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Gerald Michael Browne

AN OLD NUBIAN INSCRIPTION FROM BANGANARTI CHURCH*

THE INSCRIPTION IS FOUND on the eastern wall of Room 21 of the Upper Church at Baganarti.¹ It begins 11 cm from the north-eastern corner of the room and runs across the wall to the south-eastern corner. On the right-hand side, the last 6–8 letters of each line and all of line 4 were—

* Gerald Michael Browne read the inscription from a photograph taken after the 2003 season. The photograph did not show the endings of lines, which were at that time covered with mud mortar reinforcing the corner of the room (see below). Before his untimely death in 2004, Browne managed to prepare a preliminary publication consisting of the reading, translation and grammatical commentary. Adam Łajtar was able to check Browne's original reading and to supplement it on the right-hand side after the mud mortar had been removed during the 2005 season. He also added the general remarks that precede Browne's original text.

Following abbreviations have been used throughout: BROWNE, *Dictionary* = G. M. BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary* [= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 556, *Subsidia* 90], Leuven 1996; BROWNE, *Grammar* = G. M. BROWNE, *Old Nubian Grammar*, Lincom Europa 2002; IN = *Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim*, Vol. I by J. M. PLUMLEY and G. M. Browne [= *Texts from Excavations* 9], London 1988; vol. II by G. M. BROWNE [= *Texts from Excavations* 10], London 1989; vol. III by G. M. BROWNE [= *Texts from Excavations* 12], London 1991.

¹ On excavations at Baganarti, see B. ŻURAWSKI, *Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and Ez-Zuma* [= *Nubia II, Southern Dongola Reach Survey* 1], Warszawa 2003, pp. 95–103. For preliminary survey of Baganarti inscriptions, see A. ŁAJTAR, "Wall inscriptions in the Baganarti Churches. A General Note after Three Seasons of Work", *JJP* 33 (2003) pp. 137–159.

Old Nubian inscription from the Upper Church at Banganarti
(photo B. Żurawski)

covered with mud mortar, applied in order to mend the corner after the walls had shifted apart. This repair probably took place around 1280. The first line of the inscription is 167.5 cm above the floor, which puts it more or less at eye level of a person standing before it. The inscription itself is 128 cm wide and 15 cm high, letter height ranging from 1.3 cm (∧) to 4.1 cm (γ). The text is rendered in violet ochre against a white surface of kaolin white-wash that coats a thick layer of mud plaster, which had cracked in several places, especially at the beginning of line 3. The ochre is relatively well preserved. The hand is Old Nubian majuscules, quite fluent, but somewhat careless. The scribe inconsistently marked the vowels in initial position with a supraliteral point.

The Old Nubian inscription in question is surrounded by other texts. It runs along the lower edge of a Greek inscription in black paint, referring to the story of Jesus and Apostle Thomas. The story itself is illustrated in the upper part of the wall (only the lower parts of two figures

accompanied by legends: “Thomas” and “of the Saviour” have survived). Below the inscription there are several visitors’ graffiti. The relative chronology of these items is as follows: The Greek inscription mentioning Jesus and Thomas is obviously the earliest of the texts. It came into existence most probably as part of the last layer of the original church decoration, which was executed in the 13th century. The Old Nubian text discussed here was added second. Of a later date are the graffiti, left by visitors when the church served primarily as a pilgrimage centre in the last years of the 13th century and in the first half of the 14th century. Based on these observations, the inscription in question can be dated to around 1250–1280.

† НΟΥΔΟΥΔ • ΔΕΛΓΟΥΝΑ • ΕΟΔΑ • ΑΚΛΑΡΑ ΡΑΦΑΗΛΑ ΔΑΛΛΗΚΑΤΤΑ
 ΔΕΛΟΔΚΕ ΚΟΕΙΝΗΝ ΕΤΚΗ ΔΟΥΡΤΙΤΑ
 СИПТРАГРΑ НΟΥΦΑΡΑΛΗ ТАККА ЕПНОНА ДКЛОН ТАН СЕНТИЛОКΩ ΕΗ
 ΔΗΑΗ Γ<Δ>Λ ΔΗΑΗ ΚΕΔΙΚΚΟΝ . . . ΤΑΡ
 ΕΛΟΚΩ ΟΥΚΑ ΔΥΔΡΕΓΡΕΣΟ ΤΚΤΕΠ ΠΕΔΚΙ ΚΟΣΗ ΚΟΚΚΩΙΔΑ ΚΙΠΗΝΑ
 ΟΥΓΡΕΣΟ ΟΥ ΔΗΗΛΓΟΥΚΑ ΔΔΟΥΗΗ
 (space) ΝΟΥΔΗΗΓΟΥ[- - -].

Leader of souls, Lord who set up Raphael as the helper of every man who has a heart that is sick: Customarily (?) you have ordered him, and accordingly, if continually through his request, seeing this water, you cause the water to rise [- -], now make us live in this land that does not have harshness of the evil one. Come, manifest yourself, hear us all [- -].

1. ΑΚΛΑ<ΚΑ>ΡΑ: cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 8.

Read ΡΑΦΑΗΛΑ. The scribe wrote the letters η and λ in the wrong order. Here both the Archangel and the church named after him are meant; cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 250. There are good reasons to believe that Raphael was the patron of the Baganarti church.

ΔΑΛΛΗΚΑΤΤΑ: literary *λειτουργός*; cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 187.

ΔΕΛ-ΟΔ-ΚΕ-ΚΟ(ΡΑ) ΕΙΝΗΝ: ΟΔ-ΚΕ ΟΔ-ΚΕ; cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 122 and 82.

ΔΟΥΡΤΙΤΑ read by Łajtar.

2. СИПТРАГРΑ: I very tentatively assume that СИП- stands for *СИП- (Browne, *Grammar*, § 2.5.6a) cognate with Kenzi *sibir* = “Gewohnheit” (G. MASSENBACH,

Wörterbuch des nubischen Kunûzi-Dialektes [= *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen* 36.3], Berlin 1933, s. v.) + -(I)Γ- (Browne, *Grammar*, § 3.3.2) + predicative of \bar{p} causative (cf. e. g. F. LI. GRIFFITH, *The Nubian Texts of the Christian Period* [= *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Classe* 8], Berlin 1913, graffito no. 4.3), and the whole expression could simply mean “customarily” (cf. ΓΙΡΑΔΔΑΡΑΓΡᾶ: Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 31), balancing $\bar{\alpha}\kappa\bar{\alpha}$ later in the line.

ΤΑΚΚΑ: i. e. Raphael?

The reading $\bar{\alpha}\kappa\lambda\omicron\eta$ is not without palaeographical difficulties. The wall has much more $\bar{\alpha}\zeta\lambda\omicron\eta$. If correctly read, $\bar{\alpha}\kappa\bar{\alpha}$ here indicates habitual action; cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 8.

The wall has $\epsilon\bar{\eta}$ $\delta\eta\eta\eta$ $\epsilon\lambda\lambda$. This is probably a *lapsus calami* for $\epsilon\bar{\eta}$ $\delta\eta\eta\eta$ $\epsilon\lambda\lambda$. It is paralleled by $\omicron\gamma\kappa\omicron$ (for $\omicron\gamma\kappa\lambda$) in line 3 (see commentary there).

- $\kappa\omicron\eta$: i. e. - $\kappa\omicron\eta\eta\omicron$; cf. Browne, *Grammar*, § 4.7.5a.

. . . ΤΑΡ . read by Łajtar.

3. $\epsilon\lambda\omicron\kappa\omega$: cf. G. M. BROWNE, *BzS* 5 (1992), pp. 35–37 = idem, *Bibliorum Sacrorum versio palaeonubiana*, Leuven 1994, pp. 31–32, 159B 6: $\epsilon\lambda(\lambda)\omicron\kappa\omicron\lambda\omicron$.

$\omicron\gamma\kappa\lambda$ (λ badly made so as to resemble \omicron) $\delta\omega\rho\alpha\epsilon\gamma\rho\epsilon\zeta\omicron$: cf. *IN* II 13 ii 25.

$\bar{\omicron}\kappa\tau$ $\epsilon\bar{\eta}$: cf. *IN* I 1 ii 4.

Π ϵ - λ - κ -. cf. Browne, *Dictionary*, p. 148 and Browne, *Grammar*, § 3.3.2.

ΚΙ(Ρ)-ΠΙΗ- λ -. cf. Kenzi *binê* = “be visible” (G. W. MURREY, *An English-Nubian Comparative Dictionary* [= *Harvard African Studies* 4], Cambridge Mass. 1923, s. v.); ΚΙ(Ρ): desinenceless adjunctive (BROWNE, *Grammar*, § 3.9.19), as e. g. in *Miracle of Saint Menas* 13.1.

$\omicron\gamma(\lambda)\gamma\rho\epsilon\zeta\omicron$: note absence of the plural infix; cf. G. M. BROWNE, *Studies in Old Nubian* [= *Beiträge zur Sudanforschung* 3], Wien 1988, p. 17; for the spelling cf. $\omicron\gamma\tau\tau$ in *IN* II 26.2 (i.e. $\omicron\gamma\lambda\tau$ > $\omicron\gamma\tau\tau$ [BROWNE, *Grammar*, § 2.3.1] > $\omicron\gamma\tau$ [Browne, *Grammar*, § 2.7]; or else - λ - lost by [BROWNE, *Grammar*, § 2.5.6a]).

- 3–4. $\delta\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\bar{\eta}$ | $\eta\omicron\gamma\delta\eta\eta\gamma\omicron\gamma$ [- - -] read by Łajtar.