SOME PECULIARITIES OF GREEK AND COPTIC EPIGRAPHY FROM NIBIA

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The population of Christian Nubia was essentially of non-Egyptian tongue: they spoke an ancient form of Fiyadikkya (Fadicha) Nubian, or Nobiîn. At a certain point, they developed graphic conventions to write their language. This is the idiom which is called Old Nubian. Its script is Greek, augmented for two Coptic signs of Demotic origin, viz. ϣ š and ϩ h, mostly used in foreign words (none of the two sounds seems to be a Nubian phoneme), it also makes use of a letter δ, which is reminiscent of Coptic ϭ (B [cʰ], otherwise [ǰ]), for a sound that is obviously a voiced palatal plosive [ɟ], corresponding to the same sound in modern Nubian; and more signs are taken from the linear version of the Meroitic script: ⲧ for the velar nasal [ŋ] (from Meroitic ḫ [transcribed as -νχ-], linear ▽, hieroglyphic ⟨⟩), ⲫ for the palatal nasal [ɲ] (from Meroitic ñ, linear ⴳ, hieroglyphic ⱦ), and ʒ or ϩ for [w] (from Meroitic w, linear ƀ, hieroglyphic ⟩), in variation with ⲟⲩ.

Old Nubian was used from about the sixth century A.D. until the end of Christian civilisation in the area. The extant texts are both literary and non-literary. The literary texts consist of portions of biblical texts, hymns, homilies, the Menas Legend, etc. It is, however, remarkable that Old Nubian is hardly ever used for epitaphs. Rather, these bear Greek or Coptic inscriptions. This is to say that we have to do with diglossia. It was essential for clerics and perhaps other persons of higher levels of the society to have sufficient knowledge of Greek and/or Coptic. Unfortunately we have very little means to find out about the practical circumstances of this situation.

It may be assumed that Greek inscriptions from Egypt were usually written by persons whose mother tongue was not Greek. As for Nubia it must be assumed that most of the writers of both Greek and Coptic inscriptions were using an idiom that was not their mother tongue. And we may equally well presuppose that this has left marks on the language of the texts. Nubian is an East Sudanic language, of the Nilo-Saharan macro-phylum. It differs to a great measure both from Egyptian/Coptic

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and from Greek. The main aspects to be considered in the present context are phonetics/phonology and morphology.

Some points of phonetics: distinction of voiced and unvoiced occlusives; no aspirate plosives; signs ϩ [h] and ⲭ [x] are virtually restricted to foreign words, ϣ [ʃ] is quite rare. As for morphology we must be aware of the fact that Nubian does not have nominal gender classes. It may be added the Nubian word order is quite different from Coptic. The modifier precedes the modified: the verb comes last, following on the subject and all kinds of complements; the genitival noun comes first (rectum—regens: ⲟⲩⲣⲟⲩ-ⲛ ⲁⲣⲧⲓ "the King's Island"), postpositions in the stead of prepositions, etc.

Apart from possible deviations from the linguistic norm (which are particularly conspicuous in Greek) we may also expect the traces of cultural differences. We may mention here the typical Nubian moon-days in the dates of documents which are usually mentioned in addition to the year and the month and day; e.g. "He deceased on Tybi 23, day of the moon 16, (year) of the Martyrs 847 (Τῦβι κ̅γ̅/ σελήνι ι̅ϛ̅ ἀπὸ μαρ(τύρων) ω[.]ζ)".[1] Probably the genitive (τῆς) σελήνης is meant, in the sense of "the (so-and-so day) of the moon". Another Greek inscription corroborates this: it has the word for "moon" in Old Nubian, rather than in Greek, and this word ⲟⲩⲛ- appears in the predicative genitive in -ⲛⲁ: "the years of his life on earth (were) 88, until the month of Payni, (day) 10; *of the moon* (day) 4 (ἐπὶ τοῦ μηνὸς Παῦνη ι̅ ουννα δ̅)".[2] The opposite, viz. an Old Nubian text with a Greek moon date, can be found in a graffito from the church of Nag' el-Shêma, Seyâla: ⲁⲑⲩⲣ̅ ⲓ̅ⲃ̅ ⲥⲉⲗ{ⲗ/}ⲉⲛⲏ ⲗ̅.[3]

Further clarity can be gained from the dates in Old Nubian texts, which also contain ⲟⲩⲛⲛⲁ, "(being the so-and-so day) of the moon", with a following number. Some cases show that the numbers are ordinal, rather than cardinal numbers: for "day 1" the texts have ⲡⲣⲟⲧ(ⲟⲥ), ⲡⲣⲱⲧ(ⲟⲥ), "first", and one text has for "day 4" the respective number sign with a phonetic addition that makes clear that we have to do with the ordinal: ⲧⲱⲃⲓⲁ ⲁ̅ⲧⲁ ⲟⲩⲛⲛⲁ ⳍ̅ⲧⲁ,[4] to be read ⲧⲱⲃⲓ-ⲁ̅ ⲕⲉⲙ-

[1] J. KUBIŃSKA, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes* (*Faras* IV), p. 45–46: no. 11, line 23.

[2] *Op. cit*., p. 40–42: no. 9, lines 21–22.

[3] H. SATZINGER, in M. BIETAK, M. SCHWARZ, *Nag' el-Scheima. Eine befestigte christliche Siedlung und andere christliche Denkmäler in Sayala-Nubien*, Teil I, Wien, 1987, p. 130.

[4] G.M. BROWNE, *Old Nubian Texts from Qaṣr Ibrīm* III (*Texts from Excavations*, edited by W.J. TAIT, Twelfth memoir), no. 34, i, 3–4. 38, 2.

ϭⲓⲧⲧ-ⲁ ⲟⲩⲛ-ⲛⲁ ⲕⲟⲗⲟⲧⲓⲧⲧ-ⲁ … ⲉⲓⲛⲛ̄, "it being the fourth in Tybi, the seventh of the moon…". The Old Nubian ordinal numbers are derived from the cardinal numbers by an ending *-itt-*. ⲁ̄ⲧⲁ is, therefore, short for ⲕⲉⲙⲥⲓⲧⲧ- "fourth" plus the ending -ⲁ of the absolute state, rather than ⲕⲉⲙⲥⲟ- "four". The cardinal number ⲕⲉⲙⲥⲟ- "four", having no final *-t*, would not be written in this way. (Note that ⲍ̄ⲧⲁ for "7" is insignificant in this, as also the cardinal number ends in t: ⲕⲟⲗⲟⲧ- "seven", ⲕⲟⲗⲟⲧⲓⲧ- "seventh").

The verb of the clauses is ⲉⲓⲛⲛ̄, 3rd person singular (homonymous with the 2nd person) of the subjunctive of the present tense of the verb ⲉⲓⲛ- "to be". The subjunctive is the form of part-clauses: attributive (relative clauses), *that*-clauses, and, as in the present case, clauses of circumstance. The whole phrase, the number and its genitival extension, is a predicative extension of the verb ⲉⲓⲛ- "to be" (3rd [and 2nd] ps. singular of the present). Therefore the number is in the absolute state in *-a*, and the extension in the absolute genitive in *-na* (i.e., genitive *-n* plus absolute state morpheme in *-a*): ⲟⲩⲛ-ⲛ̄ ⲕⲉⲙⲥⲓⲧⲧ- becomes ⲟⲩⲛⲛⲁ ⲕⲉⲙⲥⲓⲧⲧⲁ, "is the seventh of the moon".

Another matter of cultural background is the form of the personal names that occur in the inscriptions. Of course, the Christian Nubians made use of biblical names, like Abraham (ⲁ̄ⲃⲣⲁ̄ⲙⲏ-, ⲁ̄ⲃⲣⲁ̄ⲙⲓ-, ⲁ̄ⲡⲣⲁ̄ⲙⲩ-[5]), Isaac (ⲓⲥⲁⲕⲓ-), Michael, Gabriel, even Jesus. Other names have a meaning in the Nubian language, like ⲉⲓⲫ̄ⲧ̄ⲧⲁ,[6] absolute state of *inyitt-*, "wealth" (the absolute state encompasses the vocative function and that of a quotation form, it seems natural that many name forms end in *-a*); ⲙⲁϣⲁⲗ "the sun"; also verbal expressions, like ⲁⲟⲗⲗⲓⲥⲁ̄, "he who loved," and ⲁⲟⲗⲗⲓⲧⲁⲕⲁ̄, "he who is loved." Of compositions, those with -ⲕⲟⲗ, "he who has" ("verbid" of ⲕⲟⲛ- "to have"), are very typical, such as: ⲓ̄ⲏ̄ⲥⲟⲩⲥⲓ-ⲕⲟⲗ "he who has Jesus," and similarly with ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ̄-, ⲁⲛⲛⲁ-, ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲗⲓ-/ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲏⲗ-, ⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ-, ⲅⲉⲱⲣⲅⲓⲟⲥⲓ-, or with ⲙⲁϣⲁⲗ- ("sun"); other names tell of having qualities like *"appearance" (ⲡⲁⲥⲉ-ⲕⲟⲗ; cf. Nobiin *pas-* "to appear," with abstract formant -ⲉ- > *-e*), or *"thousands" (ⲁⲟⲩⲣⲓ-ⲕⲟⲗ, cf. ⲁⲟⲩⲁⲉ-, Nobiin *dure* "thousand; great number").

Other frequently found compositions are formed with ⲅⲁⲗ-, "son," and ⲁⲥ(ⲧ)ⲓ-, "daughter," either in direct juxtaposition or with a genitive:

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[5] See "List of Personal Names," in G.M. BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, Louvain, 1996, p. 236–246.

[6] SATZINGER, *op. cit.*, 129.

Holy entities

ïcoyɾa- (*Iēsousin-ñal "son of Jesus"?)
мιχaнaн̄ aci- IN III 31.6, 33.6 ("daughter of St. Michael", or "of M.")
мapιāκon acti- ("daughter of *Maria-kol*", genitive *-kon*, "he who has
   St. Mary")

Names, partly formed by verbal expressions

annatoyn ɾaʌ- ("son of Anatole"? Cf. Coptic anatoʌe m., Kopt.
   Sammelbuch I,[7] no. 348, 4?)
ē̄non acti- (cf. eno-, male name; en(n)oʌ- "who has brought"?)
ē̄ʌon ɾaʌ- (cf. *elol* -"who has found")
ïpaen̄ acti- (cf. *ir-ar-l-* "who causes to bear/engender"?)
oïʌan ɾaʌ- (cf. ō̄eιʌa, name)
p̄tan ɾaʌ- (p̄t- "potentiary" (?) with ending *-a*, als a proper name,
   hence "son of Irta"; cf. p̄tn̄ aci-, below)
мoycen/мoyɰen acti- ("daughter of *Mūsā*, or *Mōšē* "?)

Titles

aмпa ɾaʌ- "son of the Abbas" (?)
p̄tn̄ aci- IN III 36 i (cf. p̄t- "potentiary"? Cf. p̄tan ɾaʌ-, above)
coyʌaι(ɾ)ɾa(ʌ)-, coynan̄ ɾaʌ- (cf. *sountouwe* "scribe"?))

Qualifications

ɾc̄c̄n̄ ɾaʌ- ("son of the holy man")

Animals, tools etc.

κatt̄t̄n̄ ɾaʌ- ("son of the lamb"; cf. the personal names κattικ-
   oyʌa- (see below); κattι oyaм- "black lamb")
κaδɾ̄ɾaʌ- (κaδn̄ ɾaʌ-, "son of the colt"?)
taмtn̄ acti- ("daughter of the furnace (taмet-)"); cf. taм(ι)tικon
   acti- ("daughter of *Tamti-kol* ["he who has a furnace"]")

Geographical terms

папκιn acti- ("daughter of the valley (папκ-)")
ɾeδιn aci- ("daughter of the mountain (ɾaδ(δ)-)"? also cf. Nobiin *nij*
   "doum palm")

Others

мaʌʌen ɾaʌ- ("son of everybody"?)

Another typical Old Nubian formation of names (found both in Old
Nubian texts and in Greek and Coptic) consists of a sacred name or a
function of respect (like "king", etc.) as a first part, often in the genitive
case (with ending -n̄), and with *-kouda* as the second element. As far as

[7] M. HASITZKA, *Koptisches Sammelbuch I* (*Mitteilungen Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*,
XXIII), Wien, 1993.

we can see the first element refers to a person (sacred and/or revered), rather than to an abstract notion. Very often the first element is short-ened in the writing (and perhaps also in the pronunciation). The meaning of *-kouda* is disputed, but I have given arguments to see here a noun **koud-* "servant" (?), with the ending *-a* of the absolute case (marking inter alia the vocative which is here generalised; it has become an invariable part of some names).

First elements are:

Jesus (ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥⲟⲩⲥⲛ̅-; ⲓ ⲏⲥⲟⲩ-; ⲉⲓⲥⲥⲛ̅-, ⲉ̅ⲥ̅ⲥⲛ̅-; ⲓⲥ)
Σωτῆρ "saviour" (ⲥⲟⲧ(ⲏⲣ)ⲓⲛ-)
σταυρός "cross" (ⲥⲧⲁⲩⲣⲟⲥⲓⲗ-)
katt- "lamb" (ⲕⲁⲧⲧⲓ-)
tousko(u)- "three", for the Trinity (ⲧⲟⲩⲥⲕⲟⲛ-, ⲧⲟⲥⲕⲟⲛ-)
St. Mary (ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲛ-, ⲙⲁⲣⲛ̅-, ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ̅-[8], ⲙⲁⲣⲁ-)
St. Michael (ⲙⲓⲗⲛ̅-, ⲙⲏⲗⲏⲛ-, ⲙⲏⲭⲉⲛ-)
St. Gabriel (ⲅⲁⲃⲣⲓⲗⲛ̅-, ⲅⲁⲃⲣⲓⲛ-, ⲅⲁⲃⲣⲓⲏⲗ-, ⲅⲁⲃⲣⲓⲏ̅ⲗ-, ⲅ̅ⲃ̅ⲗ̅-, ⲅⲁⲃⲣⲓ-)
"Angel of Jesus" (?) (ⲓ̈ⲥⲟⲩ ⲁⲅⲅⲓ-, i.e. ⲓ̈(ⲏ)ⲥⲟⲩ(ⲥⲛ̅) ⲁⲅⲅ(ⲉⲗⲟⲥ)ⲓ-?)
St. Mena (ⲙⲏⲛⲁⲛ-, ⲙⲏⲛⲁ-)
Arabic *'abū salāma* "the father of vicelessness", or the like (ⲁⲡⲟⲩⲥⲁⲗⲁ-ⲙⲁⲛ-)
ourou- "king" (ⲟⲩⲣⲟⲩⲛ-, ⲟ̅ⲣⲟⲩⲛ-, ⲟ̅ⲣⲛ̅-, ⲟⲩⲣⲟⲩ-)
papas "bishop" (?) (ⲡⲁⲡⲁⲥⲓⲛ-)
nᵍash-, title of official (ⲅⲁϣϣⲁ(ⲛ)-, ⲅⲁϣⲁⲛ-)
pajj-, perhaps "judge" (παδδⲁ-)

The second element, *koud-*, may appear in forms like -ⲕⲟⲩⲗⲁ-, -ⲕⲟⲩⲗⲗⲁ-, -ⲕⲟⲩⲗⲓ-, -ⲅⲟⲗⲗⲓ-[9]

I should like to illustrate some of the observations made above by one or two inscriptions. Let us mention first that the *-kouda* names are some-times misread, in particular when the inscription is faulty itself, or badly preserved.

Two Coptic tombstones from Wâdi Ghazâl, published already by Lep-sius (see *Kopt. Sammelbuch* I, nos. 492 and 494), have the names ⲙⲁⲣⲁⲛⲕⲟⲩⲭⲁ, and ⲙⲓⲭⲓⲕⲟⲩⲭⲁ, respectively. We have certainly to read *Mariankouda* and *Mich(ael)i(n)kouda*.

On the tombstone from Ukma (Akasha) published by R. Kasser,[10] the name of the deceased was first read ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲏⲗⲛⲟⲩⲗⲁ but Jacques van

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[8] In both Greek and Old Nubian context: *Faras* III, p. 179–180 = *Faras* IV, p. 111, no. 49

[9] See BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, Appendices, Louvain, 1997, p. 69.

[10] R. KASSER, *Stèle copte en langue saïdique*, in C. MAYSTRE, *Akasha* II, Genève, 1996, p. 24–27, Tf. XII.

der Vliet[11] who is re-editing the text has ⲙⲓⲭⲏⲁⲏⲗⲕⲟⲩⲇⲁ. Anyway, the correct full form of the name is *ⲙⲓⲭⲏⲁⲏⲗⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲩⲇⲁ.

† ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲟ ⲭ̄ⲥ̄	+ Jesus Christ.
1. ϩⲓⲧⲛ ⲧⲉⲡⲣⲟⲛⲓⲁ ⲇⲉ	Through the providence
2. ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ <ⲡ>ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲱ-	of God Almighty,
3. ⲕⲣⲁⲧⲱⲣ · ⲁⲧⲉ·ⲁⲡⲟⲫ-	the pronouncement
4. ⲁⲥⲓⲥ <ⲙ>ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϫⲱⲕ	of God was realized
5. ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁϥⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲙⲙⲟϥ	and he went to rest,
6. ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲧⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲁ τὸν	the blessed, his[sic]
7. δοῦλο'γ' σου ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲏⲗ-	servant, Michael(in)-
8. ⲕⲟⲩⲇⲁ · ⲙ ⲡⲉⲃⲟⲧ ϫⲟⲓ	kouda, in the month of Khoiak,
9. ⲁⲕ · ⲕ̄ⲍ̄ · ⲧⲏⲡⲉ ⲇⲉ ⲙ-	(day) 27; the number (of years) of
10. ⲡⲉⲩⲟ·ⲛϩ · ⲡ̄ⲃ̄· ⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ	his[sic] life being 82.
11. ⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ	May the Good God
12. ⲧⲓ ⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲧⲉ̄ϥ̄ψⲩⲭⲏ <ⲙⲛ>	grant peace to his soul, together with
13. ⲁⲃⲣⲁⲁⲙ ⲕ/ ⲓ̈ⲥⲁⲕ ⲕ/	Abraham, Isaac and
14. ⲓ̈ⲁⲕⲱⲃ ⲛ ⲧⲙⲛ̄-	Jacob, in the kingdom
15. ⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲛⲙⲡⲏⲩⲉ	of the heavens.
16. ⲁⲙⲏⲛ ⲉϥⲉ	Amen, so
17. ϣⲟⲡⲉ †	be it. +

(Coptic text and most of the translation after J. van der Vliet, personal communication)

This inscription can illustrate some more typical features of Nubian Coptic epigraphy.

(1) The deceased is referred to by masculine pronouns: ⲁϥⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲙⲙⲟϥ, etc. But he has the female Greek epithet, ⲧⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲁ. A mistake like this may be explained by the lack of grammatical gender in the Nubian language.
(2) The text ends in the well-known formula, "Give peace to his soul, together with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of the heavens". Here, the text has ⲛ ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲣⲟ instead of ϩⲛ̄-. The same applies to ⲙ ⲡⲉⲃⲟⲧ ϫⲟⲓⲁⲕ, which should be read ϩⲙ̄ ⲡ…. This may be explained by the h sound being alien to Nubian.
(3) Both R. Kasser and J. van der Vliet are uncertain about ⲉϥϣⲟⲟⲡ in line 10: Kasser takes it as an introduction to the following («Puisqu'il en est (ainsi) (?) que…»), Van der Vliet as an appendix to the preceding ("The number (of years) of his life: 82, as he was (?).") I could

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[11] I am indebted to Jacques van der Vliet for his generously putting his reading at my disposal before it appears in print.

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imagine that it is just a calque of the Old Nubian verb ⲉⲓⲛⲛ̄, part-clausal
"he/she/it is" (thus, "that he/she/it is", "he/she/it being", "whose…
he/she/it is", etc.): it would then correspond to an Old Nubian *ⲧⲁⲛ ⲁϥⲉ-
ⲛ ⲁⲣ̄ⲧ-ⲛ̄ ⲡ̄ⲃ̄ ⲉⲓⲛⲛ̄ "the-number$_3$ of his$_1$ life$_2$ being$_5$ 82$_4$". Of course, cor-
rect Coptic would make use of the nominal sentence pattern, viz. ⲧⲏⲡⲉ̣
ⲇⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲱⲛⲅ̇ ⲡⲉ ⲡ̄ⲃ̄, and at any rate not of the verb ϣⲱⲡⲉ which is,
in its stative form ϣⲟⲟⲡ, the expression of existence and presence, rather
than of identity and equation. Old Nubian, on the other hand, does not dis-
tinguish between expressions of existence or presence (like the Egyptian
adverbial sentence) and those of quality or identity (like the Egyptian nom-
inal sentence).[12]

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[12] As for this distinction in Egyptian and in African languages in general, cf. H.
SATZINGER, *Egyptian as an African Language*, in *Atti del IV Convegno Nazionale di Egit-
tologia e Papirologia*, Siracusa, 5-7 Dicembre 1997 (*Quaderni del Museo del Papiro* IX,
2000), p. 31-43, especially 32–36.