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AN INSCRIPTION IN HARET ZUWAILA

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In an interesting study of the use of Byzantine icon panels in contexts of mediaeval Coptic church woodwork,¹ Dr. L.-A. Hunt of the University of Birmingham has opened up a new path of research into cultural cross-currents in the later Mediterranean. In this article, crediting the assistance of U. Nieten, she publishes a detail of the fourteenth-century sanctuary screen carving of the Church of the Virgin at Haret Zuwaila, Cairo, reading the text as Ⲑⲧⲙⲧ ⲃⲈⲚ ⲠⲮ ⲉ ? = ... ⲃⲈⲚⲚⲘ ⲠⲁⲘⲠⲮⲈ ⲉ ?, "... go through the entrance of the door" (Plate 24 and p. 46). In fact the Bohairic inscription is quite clearly the end of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, ⲧⲙⲧ ⲃⲈⲚ ⲠⲮ = (ⲠⲮ) ⲧⲙⲧ ⲃⲈⲚ Ⲛ(Ⲡ) ⲠⲮⲘⲠ, "Good will among men" (Luke 2.14b). The character read as a *beta* is in fact a Bohairic *chai*. The carved text reads ⲚⲠⲮⲘⲠ for ⲚⲠⲠⲮⲘⲠ. This would presuppose the two other sections of the text to the left, making the given portion the right-hand wing of a tripartite structure fitting over the right-hand-most part of the triple *haikal* (sanctuary) entrance. The full Bohairic text of the Gloria (from Horner 1898) is ⲠⲮⲠⲮⲠⲮ ⲃⲈⲚⲚⲘ ⲈⲧⲮⲠⲮⲠ ⲙⲠⲮⲧ, ⲚⲈⲘ ⲠⲮⲠⲮⲠⲮⲚⲘ ⲉⲐⲁⲚ ⲠⲠⲕⲁⲉⲐ, ⲚⲈⲘ ⲠⲮⲧⲙⲧ ⲃⲈⲚ ⲚⲠⲮⲘⲠ.

After I had arrived at this reading, I found that it was already known to the late O. Burmester in 1955,² at a time when the sanctuary screen was still in place and able to be viewed. The Gloria in excelsis is often found inscribed in both Coptic and, later, Arabic over sanctuary entrances (a logical place) in Coptic churches, even those built in this century.

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¹ L.-A. Hunt, 'Iconic and iconic: unknown thirteenth and fourteenth century Byzantine icons from Cairo in their woodwork settings,' in P. Speck, ed., *Varia II* (= *Poikila Byzantina* 6; Bonn 1987) 33-48 with Plates 1-24.

² O.H.E. Burmester, *A Guide to the ancient Coptic churches of Cairo* (Cairo 1955) 70. A.J. Butler did not read the inscription in the 1880s: Butler, *The ancient Coptic churches of Egypt I* (Oxford 1884) 276.