popular in Nubia until the tenth century. It is also worth emphasising that the epitaph of Elisabeth is the latest precisely dated use of indiction in Nubia. It is worthwhile to notice that the shape of *stigmata* in both the indiction and the Hegira dates is characteristic of a cursive script; these so-called 'epect numbers' occur occasionally in late Coptic Egyptian epigraphy (Jacques VAN DER VLIET's personal communication) and are otherwise unattested in Nubia.

⁴⁸ For different variants of Egyptian indictions, see *CSBE*², pp. 22 ff, 127–128.

⁴⁹ The object had once been stored in the University Museum in Leipzig, inv. no. 688,

II. IO-II: ΘΩΘ : [] ΜΟΥ ΣΑΡΑΚ Υ[]

(...) (*in the month of*) *Thoth* [...], ... (*in the year from*) *the Saracens* 4[...] (...).

Unfortunately, a large lacuna in the central part of the stela does not allow the deciphering of the numerals depicting either the day of the month or the Hegira year; the latter might have consisted of at least two digits. If *ypsilon* is the correct reading, the epitaph should be dated sometime between 1 Muharram AH 401 (15 August AD 1010) and 29 Dhu el-Hijja AH 499 (1 September AD 1106).

The word ΜΟΥ standing just before the Hegira date is puzzling; Tonio S. Richter has noticed that the preposition ΑΠΟ should be expected in this place, which, as the examples from Sakinya have already proven, could have been written ΑΠΟΥ. However, since the language of this epitaph is virtually flawless, such a correction should rather be discarded. On the other hand, the word strongly resembles what is written in line 7 of the above-discussed epitaph of Eisak, especially that in both cases it is found right before the designation of the Hegira year. However, the state of preservation of both objects makes it impossible to assert whether this is the same word.

During the excavations on the site of Debeira West an assemblage of ostraka was found, comprising thirteen Coptic texts, one Greek, and four Arabic.⁵⁰ They are for the most part very badly preserved and hardly understandable, but, where clear, they seem to be of an economic character (apart from the ostrakon containing a fragment of the alphabet). The homogeneity of the whole assemblage is proven by the fact that

but was destroyed during World War II. Mentioned: JUNKER, 'Die christlichen Grabsteine' (cit. n. 44), pp. 123, 129, 131, 132-133; T. S. RICHTER, 'Die neun Stelen Ägyptisches Museum der Universität Leipzig inv.-nr. 680-688 mit der Herkunftsangabe Qasr Ibrim', [in:] S. EMMEL, M. KRAUSE, S. G. RICHTER & Sofia SCHATEN (eds.), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.-26. Juli 1996*, Wiesbaden 1999, pp. 295-304. The publication of the stela (together with other Leipzig tombstones) is in preparation by Tonio Sebastian RICHTER, who has kindly sent his transcription of the text and an archive photograph of the object.

⁵⁰ SHINNIE & SHINNIE, *Debeira West* (cit. n. 40), Warminster 1978, pp. 95-101.

some names are repeated in different texts, e.g., Joseph, Tobias, Abraham the Christian appear twice; Muhammad occurs in three ostraka.

Two of the Coptic ostraka have preserved the dates according to the Era of the Hegira:⁵¹

– doc. no. 181

l. 2: ΑΠΟΥ ΣΑΡΚΗ ΤΟ

(...) (*in the year*) *from the Saracens* 370 (...);

– doc. no. 411

l. 3: [ΑΠ]ΟΥ ΣΑΡΑΚ[ΗΝΩΝ

(...) (*in the year*) *from the Saracens* ...

In both ostraka the Hegira year is introduced by the preposition *απου*, as also in the case of the three Sakinya stelae.⁵² Only in the first ostrakon is the numeral preserved; the Hegira year 370 lasted approximately from 17 July AD 980 until 6 July AD 981. This ostrakon is the only text in the group that contains an annual date, basing on which the whole assemblage can be dated to the end of the tenth century.

The last two texts to be discussed in this paper are documents *sensu stricto*. They were both found during the excavations on the site of Qasr Ibrim. Chronologically earlier is a fragment (upper right corner) of a Coptic document of an unknown character, beginning with the so-called ‘official Nubian protocol’ (excavation no. 72-10-24/13).⁵³ Besides the

⁵¹ SHINNIE, SHINNIE, *Debeira West* (cit. n. 40), no. 181, p. 97, pl. LII; no. 411, p. 100, pl. LIII.

⁵² See above, pp. 138–139.

⁵³ The object is stored in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, unknown inventory number. Edition: J. M. PLUMLEY, ‘A Coptic precursor of a medieval Nubian protocol’, *Sudan Texts Bul-*

DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the discussion two things should be stated: firstly, all the discussed documents were prepared by and/or belonged to Christians, and secondly, they all seem to have been produced by indigenous Makurian citizens. These statements are proven by the contents of the texts, onomastics, occasional use of Greek, and a rather weak command of Coptic by their authors/redactors. Last but not least, the discrepancies in the dates also point indirectly to the Nubian provenance of the objects; virtually each tombstone presents some difficulties in this respect. By contrast, analogous material from Egypt shows that the Egyptians could calculate Hegira dates correctly.⁵⁹ These inconsistencies in the dates of the Nubian grave stelae prove that the Era of the Saracens was used by persons not accustomed to this chronological system or even without understanding its nature (as might be the case with the epitaph of Abraam, son of Eilnen), *ergo* they must have been non-Egyptians.

The material presented here consists of three different groups (tombstones, ostraka, and official documents) and it is hard to speak of it as a whole. In most cases, it is also impossible to find particular reasons that led the Christian authors of the texts to use the Islamic years reckoning.⁶⁰ However, three very important features connect the documents under discussion.

First of all, they were all written in Coptic. Admittedly, Greek was also used in two texts (the epitaph of Abraam, son of Eilnen and the letter of King Moise Georgios), but their main parts were composed in Coptic.⁶¹ Since both Coptic and the Era of the Saracens were adopted in Nubia

⁵⁹ In 9 out of 11 Egyptian grave stelae the double dates coincide perfectly: Căcilia WIETHEGER, *Das Jeremias-Kloster zu Saqqara unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inschriften*, Altenberge 1992, nos. 85, 86, 194; G. WAGNER & R.-G. COQUIN, 'Stèles grecques et coptes d'Égypte', *BIFAO* 70 (1971), p. 165, no. 2; LEFEBVRE, *Recueil des inscriptions* (cit. n. 29), no. 541; *SBKopt.* I 744, 746, 486; *SBKopt.* II 1095.

⁶⁰ The Era of the Saracens also appears in several epitaphs of monks from the Monastery of St Jeremiah in Sakkara (WIETHEGER, *Das Jeremias-Kloster* [cit. n. 59], p. 198).

⁶¹ See above, pp. 142 and 151.

from Egypt,⁶² it can hardly be surprising that the two phenomena appear side by side. As has been pointed out in the introduction to the present paper, Coptic documents from Egypt were sometimes dated according to the Era of the Hegira; apparently, this practice spread also in Makuria. The complete absence of this dating method in Greek Nubian sources seems to confirm the above assumption; as this language was presumably adopted in Nubia from Byzantium during the official Christianisation, it was less likely to be associated with non-Christian values.

Secondly, all the texts come from the northern part of Makuria, the territory of the former Kingdom of Nobadia. The southernmost site is Debeira West, less than 50 km north of the Second Cataract, where the two ostraka were found. Two other sites can be named: Qasr Ibrim, where the epitaph of Petrone and the two official documents were found; and Sakinya, north of Arminna, the place of origin of four tombstones. The exact findspot of the remaining four epitaphs is unknown, but the editors suggest Lower Nubia as their most probable provenance.

Last but not least, virtually all of the discussed texts are dated to the tenth century, three exceptions being the epitaph of Petrone (but its date is highly uncertain), and the two official documents from Qasr Ibrim, dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Very little is known about Makurian political history in the tenth century. The only firm historical data concerning Egyptian-Makurian contacts come from Arab historians, who report that in the mid-tenth century the Makurian army raided and occupied the Oases and Upper Egypt.⁶³ The change of the ruling dynasty in Egypt from Ikhshidids to Fatimids in AD 969 introduced a period of a relatively peaceful coexistence between the two countries.⁶⁴ However, archaeological finds from

⁶² The Muslim era could have been adopted in the Kingdom of Makuria from two possible directions: Egypt and the Red Sea Mountains. The latter area was, indeed, inhabited by Arab tribes, but their contacts with the Nile valley were rather limited; therefore, Egypt should be considered the only possible source of influences.

⁶³ Cf., e.g., a fragment of Maqriẓi's *Khitat*, translation in: G. VANTINI, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, Heidelberg – Warsaw 1975, p. 634.

⁶⁴ U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Storia della Nubia cristiana* [= *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 118], Roma 1938, pp. 122–128.

Lower Nubia allow the supposition that such coexistence had already been typical since at least the beginning of the tenth century, seemingly uninterrupted by temporary conflicts. A number of Arabic grave stelae come from the northern part of Makuria and these are dated between the tenth and twelfth centuries.⁶⁵ The occurrence of this material on such sites as Tafa, Kalabsha, Arminna, or Derr points to the fact that the Muslim presence (undoubtedly of Egyptian origin) in Lower Nubia was not limited to mere trade relations – it must have been a form of settlement. On the other hand, one must not forget that the Makurians also marked their presence in Egypt. A few grave stelae of Nubians buried on the cemetery of Deir Anba Hadra (St Simeon Monastery),⁶⁶ the dipinto from the same monastery dated according to the regnal year of the Makurian king Zacharias,⁶⁷ an eleventh-century Coptic letter from Qasr Ibrim showing that Nubians were travelling through Egypt for commercial purposes;⁶⁸ they all demonstrate that this was not only a military presence, as Arabic historical sources show, but it had a wider, cultural aspect. The use of the Saracen Era in the non-Arabic documents from Nubia perfectly coincides with the phenomenon of these mutual Egyptian-Makurian ‘penetrations’, testifying at the same time to the influence the Muslim culture exerted on the local Nubian population.⁶⁹

A further proof of lively contacts between the two neighbouring states is provided by the finds from Debeira West. One cannot doubt that the man bearing the name Muhammad, appearing several times in ostraka, was a Muslim. The use of Coptic, on the other hand, clearly points to his Egyptian provenance. The names of other persons appearing in these

⁶⁵ Cf. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Storia* (cit. n. 64), p. 118.

⁶⁶ *SBKopt.* 1 504, 525, 532, 537, 547, 548, 625.

⁶⁷ J. H. F. DIJKSTRA & J. VAN DER VLIET, ‘In year one of King Zachari». Evidence of a new Nubian king from the Monastery of St. Simeon at Aswan’, *BzS* 8 (2003), pp. 31–39.

⁶⁸ The document is currently being studied by Joost HAGEN; the information owed to Jacques VAN DER VLIET.

⁶⁹ The presence of a Muslim community is further proven by the discovery of a huge amount of Arabic documents in Qasr Ibrim (they are second in number after purely Old Nubian texts); cf. ADAMS, *Qasr Ibrim* (cit. n. 57), p. 223.

documents could have belonged to both Egyptians and Nubians. However, if the texts had pertained to an internal Egyptian affair, they most probably would have been written in Arabic, as in the case of the release of a slave, dated to the same period as the ostraka.⁷⁰ It is important to notice that in one of the ostraka an unknown sum of money is mentioned.⁷¹ This too can be regarded as a sign of the Egyptian influence, as a monetary economy was seemingly unknown (or even forbidden) in Makuria.⁷² These facts, together with the economic character of the ostraka from Debeira, corroborate the existence of the Egyptian-Nubian trade in tenth-century Lower Nubia. Moreover, the texts show that Coptic was a real *lingua franca*, in which both sides could communicate, although their command of this language was rather poor. The presence of Arabic graffiti, ostraka, and tombstones in Debeira⁷³ and in nearby Komangana⁷⁴ allows the supposition that this town was something of a trading centre, where Egyptians were living side by side with Nubians.

⁷⁰ A. GROHMANN, 'Arabische Papyri aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin', *Der Islam* 22 (1935), pp. 19–30.

⁷¹ SHINNIE, SHINNIE, *Debeira West* (cit. n. 40), p. 96, no. 40, l. 6.

⁷² See the account of the tenth-century Arab traveller Ibn Selim el-Aswani, quoted by Maqrizi in the fifteenth century, translation in: J. K. BURCKHARDT, *Travels in Nubia*, London 1819, p. 495; VANTINI, *Oriental Sources* (cit. n. 63), p. 604; commentary in: G. TROUPEAU, 'La description de la Nubie d'al-Aswani', *Arabica* 1 (1954), pp. 276–288 (*non vidi*). There exist more examples of Coptic Nubian documents in which gold coins (ⲉⲃⲟⲕⲟⲩⲧⲏⲛⲟⲓ) are attested, all of them coming from northern Nubia: *P. Lond. Copt.* 447–449, 453; J. KRALL, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Blemyer und Nubier* [= *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, philosophisch-historische Classe* XLVI], Wien 1898, pp. 16–17. An unpublished Coptic document from Qasr Ibrim mentions gold coins of el-Hakim; it is dated to the beginning of the eleventh century (J. L. HAGEN, 'Districts, towns and other locations of medieval Nubia and Egypt, mentioned in the Coptic and Old Nubian texts from Qasr Ibrim', *Sudan & Nubia* 13 [2009], p. 117).

⁷³ SHINNIE & SHINNIE, *Debeira West* (cit. n. 40), pp. 6, 9, 11.

⁷⁴ T. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH, 'Preliminary report of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition. Archaeological investigations between Faras and Gamai, November 1962–March 1963', *Kush* 12 (1964), p. 39; IDEM, 'The inscriptions', [in:] IDEM (ed.), *Late Nubian Cemeteries* [= *The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia* 6], Solna 1982, pp. 50–55, pls. 107–108.

The two official documents from Qasr Ibrim fulfill two out of three criteria established for the whole group (language and geography), but the use of the Hegira dates in these two cases should be explained in political rather than in sociocultural terms. This is clearly visible in the case of the letter from the Makurian king to the Coptic patriarch in Egypt, a country where the Era of the Saracens was the official chronological system. The fact that it was used along with two purely Christian ways of dating (the Era from the Creation of the World and the Era from the Birth of Christ)⁷⁵ creates an impression of the Makurians trying to ‘run with the hare (Coptic patriarchate) and hunt with the hounds (Ayyubid government)’.

Unfortunately, we do not know the contents of the second text, yet the mere presence of the ‘official Nubian protocol’ indicates that the document was issued by the chancery of a Makurian official.⁷⁶ What else could have been the reason to use the Era of the Saracens, otherwise unattested in such context and virtually unknown in Makuria, if not the fact that the document must have been addressed to an Egyptian, or an Egyptian must have been a part of the deed.

These two texts show that the scribes in Makurian chanceries (especially the chancery of the eparch, an official responsible for the foreign affairs) knew the Era of the Saracens and were able to use this system correctly, unlike ordinary citizens, whose epitaphs show considerable inconsistencies in the calculations of the dates.

While the appearance of the Islamic years reckoning in the ostraka and official documents is justifiable, the phenomenon is more difficult to

⁷⁵ The use of the Era of the Hegira together with the Diocletianic/Martyrs Era is nothing unusual in Egypt.

⁷⁶ A considerable number of documents in both Coptic and Old Nubian opening with this formula confirm this statement. For Coptic texts, see KRALL, *Beiträge* (cit. n. 72), pp. 16–17; *P. Lond. Copt.* 449, 450, and possibly 451; J. L. HAGEN, ‘«A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid». Progress report on the Coptic manuscripts from Qasr Ibrim’, [in:] W. GODLEWSKI & A. ŁAJTAR (eds.), *Between the Cataracts. Proceedings of the 11th Conference for Nubian Studies, Warsaw University, 27 August–2 September 2006* II [= *PAM Supplement Series* 2.2], to be published in 2010, pp. 719–728. For Old Nubian texts, see G. M. BROWNE, *Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim* II [= *Egypt Exploration Society. Texts from Excavations* 10], London 1989; IDEM, *Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim* III [= *Egypt Exploration Society. Texts from Excavations* 12], London 1991.

understand in the case of the grave stelae. There can be no doubt that the use of the Hegira dates in the Nubian epitaphs was devoid of any Islamic context. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the Era was adopted simply as another way of counting years. A few examples of Coptic epitaphs of monks from the St Jeremiah Monastery in Sakkara⁷⁷ show that already in ninth-century Egypt the Era of the Saracens began to be treated as a mere chronological system, devoid of its religious meaning. The Nubian redactors most probably had but a vague knowledge of its origins and nature and thus were not prejudiced against an idea that was culturally and religiously foreign.

In this context it is worthwhile to compare the designations for Hegira dates used in Egypt and Nubia. A brief survey of Egyptian sources⁷⁸ has revealed that in the eighth–ninth century designations involving the word ἔτους were in almost exclusive use, in three different versions: κατ' Ἀραβας ἔτους, ἔτους Σαρακηνῶν, and simply ἔτους.⁷⁹ Only the last two forms survived until the tenth–eleventh century, but their popularity decreased radically; the most popular designations in Coptic became those with the name ΣΑΡΑΚΗΝΩΝ (in different forms) standing on its own. This situation is reflected, to some extent, in Nubia. As all the Nubian attestations are later than the ninth century, it is unsurprising that one does not find the use of the forms with εΤΟΥΣ, but, instead, the self-standing name ΣΑΡΑΚΗΝΩΝ occurs frequently. Equally popular in Nubia are the designations using the preposition ΑΠΟ. It is remarkable that only in two Egyptian attestations⁸⁰ of Saracen dates does this preposition appear, moreover in the form ΑΠΟΥ. The similarity is all the more striking since in both cases a Diocletianic date precedes, introduced by the regular form ΑΠΟ, just as in the Nubian examples. Both attestations are literary manuscripts coming from the Esna–Edfu region and both are dated to far later periods than the first Nubian occurrence of this form in

⁷⁷ WIETHEGER, *Das Jeremias-Kloster* (cit. n. 59), p. 198.

⁷⁸ The survey has been carried out by the author on the basis of the lists included in WÖRNER, 'Hegira years' (cit. n. 6), pp. 109–113, and CSBE², pp. 68–86.

⁷⁹ WÖRNER, 'Hegira years' (cit. n. 6), p. 114.

⁸⁰ See above, n. 19.

AD 906/7. The evidence points to Nubia as the source of this form of designation. However, despite the Nubians' inventiveness and creativity in different fields, it seems rather impossible that this form was their original idea. The interchange of σ and $\sigma\gamma$ was an uncommon phenomenon in the middle Nile Valley;⁸¹ thus one can suppose the redactor of the Sakinya inscriptions would have used the preposition in its regular form, especially that he used it in Diocletianic dates, unless he had been influenced by another source. As this phonetic phenomenon was fairly popular in Upper Egypt, it is probable that the inspiration came from this very direction. The presence of the preposition in an identical context in the two codices from the Esna–Edfu area could suggest the monastic scriptoria in these two towns as a more precise source of influence, inspiring not only the use of this curious prepositional form but also the very idea of introducing Hegira dates in Nubian texts.⁸²

Further proof, though far later, to the above statement is delivered by codex BL Or. 6799, containing *The Discourse on the Cross* by Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, written in Sahidic Coptic,⁸³ reportedly discovered in the ruins of a monastery near Edfu.⁸⁴ The colophon of the manuscript (fol. 40a and b) contains all the necessary information, namely the date, the names of the copyist and the founder (unfortunately, not preserved in full), and the codex's place of destination. The dating formula consists of three elements: Pauni 15, year 769 from the Martyrs, and AH 448. The annual date is calculated to 9 June of either AD 1053 or 1056 according to the Eras of the Martyrs and the Hegira, respectively.⁸⁵ The manuscript, ordered by

⁸¹ See above, n. 19.

⁸² It would be interesting to check whether any other similarities exist between Nubian and southern Upper Egyptian Coptic.

⁸³ *Editio princeps*: E. A. W. BUDGE, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1915, pp. XL–XLVII (description), CI–CXIII (summary), 184–230 (Coptic text), 762–808 (translation), pls. IX–XII. Mentioned: F. LL. GRIFFITH, *The Nubian Texts of the Christian Period*, Berlin 1913, p. 4. Colophon: LANTSCHOOT, *Recueil des colophons* (cit. n. 19), no. CXXI, pp. 216–218, commentary on pp. 85–86; B. LAYTON, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired since the Year 1906*, London 1987, no. 83, pp. 89–90.

⁸⁴ For the history of the collection, see LAYTON, *Catalogue* (cit. n. 83), pp. xxvi–xxx.

⁸⁵ Such a big discrepancy is a rather strange phenomenon in Egypt, where scribes or

a 'son of Mashenka, from the nome of Pachoras' for 'the Church of the Cross in Serra' (Lower Nubia), was copied by one Merkure, son of Pameos. The clearly Egyptian name of the copyist's father is an important premise concerning the provenance of the codex. The phrase reading 'Christ being king over us', appearing as the last element of the dating formula, also points to the Egyptian provenance of the manuscript.⁸⁶ As Coptic ecclesiastical sources from Egypt show, this phrase was used in order to avoid mentioning Muslim rulers. In Nubia the use of such a statement was obviously pointless and normally the phrase would have been replaced with a real dating formula, containing the name of the king and his regnal year. Thus, the codex, ordered by a Nubian for a Nubian church, seems to have been written by an Egyptian scribe. Provided this assumption is true, the manuscript would be a perfect witness to the process of 'the migration of ideas' without the necessity of direct contact between the societies.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to point an exact and only one way of the Makurians becoming acquainted with the new dating system. The propositions discussed above certainly do not exhaust the list of possibilities. In fact, reasons could have been particular in each case. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasised that the appearance of the Era of the Saracens in Nubia coincides with a period of intensive Egyptian–Makurian contacts on the borderlands, dating from the beginning of the tenth century. The use of this chronological system can thus be regarded as a sign of Egyptian influence

redactors usually did not have problems with correct dates reckoning. But this seems to pertain only to official documents and tombstones; the mistakes in dates occur much more frequently in Coptic literary manuscripts.

⁸⁶ J. VAN DER VLIET, '«In a robe of gold»: Status, magic and politics on inscribed Christian textiles from Egypt', [in:] Cäcilia FLUCK & Gisela HELMECKE (eds.), *Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Egypt* [= *Studies in Textile and Costume History* 4], Leiden – Boston 2006, p. 48, n. 110.

on traditional Nubian culture.⁸⁷ One might also notice that the use of Sahidic Coptic in the discussed documents is another element of the picture of the lively contacts between the two cultures. This influence left its mark not only upon the upper classes of the society, such as the officials and tradesmen, but also upon ordinary citizens, as is proven by the presence of the Era in the grave stelae.

The chronological, linguistic and topographic proximity of the discussed objects proves beyond doubt that the texts were subject to the same cultural process, forming the cultural landscape of Lower Nubia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. During these two hundred years the contacts between the two neighbours, Egypt and Makuria, witnessed a rare period of relative peace. This situation opened the way for the cultural intermingling between Muslim Egyptians and Christian Nubians. The use of the Era of the Hegira in the non-Arabic documents from Lower Nubia is just one element of this process.⁸⁸

Grzegorz Ochała

ul. Ząbkowska 4/11

03-735 Warszawa

POLAND

g.ochala@gmail.com

⁸⁷ One must not forget that such an influence could work in both directions. This can be illustrated, for example, by the fact that the term 'the Era of the Martyrs' seems to have been coined in Nubia in the eighth century (*J. Khartoum Greek* 20, and p. xxv) and then spread to Egypt.

⁸⁸ For the evidence and discussion on the Arab presence in Lower Nubia, see, D. A. WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile*, London 2002, pp. 106–107.