

Epitaph of Merki Found in Hambukol

ADAM ŁAJTAR

Abstract: The article offers *editio princeps* of a Greek epitaph discovered during the archaeological work of the Canadian Mission in Hambukol, a locality situated on the right-hand bank of the Nile, several kilometres to the north of Dongola, the capital of the Christian Nubian Kingdom of Makuria. The epitaph, constructed with the prayer ‘God of spirits and all flesh’, is dated to the ninth century on contextual and palaeographic grounds. It commemorates a certain Merki, who, according to the text, followed a splendid career in the state apparatus, which led from *notarios* to *protodomestikos*, i.e. the head of the royal office dealing with agriculture and fiscal matters.

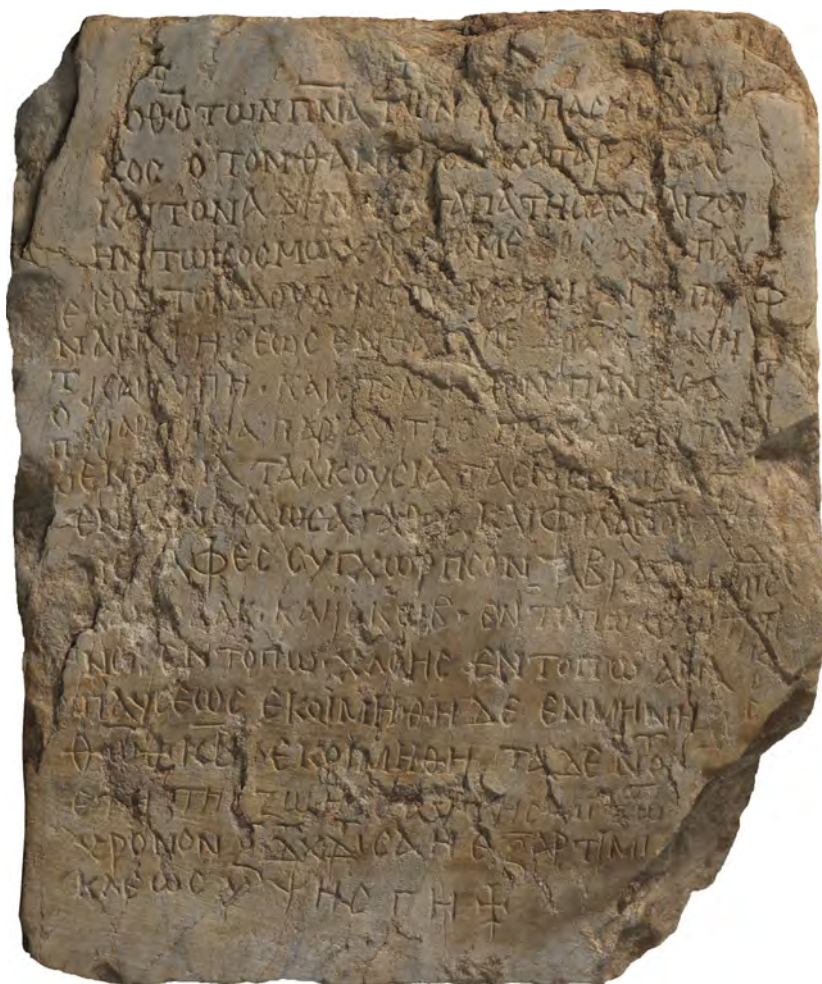
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Adam Łajtar, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw; a.lajtar@uw.edu.pl;

 0000-0003-3842-2180

Hambukol is a village on the right bank of the Nile, 7km to the north of the ruins of Dongola, the capital of the Nubian Christian Kingdom of Makuria. It is located on an alluvial stripe of land separating the river from its palaeochannel, called Letti Basin. In the time of the Kingdom of Makuria, Hambukol was an occupation site, the remains of which are hidden nowadays under two artificial hills called, appropriately, the Southern and the Northern Kom. Archaeological excavations carried out by the mission of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Toronto, brought to light, on the Southern Kom, a spacious building of a disputable character amidst domestic architecture,¹ and on the Northern Kom a church surrounded by graves. It is on the Northern Kom that three epitaphs, all of them in Greek, were discovered. The epitaphs were found *in situ*. The first of them, inscribed on a marble tray and commemorating Mariankuda, a tetrarch of Makuria (died AD 887), came to light in the church, within the sanctuary; the second belonging to a man whose name has not been preserved, on a tomb incorporated into a later burial structure located against the southeast wall of the church; and the third, commemorating a certain Merki, on a smaller cruciform tomb in the vicinity of the previous one. As a result of the division of finds between the

¹ For results of excavations on the Southern Kom, see: Grzymski *et al.* 2001.



1. Greek epitaph of Merki found in Hambukol (© Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto).

Sudanese state and the ROM mission, the two first inscriptions went to the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. They were published by me in the catalogue of Greek epigraphic holdings of the said museum.² The third inscription was allotted to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (inventory number 998.89.7) where I studied it in autopsy in summer 2007. The purpose of the present paper is to publish this interesting find.

The inscription stands on a roughly rectangular slab, 30.2cm high, 25.5cm wide, and 3.5–4.5cm thick, made of white-cream marble with blue-gray stripes (**Fig. 1**). The lower right-hand corner of the slab is broken off, but as no letter is lacking here one can suppose that the breaking was older than the carving of the inscription. The edges of the slab are

² Łajtar 2003: nos 18, 19.

chipped off and the stone surface is worn in many spots, especially in the upper right-hand corner and in the centre of the left-hand side. The inscription has neither framing nor ruling, but it was executed quite nicely in even lines. The height of the letters varies between 0.5cm (ο in the word κόσμῳ in line 4) and 1.8cm (φ in line 12). Palaeographically letters represent round epigraphic majuscules. The direct strokes of the letters are provided, though inconsistently, with serifs. Words are optionally separated by dots at middle height to the letters. Vowels in initial position are marked, though not consistently, with a dot. Dots also occur above vowels in the medial and final positions, either to mark accent or to highlight the vowel as a syllable (for details, see palaeographic apparatus). *Nomina sacra* are used according to common rules. Titles are abbreviated thrice through placing the last preserved letter in upper case; by chance, this letter is τ in all three cases.

The person who carved the inscription in the stone made serious mistakes at work, omitting substantial parts of the text, and corrected himself adding the omitted words or phrases on the margins. For a detailed discussion of these phenomena see general commentary.

The inscription remains unpublished. Its discovery was reported by Julie Anderson.³ The career of the deceased was discussed briefly by Adam Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet.⁴

The object can be dated to the ninth century based on archaeological context and palaeography.

†	†	†	
	ὁ	θ(εὸ)ς	τῶν πν(ευμ)άτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός, ὁ τὸν θάνατον καταργήσας
4	καὶ τὸν Ἄδην καταπατήσας καὶ ζωὴν τῷ κόσμῳ χαρισάμενος, ἀνάπαυσον τὸν δοῦλον σου Μερκι ἐν τόπῳ φωτινῶ ἐν τόπῳ ἀναπήξεως, ἔνθα ἀπέδρα ὀδύνη		
8	καὶ λύπη · καὶ στεναγμόν· πᾶν δὲ ἀμάρτημα · παρ' αὐτῆς πρακθέντα		
	⟨τὰ⟩ ἐκούσια, τὰ ἀκούσια, τὰ ἐν γνώσε[ι], τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ, ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλάν(θρωπ)ος, ἄ-	πρωτ(ο)-	
12	νες ἄφες συγχώρ(η)σον · ⟨ἐν κόλποις⟩ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ [Ι]σαὰκ · καὶ Ἰακώβ, · ἐν τόπῳ φωτινῶ, · ἐν τόπῳ · χλόης, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναπαύσεως. ἐκοιμήθη δὲ ἐν μηνῇ	δο- μίσ- τι- κ- ο-	
16	Θῶθ κβ̄ ἐκοιμήθη. τὰ δὲ ἐτη τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς χρόνον ξδ̄. χα(ρ)τ(ου)λάριος Σση, ἔξαρχ(ος) Τιμικλεως ὑψη(λῆ)ς γῆ. †	νοτ(άριος) μιζώτερος	ς

³ Anderson 1999: 75.

⁴ In: Łajtar 2006: 102–104 (with the focus on the office of *chartouarios* of Saï); Łajtar 2015: 231–232 (with the focus on the place-name Timikleos); Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2010: no. 20, commentary to lines 10–11 (about the title of *notarios*).

1. ὅς πᾶτων || 2. ὅτον || 7. ἀναψήξεως ἀπέδραόληνη || 8. πάνδε || 10. εκογσία ἀκογσία || 11. ἀγνοιά ἀγαθος φίλᾶνος || 11-12. ἀνεκάφες συγχωρησον || 13. ἱακωβ || 14. τόπωκλόνος || 14-15. ἀναπαγσεως || 16. ἠῶθ νο\`τ\` || 17. μίζω\`τ\` || 18. και\`τ\` || 18-19. τιμικλέως

6. φωτεινῶ || 7. ἀναψύξεως || 8. στεναγμός || 9. αὐτοῦ πραχθέντα (for πραχθέν) || 15. μηνί || 17. αὐτοῦ μειζότερος || 18. χρόνος || 19. γῆς || right-hand margin: πρωτοδομήστικος

God of spirits and of all flesh, you who have defeated death and trodden down Hades and given life to the world, rest Your servant Merki in a shining place, in a place of refreshment, from which pain and grief and lamentation have fled away. As a good God and loving mankind forgive every sin committed by her (sic!), both conscious and unconscious, (committed) in the state of knowledge and in ignorance, remit and redeem, (in the bosom) of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place, in the place of verdure, in the place of rest. He fell asleep in the month of Thoth (day) 22. And the years of her (sic!) life (were) age 64. (He was) chartouliarios of Saï, exarchos of Timikleos, the lofty land, notarios, meizoteros, protodomestikos.

GENERAL COMMENTARY

The Hambukol epitaph of Merki belongs to a wider group of Nubian Christian funerary inscriptions characterised by a long prayer for the dead beginning with the invocation ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός.⁵ It shows numerous deviations from the standard form of this prayer as found on Nubian tombstones. The majority of these deviations are due to inadvertence of either the redactor of the inscription or the stonemason (or both of them).

The most substantial of all these changes is a complete remodelling of the second part of the prayer following the words πᾶν ἀμάρτημα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθέν. The original text of this part reads as follows: πᾶν ἀμάρτημα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθέν λόγῳ ἢ ἔργῳ ἢ κατὰ διάνοιαν, ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος, συγχώρησον, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ζήσεται καὶ οὐχ ἀμαρτήσεται. σὺ γὰρ μόνος, ὁ θεός, πάσης ἀμαρτίας ἐκτὸς ὑπάρχεις καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη σου δικαιοσύνη εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, κύριε, καὶ ὁ λόγος σου ἡ ἀλήθεια. σὺ γὰρ εἶ ἡ ἀνάπαυσις καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δεῖνος καὶ σοὶ τὴν δόξαν ἀναμέλομεν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν, i.e.: *As a good God and loving mankind forgive every sin committed by him in word or in deed or in thought, for there is not a man who would live and would not sin. For you alone, O God, are without every sin, and your justice is justice forever, O Lord, and your word is truth. For you are the rest and the resurrection of your servant NN and to you we sing glory, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, amen.* Of this text, the initial list of various kinds of sins – λόγῳ ἢ ἔργῳ ἢ κατὰ διάνοιαν, ‘in word or

⁵ For these epitaphs, see most recently: Łajtar 2003: XXI–XXIII. A list of epitaphs (now much outdated) is found in: Łajtar 1996: 101–108. For the prayer itself, its origin, structure, and theological message, see: Brakmann 2006: 303–310.

in deed or in thought' – was substituted, possibly under a liturgical model, by another one, reading τὰ ἐκούσια, τὰ ἀκούσια, τὰ ἐν γνώσει, τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ, 'conscious and unconscious, (committed) in the state of knowledge and in ignorance', and the rest, following the request συγχώρησον, was cut off. The shortening seems to be purely automatic and might have been caused by the lack of space on the stone. Note, however, that the Dongolese epitaph of the priest Stephanos (Istephanou), also called Eifnitta, dating from AD 797,⁶ has the prayer for the dead breaking in exactly the same place, which may suggest that there was a certain tradition, at least in the Dongola area, to abbreviate the prayer with the request συγχώρησον. Additionally the penitential formula ἄνες ἄφες, 'remit and redeem', was inserted before συγχώρησον. It should be observed that this formula, most probably of liturgical origin, occurs in exactly this place in several Nubian epitaphs with the prayer ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός.⁷

In the first part of the prayer, changes occur in its second half where God is asked to grant various places of rest for the soul of the deceased. The text reads as follows in its standard form: ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δεῖνος (τὸν δούλον σου τὸν δεῖνα) ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ, ἐν τόπῳ χλόης, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως, ἐνθα ἀπέδρα ὀδύνη καὶ λύπη καὶ στεναγμός, i.e. *rest the soul of your servant (rest your servant) in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place, in a place of verdure, in the place of refreshment, whence pain and grief and lamentation have fled away*. Of this, the words ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ, ἐν τόπῳ χλόης, 'in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place, in a place of verdure' were omitted. The stonemason was aware of this omission and tried to improve the text in a double way. First he added φωτινῷ (= φωτεινῷ) in the right-hand margin, to the right of line 6, and ἐν τόπῳ in the left-hand margin, to the left of line 7, thus creating the sequence ἐν τόπῳ φωτεινῷ, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως, 'in a shining place, in a place of refreshment' (the additions are marked by vertical strokes in the edition above). Second he repeated the entire omitted sequence in lines 12–15 in a fully arbitrary way, without any syntactical and semantic connection with the neighbouring phrases. One can suppose that he introduced the omitted text in this very place because he was exactly there during the work when he stated that he made the omission. By the occasion of this self-correction, the words ἐν κόλποις had fallen out, which causes the names of the patriarchs to be deprived of a regens. Interestingly, the text added in lines 12–15 has the request for rest ἐν τόπῳ ἀναπαύσεως, which does not belong to the *textus receptus* of the prayer ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός although it sometime occurs in place of ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως in Nubian epitaphs with the prayer in question.⁸ One can summarise the above observations as follows: initially the stonemason tried to correct his mistake in a restricted way using the free space on both sides of the main text, but then decided to introduce a serious correction for which he had to interrupt

⁶ Łajtar, Twardecki 2003: no. 110.

⁷ Cf. Łajtar 2003: no. 3, commentary to line 9. Generally for the formula, see: Wade 2005.

⁸ Cf. Łajtar 2003: no. 9, commentary to line 9.

the main text. As a result of these omissions and self-corrections, he produced a text which is redundant in at least one, and, if we eliminate the opposition between ἀναψύξεως and ἀναπαύσεως, even in two places. Its ultimate form reads: ἀνάπαυσον τὸν δούλον σου Μερκι ἐν τόπῳ φωτινῶ, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψήξεως, (ἐν κόλποις) Ἀβραάμ κα[ὶ] Ἰσαάκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, ἐν τόπῳ φωτινῶ, ἐν τόπῳ χλόης, ἐν τόπῳ ἀναπαύσεως, ἔνθα ἀπέδρα ὀδύνη καὶ λύπη καὶ στεναγμὸν, *rest the soul of your servant Merki in a shining place, in a place, of refreshment, in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place in a place of verdure, in a place of rest, from which pain and grief and lamentation have fled away.*

The prayer for the deceased is followed by information about the date of his death and the length of his life. The former is introduced by the habitual ἐκοιμήθη, here doubled most probably as the result of a conflation (see line commentary), the latter – with the equally habitual τὰ δὲ ἔτη τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ, with the wrong pronoun αὐτῆς for αὐτοῦ (see line commentary).

After the information about the date of death and the length of life, the text continues with the description of the career of the deceased man. It assumes the form of an asyndeton deprived of an introductory formula. An asyndetic list of titles is common as a description of the deceased's career in Nubian epitaphs. One can cite here such examples as the epitaph of the priest Stephanos (Istephanou) from Dongola (died AD 797),⁹ the epitaph of Staurophoros from Debeira (died AD 1069),¹⁰ the epitaph of Marianou, bishop of Phrim (died AD 1132),¹¹ and many more. However, the placement of the titles' list in Merki's epitaph and the lack of an introductory formula are rather exceptional. In the epitaphs with the prayer ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός the information about the deceased should occur either in the first part of the prayer, after the words ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δεῖνος (τὸν δούλον σου τὸν δεῖνα), 'rest the soul of your servant NN (rest your servant NN)', or in its second part introduced by σὺ γὰρ εἶ ἡ ἀνάπαυσις καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦ δεῖνος, 'you are the rest and the resurrection of your servant NN'. The remodelling of the second part of the prayer, which led to the elimination of the latter expression, might have been the reason why the redactor of the present epitaph (followed by the stonemason) chose another, somewhat artificial, solution. Another possibility is that he added the description of Merki's career as an afterthought. If this second possibility is correct, we would have further proof of his inattention at work.

The description of Merki's career has five titles. Two of them – χαρτουλάριος Σαη and ἔξαρχος Τιμικλεως ὑψηλῆς γῆς – belong to the original body of the text, closed with a cross at the end of line 19. The remaining three must be considered as later additions. Two of these additions – νοτ(άριος) and μιζώτερος – were recorded in free spaces towards the end of lines 16 and 17 respectively, and the third – πρωτ(ο)δομίστικος – was written from top to bottom in the right-hand margin. This supposed sequence of writing the titles is strange as it does not correspond with the importance of the titles, neither in ascending

⁹ Łajtar, Twardecki 2003: no. 110.

¹⁰ Hägg 1982: 57.

¹¹ Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2010: no. 21.

nor descending order, which means that it does not mirror the chronological *cursus* of Merki. Obviously the redactor of the epitaph (followed by the stonemason) was again not very attentive at work and listed the titles without order, or with little order, as they came to his mind. When arranged according to the importance of the titles in ascending order, the list should rather read: νοτ(άριος), χαρτουλάριος Σαη, μιζώτερος, ἔξαρχος Τιμικλεως ὑψηλῆς γῆς, πρωτ(ο)δομίστικος, or, less probably: νοτ(άριος), μιζώτερος, χαρτουλάριος Σαη, ἔξαρχος Τιμικλεως ὑψηλῆς γῆς, πρωτ(ο)δομίστικος.

The career of Merki as reconstructed above is remarkable. It started with two offices connected with drafting and keeping documents (*notarios*, *chartouarios* of Saï). In this context it is worth stressing that Merki obviously was not an ecclesiastic, which means that literacy was not restricted to the men of the Church and was accessible also for laity in Christian Nubia. After that, Merki continued his career with two posts in the territorial administration (*meizoteros*, exarch of Timikleos), whereby the second of these posts was connected with the capital of the Kingdom of Makuria. He ended up with the office of *protodomestikos*, thus becoming a person in the closest entourage of the King, his deputy for fiscal and economic matters in the entire Kingdom of Makuria. One wonders how to interpret the remarkable promotion of Merki from the low office of *notarios* to the very high office of *protodomestikos*. Two possibilities seem to come in mind. Either the Kingdom of Makuria had state structures loose enough and the enough social mobility to allow the making of splendid careers by ambitious and well-educated men even if they did not belong to the uppermost strata of the society, or ‘aristocrats’, similarly as members of the *ordo senatorius* in ancient Rome, had to follow a strict *cursus honorum* before entering into the most elevated posts in the administration of the state. At the moment we have no data for solving the question but future finds of a textual nature may cast a light on it.

LINE COMMENTARY

6. The personal name Merki (μερκι, also spelled μερκη) is well attested in Christian Nubia. In addition to the person commemorated by this epitaph the following bearers of this name are known: μερκη πρε(σβγτερος) mentioned in a *graffito* on the rocks near Ashkeit in the area of the second cataract (date unknown);¹² μερκι, son of μαρτοσογγουδα, mentioned in a *graffito* on the rocks of the so-called Gebel Maktub near Qasr Ibrim (tenth/eleventh century);¹³ μερκη εἰμη παπασα, ‘Merkê, bishop of Ibrim’, listed in the protocols of two legal documents, one found in Qasr Ibrim (AD 1463),¹⁴ the other in Gebel Adda (date unknown);¹⁵ μερκη, mentioned as the author of a literary(?) text from Qasr Ibrim (date unknown);¹⁶ μερκη πρε(σβγτερος), addressee of a letter found in Qasr Ibrim (date unknown).¹⁷ μερκι is probably

¹² Łajtar, Van der Vliet 1998: 51, no. 13 (= Van der Vliet 2018: 359–360, no. 13).

¹³ Unpublished.

¹⁴ Ruffini 2014: no. 63, 6.

¹⁵ Unpublished; preliminarily, see: Millet 1967: 62.

¹⁶ Ruffini 2014: no. 88, r^o 1.

¹⁷ Ruffini 2014: no. 110, v^o 12.

a hypocoristic of Μερκούριος provided with the formant /-i/ frequently occurring at the end of Nubian substantives including names.

8. The spelling *στεναγμων* instead of *στεναγμος* has probably nothing to do with morphology or syntax (accusative for nominative) but is purely phonological: the loss of /s/ in the final position with the simultaneous addition of /n/.¹⁸ Without being frequent, the spelling *στεναγμων* (*στεναγμωνων*) occurs in Nubian epitaphs with the prayer *ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός*.¹⁹ The above remarks hold true also for *χρονον* (for *χρόνος*) in line 18.

8–11. The direct object in singular (*πᾶν ἀμάρτημα*) is connected with the attribute in plural (*πραχθέντα, <τὰ> ἐκούσια, τὰ ἀκούσια, τὰ ἐν γνώσει[ι], τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ*). This is probably due to the -a ending of the word *ἀμάρτημα*, which makes the impression for an unqualified person of being plural. The correct reading should be: *πᾶν ἀμάρτημα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθὲν τὸ ἐκούσιον, τὸ ἀκούσιον, τὸ ἐν γνώσει, τὸ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ*. It is not excluded that the redactor of the inscription wanted to put all these elements in the plural: *πάντα ἀμαρτήματα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθέντα, τὰ ἐκούσια, τὰ ἀκούσια, τὰ ἐν γνώσει, τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ*. Against this supposition is that the object is singular in the *textus receptus* of the prayer *ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός*.

9. *παρ' αὐτῆς* instead of *παρ' αὐτοῦ* is strange. It is known that Nubian epitaphs for women frequently contain masculine forms *δούλος* for *δούλη* and *αὐτός* for *αὐτή*.²⁰ Their occurrence is attributed to the fossilisation of some expressions like *ἀνάπαυσον τὸν δούλον* and *πᾶν ἀμάρτημα παρ' αὐτοῦ πραχθὲν*, and to the weak sense of grammatical gender among the Nubian speakers whose native tongue did not possess this grammatical category. The latter explanation may hold true also for our case, where the feminine form is used for a man. Another instance of *αὐτῆς* used instead of *αὐτοῦ* occurs in line 17, but the latter occurrence should probably be interpreted differently.

10. Conscious and unconscious sins (*τὰ ἀμαρτήματα τὰ ἐκούσια καὶ τὰ ἀκούσια*) are similarly referred to in the prayer for the dead contained in the epitaph of an unknown person found in Khandak, several kilometres to the north of Hambukol: *παρορῶν αὐτ() τὰ ἀμαρτήματ(α) πάντ(α) τὰ ἐκούσια [(καὶ) ἀκούσια]*.²¹ Sins committed in the state of knowledge and in ignorance are not mentioned in Greek epitaphs from Nubia but are pointed out in the Old Nubian part of the epitaph of the Nubian King Georgios, who died in AD 1157 in Wadi Natroun in Lower Egypt and was buried there: *ταν εαπερογκον ακκιδταμη (...)* *ειελ αγειδισινγογκα μασιλ αγειδισινγογκα*, 'And forgive his sins,

¹⁸ Generally for this phenomenon, see: Gignac 1976: 131–132.

¹⁹ Examples collected in: Łajtar 2003: no. 3, commentary to line 8.

²⁰ See, for example: Łajtar 2003: no. 7, commentary to line 13.

²¹ Łajtar 2003: no. 16.

(...) that he committed knowing (and) not knowing'.²² Outside of Nubia, they are referred to in an epitaph from Asia Minor: παρορῶν τὰ πλιμμελήματα τὰ ἐν γνώσειε (read γνώσει, i.e. γνώσει) κ(αὶ) ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ φιλαν[θρωπίᾳ σου].²³ The entire expression τὰ ἀμαρτήματα τὰ ἐκούσια καὶ τὰ ἀκούσια τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ καὶ γνώσει belongs to the prayer ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός neither in its Byzantine form nor in the Nubian one. If it occurs in the epitaph of Merki, it was introduced either by the redactor of this epitaph or by someone else on an earlier stage of the text transmission. In the latter case, we would have to do with a separate text tradition of the prayer ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός in this very place where the redactor of the Merki's epitaph was active or where he was educated. The source of borrowing for this expression most probably was of liturgical character. This might have been a prayer for the dead from the funerary liturgy of the Greek Church, which has παρορῶν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὰ πλιμμελήματα αὐτοῦ τε ἐκούσια καὶ τὰ ἀκούσια καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ καὶ γνώσει.²⁴ One compares also the prayer for the dead from the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII 41: δεηθῶμεν, ὅπως ὁ φιλόανθρωπος θεὸς προσδεξάμενος αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν παρίδῃ αὐτῷ πᾶν ἀμάρτημα ἐκούσιον καὶ ἀκούσιον.²⁵

15–16. ἐκοιμήθη δὲ ἐν μηνὶ Θῶθ κβ̄ ἐκοιμήθη is a conflation of two expressions: ἐκοιμήθη δὲ ἐν μηνὶ Θῶθ κβ̄ and ἐν δὲ μηνὶ Θῶθ κβ̄ ἐκοιμήθη. Actually, one of the two ἐκοιμήθη should be eliminated.

The name of the month Thoth is recorded with a dash over it (Θῶθ̄). Marking the month names with horizontal dashes is a widespread practice in Christian Nubian literacy.²⁶ The reason for this practice is not clear. Perhaps Nubian writers wanted to underscore in this way that names of months of the Egyptian calendar do not undergo the rules of Greek declension.

17. ἀυτῆς (instead of αὐτοῦ) is probably due to the influence of the neighbouring ζωῆς.

18. For the spelling χρονον (for χρόνος), see commentary to line 8 where a similar case is discussed (στεναγμον for στεναγμός). χρόνος means 'lifespan, age' here. Other Nubian epitaphs use ἡμέρα in analogical context.²⁷

18–19 + additions on the right-hand margin. The title of *chartouarios*, literally 'the one who is dealing with *chartai*', i.e. sheets of writing material, is attested several times in Christian Nubia,²⁸ but it is only here that it is modified by a place name. Most probably,

²² Van Gerven Oei 2011. The phrase in question is found in line 12.

²³ Sterrett 1888: 314.

²⁴ Goar 1730: 426.

²⁵ *Les constitutions apostoliques* 3.

²⁶ For a collection of evidence, see: Ochała 2011: 225–237, 249–250. The practice is attested in relation to the following month names: Thoth, Hathyr, Khoiak, Tybi, Mekheir, Pakhon, and Mesore.

²⁷ For the meaning of the word ἡμέρα in Greek Christian epitaphs from Nubia, see: Hägg 1982: 59.

²⁸ For a collection of evidence and a discussion, see: Łajtar 2006: 102–104, where this inscription is also cited.

chartouarios of Saï was the head of an office located in this very place where documents were drawn and kept. This was either a town-office or an office connected with a larger administrative unit within the Kingdom of Makuria, of which Saï was capital.

The title of *exarchos* is not very common in Christian Nubian sources.²⁹ Nubian *exarchoi* were probably civilian officials, governors of certain areas (districts), important from the point of view of the functioning of the Kingdom of Makuria (earlier also Kingdom of Nobadia). The comparison with the Eastern Roman *exarchoi* suggests that their authority was of both a civilian and military nature. It has been suggested in the earlier scholarship that Nubian *exarchoi* could have been Church officials.³⁰ The purely civilian career of Merki shows that this cannot be true, at least for him.

The inscription designates Merki as ἔξαρχος Τιμικλεως ὑψηλῆς γῆς. It has been proved recently that Timikleos is the name for Dongola, the capital of Makuria, used in Greek and Coptic sources.³¹ The designation ὑψηλῆ γῆ, 'lofty land', for Dongola appears only here and its origins are unknown. It may refer to either the particular location of the citadel of Dongola on a rocky outcrop in an otherwise plain neighbourhood or the prominent role Dongola played within the Kingdom of Makuria as the royal capital. A commentary is necessary for the spelling γῆς occurring on the stone. I have edited the place as we were dealing with the omission of a syllable (ὑψη(λῆ)ς). Such an omission is explicable as a kind of haplography facilitated by the fact that the omitted syllable and the preceding one have the same vowel η. It is not excluded, however, that γῆς is not a mistake, but is what the redactor of the inscription exactly wanted in this place. He might have felt that the adjective 'high, lofty' reads ὕψος, ὕψη, ὕψον in Greek, i.e. that it has exactly the same root as the substantive 'height' (τὸ ὕψος) and the adverb 'on high, aloft' (ὕψι), not extended by -ηλ-.

It is interesting to observe that Dongola was the centre of an exarchate. This is surely connected with its capital functions within the Kingdom of Makuria. A smooth and undisturbed functioning of the royal court and the central administration obviously required a special organisational frame, uniting, as it seems, civilian and military authority in one hand. The extension of this exarchate is difficult to estimate. It could have encompassed the town of Dongola itself and its immediate hinterland including the fertile Letti Basin, which must have been the main source of supply for the capital.

The title of *notarios* is attested several times with relation to Christian Nubia.³² Greek νοτάριος transcribes the Latin *notarius*. In the time of the Roman Empire, *notarii*, often recruited from among the imperial freedmen, were primarily stenographers who recorded

²⁹ For a collection of evidence and a discussion, see: Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2010: no. 43, commentary to line 5, where this inscription is also cited. To the Nubian attestations of *exarchoi* collected and discussed there one can add three further examples in Coptic legal documents from Qasr Ibrim datable to the tenth-eleventh century (unpublished; preliminarily, see: Hagen 2009: 117). These are: exarch of Talmis, exarch of the district of Kouttouke, and exarch of Adom[- -] (names of holders not given in Hagen's preliminary presentation).

³⁰ See discussion in: Hägg 1990: 160–161.

³¹ Łajtar 2015.

³² For a list of attestations (including, among other, the inscription published here) and a discussion, see: Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2010: no. 20, commentary to line 10.

the minutes of important meetings.³³ Later, in the time of the Eastern Roman Empire, they were known as scribes and secretaries serving in various government departments like *genikon*, *vestiarion*, *dromos*, etc. It is undoubtedly in this later meaning that the term *notarios* was used in Christian Nubia. One can suppose that Nubian *notarioi* were clerks employed in the bureaus of higher officials and drafting documents for them.

As far as Christian Nubia is concerned, the title of *meizoterōs* has been attested ten times in addition to this inscription.³⁴ The list of attestations is as follows:

- (1) Paulos *meizoterōs* commemorated by a Coptic epitaph of Lower Nubian provenance; date unknown;³⁵
- (2) Epephanios (i.e. Epiphanyios) *meizoterōs* commemorated by a Greek epitaph of Lower Nubian provenance; date unknown;³⁶
- (3) Ang()phorou *mizoterōs* commemorated by an epitaph in Greek found in Qasr Ibrim; date unknown;³⁷
- (4) Starophoros, *meiz() nauarches* of Nobades and *nau()* of Seven Lands, commemorated by a Greek epitaph found at Debeira; AD 1069; note that both the reading *meiz(oterōs)* and *meiz(on)* is possible in this case;³⁸
- (5) Simon, *meizo()* of Nobadia, mentioned in the protocol of a legal document in Coptic; Lower Nubia; possibly second half of the eighth century;³⁹
- (6) Joseph, *meizo()* of Nobadia, listed in the protocol of a legal document in Coptic; Lower Nubia; possibly beginning of the ninth century;⁴⁰
- (7) Abraam, *meizoterōs* of the king, listed in the protocol of a legal document in Coptic dating from AD 925 found in Qasr Ibrim (line 9);⁴¹
- (8) Georgios, eparch of Nobadia, *meizoterōs* of the protoeparch, listed in the protocol of the same document (lines 9–10);
- (9) *meizoterōs* (and) *domestikos* (name not preserved) mentioned in the protocol of a legal document of AD 1071/1072 found in Qasr Ibrim;⁴² note that the translation is uncertain; it can also be *meizoterōs* (of the) *domestikos*;

³³ Cf. Teitler 1985.

³⁴ In the following discussion of the title *meizoterōs* I do not make distinction between *meizoterōs* and *meizon*. The latter has not been attested indisputably in Christian Nubia so far (see remarks to nos [4], [5], [6], [7], and [10] in the list) although it is well known elsewhere. I also do not take into consideration the titles of *protomeizoterōs* and *archimeizoterōs* as they refer to officials of a different grade than *meizoterōs*.

³⁵ Van der Vliet 2002: 185–191 (= Van der Vliet 2018: 284–287).

³⁶ Richter 1999: 296–297.

³⁷ Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2010: no. 56.

³⁸ Hägg 1982: 56–59.

³⁹ Krall 1900: 237. Krall read $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}\dot{\text{N}}\text{N}\text{O}\text{B}\dot{\text{A}}\text{T}\dot{\text{I}}\text{A}$ and translated ‘meizon of Nobadia’; here the correct reading should be $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\)\text{N}\text{O}\text{B}\dot{\text{A}}\text{T}\dot{\text{I}}\text{A}$ as observed by Lajos Berkes (personal communication); note that the abbreviation can be expanded as both $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\text{T}\text{E}\text{P}\text{O}\text{C})$ and $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\text{N})$.

⁴⁰ Krall 1900: 239. Krall read $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}\text{N}\text{T}\text{N}\text{O}\text{B}\dot{\text{A}}\text{T}\dot{\text{I}}\text{A}$ and translated ‘meizon of Nobadia’; here the correct reading should be $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\)\text{N}\text{T}\text{N}\text{O}\text{B}\dot{\text{A}}\text{T}\dot{\text{I}}\text{A}$ as observed by Lajos Berkes (personal communication); note that the abbreviation can be expanded as both $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\text{N})$ and $\text{M}\dot{\text{I}}\text{Z}\text{O}(\text{T}\text{E}\text{P}\text{O}\text{C})$.

⁴¹ Unpublished; quoted after a hand-out distributed by Jack M. Plumley during one of his lectures.

⁴² Plumley 1981: 7–8, line 8.

(10) Apapa, deacon of the *meiz*() of Faras, sender of a letter to Ioannes, a bishop; date unknown, but not earlier than twelfth century;⁴³ note that the translation of the information about the sender is uncertain; it can also be: ‘Apapa, deacon (and) *meiz*() of Faras’; note further that both the reading *meiz(oteros)* and *meiz(on)* is possible.

Gerald Michael Browne suggested that Greek (and Coptic) *meizoteros*, literally ‘the greater one’, might have had its counterpart in the Old Nubian ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)ΚΑΤΤ-, which derives from ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)-, ‘to be great’.⁴⁴ ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)ΚΑΤΤ- is attested several times as title of officials in the protocols of Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim from the twelfth–thirteenth century. It may occur as a bare title⁴⁵ or in connection with a place-name, including ΔΔΔΔΟΥΙ ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)ΚΑΤΤ, ‘*dau(ou)katt* of Addawi’,⁴⁶ ΦΡΙΜ/ΣΙΛΜΙ ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)ΚΑΤΤ, ‘*dau(ou)katt* of Qasr Ibrim’,⁴⁷ and ΙΡΚΙΝ ΔΔΥ(ΟΥ)ΚΑΤΤ, ‘*dau(ou)katt* of a village’.⁴⁸

The title of *meizoteros* is rather vague. In the Eastern Roman Empire it could have been used to designate: (1) a person employed on private title by a particular (a kind of majordomo or steward); (2) a functionary placed under the orders of another official, both civilian and ecclesiastic; (3) an official of a village, head of a village or president of the village’s council.⁴⁹ The same ambiguity in the use of the title is observable in Nubia. Abraam and Georgios, numbers (7) and (8) in the list above, were functionaries attached, respectively, to the king and the protoeparch, Simon and Joseph, (5) and (6) in the list, must have been officials on a provincial level, whereas *meizoteros* of Faras (10), *dau(ou)katt* of Addawi, *dau(ou)katt* of Qasr Ibrim, and the *dau(ou)katt* of a village – officials on the town/village level. As village officials, Eastern Roman *meizoteroi* had competences in administering the finance and the justice including making arbitration and presiding over courts. Similar competences can tentatively be ascribed to Nubian *meizoteroi/dau(ou)katt*. It is interesting to observe that the term *dau(ou)katt* persisted the fall of the Kingdom of Makuria and has been used until present by the inhabitants of the Mahas region in the form *dawokati* as a designation for the head of a lineage.⁵⁰ The *dawokati* is elected among old and knowledgeable men of the lineage. He is *entrusted to run the affairs of the lineage effectively, to represent the lineage members in front of authorities whenever or wherever need arises, and to regulate the affairs of the lineage with other neighbouring lineages*.⁵¹ The difference between the present-day *dawokati* and the Nubian *meizoteroi/dau(ou)katt* is that the latter were most probably state officials whereas the former are representatives of the population but their sphere of activity may not differ very much from each other.

⁴³ Ruffini 2014: no. 89, v^o 6.

⁴⁴ Browne 1996a: 130; see also: Browne 1996b: 37.

⁴⁵ Browne 1991: nos 31, 11; 33, 6; 36, i 11; 39, 27; 40, 19; Ruffini 2014: 71, r^o 23; 101, r^o 8; 114, r^o 16–17.

⁴⁶ Browne 1991: nos 30, 11; 34, 12–13; 36, i 7; Ruffini 2014: 67, 6; 69, 5.

⁴⁷ Browne 1991: nos 34, 33–34; 37, 26; 38, 11; 40, 9; Ruffini 2014: 98, v^o 6.

⁴⁸ Browne 1991: no. 34, 25.

⁴⁹ For the meaning of the title of *meizoteros* with the focus on the Late Roman and Early Arab Egypt, see: Rouillard 1928: 69–71; Berkes 2017: 88–121.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ali Osman 1982: 190.

⁵¹ Ali Osman 1982: 190.

Due to the lack of a closer description it is impossible to decide what was the character of the Merki's office of *meizoterios*. He could have been both a village/town official and a subaltern functionary acting under another official, although the first possibility seems more probable to me.

The present inscription yields the first epigraphic attestation of the title of *protodomestikos* in Christian Nubia. Thus far, this title was known only through the protocols of legal documents on leather. All these documents originate from Lower Nubia and are in Coptic. Two documents drafted apparently in Mohondi (Ikhmindi) and now kept in Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria mention a *protodomestikos* Ioannes active under an otherwise unknown king Chael (probably second half of the eighth century). In the first of these documents he is designated as 'protodomestikos of the palace' (ΠΡΟΤΟΜΕΣΤΙΚΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΛΛΑΔΟΥ),⁵² in the other – 'protodomestikos of the palace of the king' (ΠΡΟΤΟΜΕΣΤΙΚΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΛΛΑΔΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ),⁵³ in both these documents he bears the honorary epithet 'illustrius' (ΛΑΜΠΡΟΤΑΤΟΣ). Two sales drafted within the bishopric of Kourte and now kept in the British Museum⁵⁴ let us know a certain Georgios who, at the same time, held as many as three offices, namely *protoeparchos*, *protodomestikos* and *protomeizoterios*. The documents are dated to the time of a king with the name Ioannes (possibly first quarter of the ninth century). Thanks to a Qasr Ibrim document of AD 925 containing an agreement about a slave ownership we learn that the then reigning king Zacharias, son of Georgios, held also the offices of *protoeparchos* and *protodomestikos*.⁵⁵ The same document informs that a certain Koudimpr[.] was *architriklinaris* of the King, *triklinaris* of the *protodomestikos*, and eparch of Nobadia. Finally, a fragmentary document of AD 1071/1072 found in Qasr Ibrim lists among the highest officials of the Kingdom of Makuria 'protodomestikos of the palace' (ΠΡΟΤΟΜΕΣΤΙΚΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΛΛΑΔΟΥ) whose name is lost.⁵⁶ The title of *protodomestikos* presupposes the existence of the lower-rank title of *domestikos*. The latter is well attested in both the Greek form (used also in Coptic) and its Nubian counterpart *samet/samat*. In the large majority of cases, *domestikos/samet* is qualified as that of Pachoras/Faras;⁵⁷ the holders of this title were often eparchs of Nobadia. There is also a single attestation of a *samet* of Tapha.⁵⁸ The office of *samata* was known in the Kingdom of Kokka that arose in the area to the north of the third cataract after the fall of Makuria.⁵⁹ The *samata* of Kokka was the head of a *saqia*, i.e. an areal watered by one water-wheel, and was responsible for collecting tax in kind, especially in dates. The word persisted (as *samad/samed*) until quite recently in some parts of the Dongola area with exactly the same meaning as in the Kingdom

⁵² Krall 1900: 236–237.

⁵³ Krall 1900: 238–239.

⁵⁴ Crum 1905: nos 449–450.

⁵⁵ The document remains unpublished. I am quoting it here after a hand-out distributed by Plumley during one of his lectures.

⁵⁶ Plumley 1981: 5–8, line 5.

⁵⁷ The attestations are too numerous to be listed here; for a complete list, see: *Medieval Nubia: Offices and titles*, s.v. *domestikos*.

⁵⁸ Browne 1991: no. 38, line 12.

⁵⁹ For the organisation and functioning of the Kingdom of Kokka, see: Ali Osman 1982.

of Kokka.⁶⁰ Assuming that the administration of the Kingdom of Kokka followed that of its predecessor, the Kingdom of Makuria, one can suppose that the Makurian *domestikos /samet* was a royal official responsible for agriculture and fiscal matters in a given area – a village, a town or a larger administrative unit. Consequently *protodomestikos* must have been an official of the central administration who organised and watched over the work of *domestikoi* in the entire Kingdom of Makuria. His office was of the same grade as that of *protoeparchos* and *protomeizoteros*, no wonder then that the three could have been concentrated in one hand. Moreover they could have been fulfilled by King, which testifies to their importance from the point of view of the Kingdom's functioning.

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