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Four Christian funerary inscriptions from the Fayum (I. Deir el-cAzab 1-4.)

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**FOUR CHRISTIAN
FUNERARY INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE FAYUM
(I. DEIR EL-^cAZAB 1–4)**

THE FOUR FUNERARY MONUMENTS which are published here for the first time are part of the collections of Deir el-‘Azab, now better known as the Monastery of Anba Abraam, a large ecclesiastical centre situated a few kilometres to the south-east of Medinet el-Fayum, on the main road to the Nile Valley.¹ We are grateful to His Grace Anba Abraam, Bishop of the Fayum, for his permission to study and publish them.²

There is no documentation available to show the exact provenance of these four objects. Nonetheless, they can be assumed to come from the Fayum, which is generally confirmed by their stylistic and textual character-

¹ See SAMEH ADLI, ‘Several Churches in Upper Egypt’, *MDAIK* 36 (1980), pp. 1–14, at 4; S. TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* (= *TAVO Beihefte*, Reihe B 41/1–6), Wiesbaden 1984–1992, vol. II, pp. 681–682; SAMUEL AL SYRIANI & BADI HABIB, *Guide to Ancient Coptic Churches & Monasteries in Upper Egypt*, [Cairo] 1990, p. 146, no. 189; FATHY KHURSHID, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Fayum Province, From the Spread of Christianity Until the End of the Ottoman Period* (in Arabic), Cairo 1998, pp. 127–131; R. N. HEWISON, *The Fayum: History and Guide*, 3rd ed., Cairo – New York 2001, pp. 66–67. Locally, a series of illustrated booklets on the monastery are sold, produced by the Coptic Orthodox archdiocese of the Fayum; one of these, no. 3 in the series, is devoted to its collections.

² We furthermore thank Sister IRENE and Mr. Ezzat SALIB for their assistance in Deir el-‘Azab, and Dr. Brian MUHS of the Leiden Papyrological Institute for correcting our English.

ristics. Further, internal criteria allow stela no. 1 to be assigned to one of the Christian cemeteries of the town of Arsinoe. For wooden tablet no. 4, Deir el-Malâk (Naqlûn), a few kilometres to the south-east of Deir el-'Azab, has been cited as a plausible provenance, but this remains uncertain. All four monuments are in Greek and can be dated only very imprecisely to the Byzantine – early Islamic period.³ In addition to their prosopographical and art historical interest, they illustrate the prosperity and the high cultural level of the Fayum in this period.

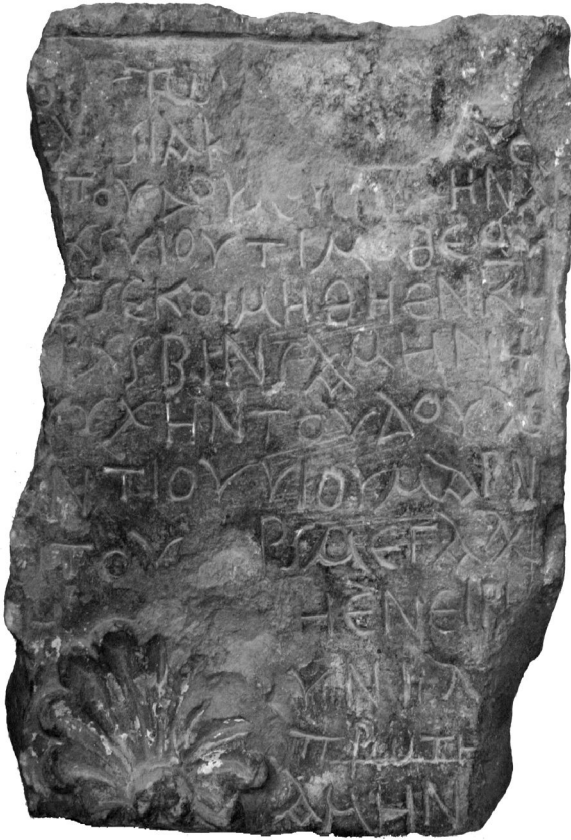
1. TOMBSTONE OF MENAS AND GERONTIOS

Upper right hand corner of a tombstone; limestone, 23 x 35 x 9 cm. The lower half of the stone (which must have contained a sculptured motif, either a cross or a praying figure) is missing. The surviving upper part is irregularly broken at the left hand side, and at the lower right margin another piece of the stone is broken away. Surface damage occurs at several places. The original width of the stela may have been about 50–51 cm., and while its original height cannot be reconstructed exactly, it may have been over 75 cm.

Remains of 13 lines of Greek text are preserved, though the beginnings of each line (about one third of the original length) are missing. Lines 10–13 are interrupted in the middle by a sculptured conch.

The text is written in crudely drawn and rather irregular incised uncials, about 2–2.5 cm. high, badly ruled. Characteristic letter forms include the *A* with a broken bar and a long upward stroke towards the left at the top (also notable in *Δ*), while the letter *B* is plump with a narrow base (l. 6).

³ For recent reviews of the Christian epigraphic record of the Fayum, see A. BOUD'HORS & F. CALAMENT, 'Un ensemble de stèles fayoumiques inédites: à propos de la stèle funéraire de Pantoleos de Toutôn', [in:] M. IMMERZEEL & J. VAN DER VLIET (ed.) *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies Leiden, 27 August – 2 September 2000* (= *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 133), pp. 447–475 (Coptic only; with an appendix: 'Epigraphie fayoumique: addenda et corrigenda', *ſCoptS* 7 [2005], pp. 131–135); S. SCHATEN, 'Christian Funerary Stelae from the Fayoum', [in:] GAWDAT GABRA (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, Cairo – New York 2005, pp. 257–263; J. VAN DER VLIET, 'Reconstructing the Landscape: Epigraphic Sources for the Christian Fayoum', *ibidem*, pp. 79–89.



Text

Arsinoe (Medinet el-Fayum)

7th-8th cent.

† κ(ύρι)ε Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς ὁ Χ(ριστό)ς] ὁ θε(ε)ὸς τῶν πα[τέρων ἡμ-
 ῶν Ἀβρα(αμ) (καὶ) Ἰ(σὰ)κ(αὶ) Ἰακ(ώβ) ἀνάπ[αυσ-
 ον τὴν ψυχῆ]ν τοῦ δούλου σου Μη(ν)ᾶ

- 4]χ(δ), υἱοῦ Τιμοθέου
]τ(δ). ἐκοιμήθη ἐν κ(ύρι)ῳ
 μ(ην)ι ἀ]ρχ(ῆ) β(ἡ) ἐν(δ)ικτίωνος). ἀμήν. +
 ἀνάπαυσον τὴν] ψυχὴν τοῦ δούλου

- 8 σου Γερ]οντίου, υἱοῦ Μαρνι-
 τᾶ πραιπο]σίτου, [π]ρ(εσβυτέρου) μεγάλ(ης)
 ἐκκλ(ησίας). ἐκοιμ]ῆ||θη ἐν εἰρή-
 νῃ, μ(ηνι) Πα]||ῦνι λ,
 12 τέλει] || πρώτη]σ
 ἰν(δικτίωνος).] || ἀμήν. [†

1. filling in of first lacuna e.g.; θ(εο)s: stone ΘC | 2. (κα)δ: stone S (twice) | 4-beginning and 5-beginning: end of abbreviated profession name or title | 5. κ(υρ)δφ: stone KΩ | 6. ἀ]ρΧ(ῆ): stone]PXS | 7. δούλου: final -ου ligatured | 8. Γερ]οντίου: low o after lacuna suggests preceding ρ | 9. [π]ρ(εσβυτέρου) μεγάλ(ης): stone [II]PS ΜΕΓΑΛΛ/; for the small letter π in the lacuna, cf. l. 12 | 12. lacuna: τέλει, rather than ἀρχῆ (see below).

Translation

† O Lord Jesus-Christ?,] God of [our] fathers [Abraham and] Isaac and Jacob, rest the soul of your servant Mênas, [...], son of Timotheos, [...]. He fell asleep in the Lord [in the month ..., (day) ...], in the beginning of the second (year of the) indiction. Amen. †

[Rest the] soul of [your] servant Gerontios, son of Marnitas, *praepositus*, priest of the Great [Church.] He fell asleep in peace, [in the month] Pauni, (day) 30, [in the end?] of the first [(year of the) indiction.] Amen. †

Commentary

The text is an epitaph for two men, Menas and Gerontios,⁴ whose relationship to each other is not clear from the text as preserved. Both are given titles and a filiation. Gerontios was a priest of the ‘Great Church’

⁴ The latter name is damaged, but from the traces its reading is highly plausible. Gerontios was a very common name in the Christian Fayum, see J. M. DIETHART, *Prosopographia Arsinoïtica* 1 (= *MPER*, n.s. 12), Vienna 1980, nos. 1261–1319; for its wider distribution, see W. J. CHERF, ‘What’s in a Name? The Gerontii of the Later Roman Empire’, *ZPE* 100 (1994), pp. 145–174.

(l. 9-10), and his father, Marnitas, was most probably a *praepositus*, 'prefect' (l. 8-9).⁵ Since the stone originates from the Fayum, the 'Great Church', where Gerontios served as a priest, can be identified as the cathedral church of Arsinoe, well known through a variety of documents, mainly from the early Islamic period.⁶ Among the many persons named Gerontios that are listed in the *Prosopographia Arsinoitica* there are in fact one or two priests (both from the 6th-7th century).⁷ It is impossible, however, to link any of these men to the one commemorated here. The name of his father, Marnitas, is extremely rare in Egypt and the two examples mentioned in the repertories are both from the Fayum.⁸ Again, however, it is not possible to identify the father of Gerontios with either of these. The titles or professions of Menas and his father, Timotheos, mentioned in l. 4 and 5, are now lost but for their final letters. Presumably both were also men of some status.

Several other funerary inscriptions commemorating multiple people are known from the Fayum.⁹ The present one is textually unusual in that, after a shared opening invocation (l. 1-2), it presents a complete epitaph for each of both deceased. Both formulae follow a similar pattern that is common in the Fayum (κύριε ἀνάπαυσσον τὴν ψυχὴν + name + ἐκοιμήθη

⁵ See F. PREISIGKE, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* III, Berlin 1931, p. 143 (civil officials) and p. 217 (military); S. DARIS, *Il lessico latino nel greco d'Egitto*, 2nd ed., Barcelona 1991, s.v. The *Prosopographia Arsinoitica* (cit. *supra*, n. 4) mentions no *praepositi*.

⁶ See E. WIPSYCKA, 'Καθολικὴ et les autres épithètes qualifiant le nom ἐκκλησία. Contribution à l'étude de l'ordre hiérarchique des églises dans l'Égypte byzantine', *JJP* 24 (1994), pp. 191-212, at 200-202 (republished in: EADEM, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive*, Rome 1996, pp. 157-175, at 165-166); TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten* IV (cit. n. 3), p. 1511.

⁷ DIETHART, *Prosopographia Arsinoitica* (cit. *supra*, n. 4), nos. 1289 (6th-7th cent.) and 1305 (7th cent.).

⁸ DIETHART, *Prosopographia Arsinoitica* (cit. *supra*, n. 4), nos. 3429 (6th cent.) and 3430 (AD 663). See also BGU II 675 = SPP VIII 1139 (with BL VI, p. 12): δι' ἐμοῦ Μαρνιτου ἀντ(ι)γ(εοῦ)χ(ου). The document can be paleographically dated to the 7th cent. (see the photograph in A. BATAILLE, *Les Papyrus*, Paris 1955, pl. XIII). The form Μαρνιτου would imply the nominative Μαρνήτης which is by no way surprising since the names ending in -ās (gen. -ā) may be interchanged with those ending in -ης (gen. -ου).

⁹ See W. GODLEWSKI & A. ŁAJTAR, elsewhere in this volume (pp. 43-62), under no. 1.

+ date).¹⁰ Some variation occurs in the dating lemmata: whereas Menas died 'in the Lord' (l. 5), Gerontios died 'in peace' (l. 10–11). The long opening invocation of l. 1–2, with its reference to the three patriarchs, is another remarkable feature.¹¹ It well illustrates the transition from very brief, summary epitaphs (such as no. 2 below) to more developed texts that show a strong liturgical inspiration.¹²

The method of dating observed in the present stela, by 'beginnings' and 'ends' of indiction years, is again particularly common in documents and inscriptions from the Arsinoite.¹³ The reconstruction of $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota$ in l. 12 is uncertain, of course, but the association of the end of the indiction with the month of Pauni is in accordance with the predominant statistical evidence for the region.¹⁴ It would indeed be logical if both men had died shortly after each other, Gerontios at the end of a first indiction year (l. 11–13), Menas in the beginning of the following, second year (l. 6). No absolute dates are given, but the present epitaph can be profitably compared to the stela of Pousei and Kosmas, now in Berlin but also originally coming from the Fayum.¹⁵ This is also a double epitaph, with an extensive text surmounting the pictorial field (lost in the present piece). It likewise opens with the invocation of the 'God of our fathers' and, in referring to the patriarchs (l. 5–9), shows a similar liturgical inspiration.¹⁶ The Berlin stela is dated to Diocletian year 419 (AD 703), and the present stela must belong to approximately the same period.

¹⁰ Type no. 1 in D. ZUNTZ, 'Koptische Grabstelen: Ihre zeitliche und örtliche Einordnung', *MDAIK* 2 (1932), pp. 22–38, at 23. The same formulary is found in no. 3 below.

¹¹ For its background, see M. RIST, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: A Liturgical and Magical Formula', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57 (1938), pp. 289–303.

¹² For this development in Fayum epitaphs, see VAN DER VLIET, 'Reconstructing the Landscape' (cit. *supra*, n. 3), pp. 80–81.

¹³ See now the fully documented discussion in R. S. BAGNALL & K. A. WORP, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, 2nd ed., Leyden 2003, pp. 22–35.

¹⁴ See BAGNALL & WORP, *Chronological Systems* (cit. *supra*, n. 13), in particular p. 25.

¹⁵ Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 4477: LEFEBVRE, *Recueil*, no. 790; cat. exhib. *Ägypten: Schätze aus dem Wüstensand*, Wiesbaden 1996, no. 67.

¹⁶ It seems as if, in funerary epigraphy, the invocation 'God of Abraham (etc.)' (here l. 1–2) is interchangeable with the well-known prayer for rest 'in the bosom of Abraham (etc.)' (found in the Berlin stela); cf. *I KhartoumCopt* no. 46, with commentary.



2. TOMBSTONE OF PAPAS

A complete and well preserved funerary monument, carved from one piece of limestone, measuring 18.5 x 17 x 17 cm. It consists of an otherwise undecorated square block surmounted by a sculptured Maltese cross within a laurel wreath; the space between the arms of the cross is filled in with leaf-like decoration.

The front of the square base bears an epitaph of four lines in Greek, which leaves the lower third part of the surface empty. The text is written in square incised uncials, about 1.8 cm. high. Characteristic letter forms include a broken bar symmetrical *A*.

Text

Fayum

ca. 6th–8th cent.?

† ἐν ἡρήνῃ.
 τ(οῦ) ἀναπαυ-
 σαμέν(ου) ἐν

4 κ(υρὶ)φ Παπᾶ.

1. ἡρήνῃ, 1. εἰρήνῃ; -ην- ligatured | 2 and 3. abbreviations by a slash | 4. κ(υρὶ)φ· ΚΩ.

Translation

† In peace. (Monument) of Papas, who went to rest in the Lord.

Commentary

The peculiar shape of this monument is as yet unparalleled, although crosses within laurel wreaths are common enough in Christian sculpture, funerary and non-funerary, from all over Egypt. Another funerary monument from the Fayum, now in Cairo, is particularly close in style and appearance to the present piece.¹⁷ It bears an identical textual formula (partly lost), inscribed in a *tabula ansata* below the laurel wreath, and the similarity between both monuments suggests that they might share a common, though unknown, provenance.

Beyond the name of the deceased, Papas,¹⁸ no information can be gained from the epitaph – it even lacks the usual date of death. This very concise text, characterised by ἐν εἰρήνῃ, is typical of an entire class of Fayum monuments.¹⁹ Its brevity and the laconic form of the monument could be indicative of a (typologically) early date.

¹⁷ W. E. CRUM, *Coptic Monuments*, Cairo 1902, no. 8543; LEFEBVRE, *Recueil*, no. 79. Crum connects this piece with his no. 8710 (p. 145, n. 3).

¹⁸ DIETHART, *Prosopographia Arsinoïtica* (cit. *supra*, n. 4) mentions only two persons of this name: nos. 4145 (AD 531) and 4146 (6th–7th cent.).

¹⁹ See ZUNTZ, 'Koptische Grabstelen' (cit. *supra*, n. 10), p. 23, types no. 2 and 3; A. ŁAJTAR, 'Bemerkungen zu griechischen christlichen Inschriften aus dem Koptischen Museum in Kairo', *ZPE* 97 (1993), pp. 227–235, at 230–231 (with further references).



3. TOMBSTONE OF NN

The upper part of a limestone funerary stela, presently measuring 32 x 23 x 6–8 cm. The lower part, with a sculptured decoration of a cross within a niche, has for the greater part broken away; the surviving upper part, including the epigraphic field, is severely damaged.

The remains of five lines of Greek text are still visible, but are so much obliterated as to be almost entirely illegible. Incised uncials, about 1.5 cm. high.

Text

Fayum

ca. 7th–8th cent.?

† κ(ύρι)ε, ἀνάπ[αυσσον τήν
 ψυχ[ήν
 ἸΕ . [
 4 ΜΕÇΩΡΠ[
 μ(ηνὶ) Ἐπεῖφ δ . . α' ἰν(δικτίωνος) †

1. κ(ύρι)ε: KE | 3. mere traces | 4. or ΜΕÇXP[? | 5. μ(ηνὶ): MS; α': slightly raised, uncertain whether something precedes; ἰν(δικτίωνος): INS.

Translation

† Lord, grant rest to the soul [of your servant N.N. He/she fell asleep?] in the month Epeiph, (day) 4 (?), of the first (or eleventh) year of the indiction. †

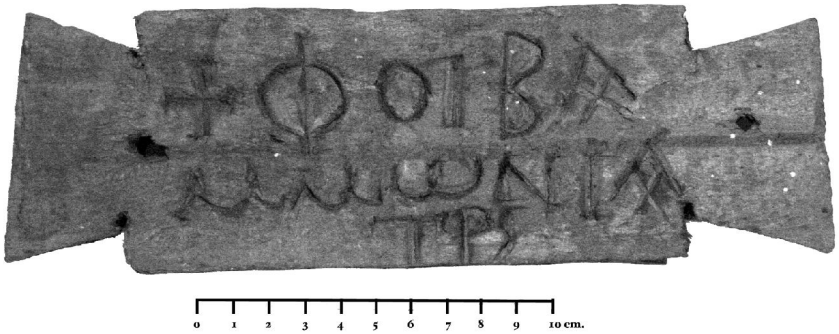
Commentary

This monument belongs to the group of conventional Fayum stelae characterised by a big sculptured cross within an *aedicula*.²⁰ Here, the epigraphic field is squeezed in between the niche containing the cross and the tympanum *plus* conch that would logically crown the niche.²¹ Apart from this detail, the style and iconography as well as the very common textual formula, virtually identical to that of the double epitaph no. 1, above, are close to those of the stelae found at Naqlûn. There, however, the text is arranged within the niche, around the cross.²²

²⁰ See, most recently, S. SCHATEN, 'Christian Funerary Stelae' (cit. *supra*, n. 3), pp. 258–261.

²¹ Several other examples of this arrangement are known from the Fayum; e.g. cat. exhib. *Ägypten: Schätze aus dem Wüstensand*, no. 81.

²² For the Naqlûn stelae, see A. ŁAJTAR, 'Two Greek Inscriptions from Deir el-Naqlun', *Nubica* 3/1 (1989–1993), pp. 265–274, at 269–274; in recent years, some fragments of others



4 WOODEN FUNERARY TABLET
OF PHOIBAMMON

A *tabula ansata* inscribed with three lines of Greek text, 7 x 23 x 3 cm.; dark brown wood of low density and mediocre quality, undoubtedly of local provenance. Near the ends, two holes have been drilled for attaching the *tabula* to a mummy or, perhaps, a coffin.

The text consists of three lines of slightly sprawling incised uncials, varying in height from about 3 cm. (in l. 1) to 1.5 cm. (in l. 2-3). Letter forms include a broken bar symmetric *A* and a three-stroke *M* with a low saddle.

Text and Translation

Naqlûn (?), Fayum

ca. 6th-8th cent.?

† Φοιβά-
2 μμων, ἰα-
τρ(ός).

† Phoiba-
mmôn, phy-
sician.

2-3. ἰα|τρ(ός): IATPS.

have been found, for which see now W. GODLEWSKI & A. ŁAJTAR elsewhere in this volume, pp. 43-62.

Commentary

Wooden tablets, often in the shape of a *tabula ansata*, as in the present case, are a traditional element of funerary equipment in Graeco-Roman Egypt, meant to be attached to the mummy of the deceased for the purpose of identification.²³ Conventionally known as mummy labels, they remained in use until well into Christian times.²⁴ Since they are inscribed with the name of the deceased, usually accompanied by a filiation or a title, they may also serve as a memorial, analogous to grave stelae, for which they offer a cheap alternative.²⁵ In late antiquity, stone funerary monuments often also incorporate *tabulae ansatae*, typically as a feature exhibiting (part of) the epitaph.²⁶ In one of these, a Fayum monument for a children's tomb, the stone *tabula* shows two (fake) holes for attachment, which indicates that it was meant to imitate a wooden tablet like the present one.²⁷ Transposed into a more costly material and fitted into the symbolic framework of a high-status object, the simple *tabula* had apparently retained its privileged role as a text bearer in a funerary context. By contrast, undoubtedly Christian examples in wood, like the one published here, are quite scarce.²⁸

In sources from Christian Egypt, the name Phoibammon is as ubiquitous as the profession of doctor. Tombstones of physicians

²³ For an introduction, see J. QUAEGBEUR, 'Mummy Labels: An Orientation', [in:] E. BOSWINKEL & P. W. PESTMAN, (ed.), *Textes grecs, démotiques et bilingues* (= *Pap. Lugd. Bat* 19), Leyden 1978, pp. 232–259; on the *tabula ansata*-form: 235–236; Fayum provenances: 244.

²⁴ For Christian mummy labels, see now H. FROSCHAUER, 'Tradition im koptischen Bestattungswesen: Ein christliches Mumientäfelchen aus den Beständen Tamerit in der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek', *Eirene* 40 (2004), pp. 91–100, and A. DELATTRE, 'Une étiquette de momie copte de l'ancienne collection G. A. Michae-lidès', *CdÉ* 80 (2005), pp. 373–374.

²⁵ QUAEGBEUR, 'Mummy labels' (cit. *supra*, n. 23), p. 237.

²⁶ For some typical examples from the Fayum, see CRUM, *Coptic Monuments*, nos. 8543, 8590; cat. exhib. *Ägypten: Schätze aus dem Wüstensand*, nos. 64, 65, 84, but the phenomenon was common all over Egypt.

²⁷ Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 4709; LEFEBVRE, *Recueil*, no. 794; cat. exhib. *Ägypten: Schätze aus dem Wüstensand*, no. 84.

²⁸ See DELATTRE, 'Une étiquette de momie copte' (cit. *supra*, n. 24), who provides a full bibliography.

abound,²⁹ and from one of the monasteries of Western Thebes another Phoibammon is known who was a physician as well as a deacon.³⁰ As for the Fayum, no doctors with this name can be identified with certainty.³¹ A possibly fifth-century namesake, who seems to have been a kind of general practitioner, may have inhabited hermitage no. 44, behind the monastery at Naqlûn.³² Since the provenance suggested for the Deir el-'Azab tablet is no more than conjectural, it cannot be ascertained whether its owner, in addition to being a doctor, was a monk as well.

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²⁹ For some examples, see LEFEBVRE, *Recueil*, nos. 135, 190, 496, 799; KAMAL SABRI KOLTA, 'Namen christlicher Ärzte der koptischen Zeit in Ägypten', *Die Welt des Orients* 14 (1983), pp. 189-195; G. NACHTERGAEEL, 'Lecture de quelques noms de métiers dans des inscriptions grecques d'Égypte', *CdÉ* 74 (1999), pp. 148-155, at 152-153, no. 3; for the Coptic stela of a female doctor, *I LyonCopt* no. 1 (*Bulletin des musées et monuments lyonnais* 2001, no. 1, pp. 74-75).

³⁰ R. RÉMONDON & al., *Le Monastère de Phoebammon dans la Thébaïde* II, Cairo 1965, p. 71, no. 116b.

³¹ DIETHART, *Prosopographia Arsinoitica* (cit. *supra*, n. 4) lists four physicians and two 'archphysicians', none of them called Phoibammon, though.

³² See W. GODLEWSKI, 'Excavating the Ancient Monastery at Naqlun', [in:] GABRA (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism* (cit. *supra*, n. 3), pp. 155-171, at 157-158.