

ADAM ŁAJTAR

A GREEK CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTION FROM EL-CHANDAQ, NUBIA

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 94 (1992) 217–220

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

A GREEK CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTION FROM EL-CHANDAQ, NUBIA.

A funerary inscription in Greek copied in el-Chandaq, a locality on the west bank of Nile, some twenty kilometres south of Old Dongola (Upper Nubia), was published by U. Monneret de Villard in 1935¹. The text of the inscription is presented in majuscule and reads as follows (left hand side; on the right hand side my reading of the inscription and translation)

+ Ι'//////// Ν'///	
ΖΩΗ'////Ε'//ΣΑΝ	† Ι[.]Ν -----
ΘΕΝΤΑΣ'////////Τ	ΖΩΗ[. .]Ε[.]ΣΑΝ -----
////////// ΥΚΩΝ	ΘΕΝΤΑΣ [.]Τ -----
//////////Ν'//////////	[.] ΥΚΩΝ
//////////	5 [.]Ν -----
//////////	-----
//////////	-----
//////////	-----
////////// ΨΥΧΗΝ	10 [- - - Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ θε(ός)ς, ἀνά-]
ΑΥ ΕΝ Κ[ΟΛΠΟΙΣ] ΑΒΡΑΑΜ	[παυσον τή(ν)] ψυχὴν
κ ΙΣΑΑΚ κ ΙΑΚΩΒ · ΕΝ [α]	αὐ(τ)(οῦ) ἐν κ[όλποις] Ἀβραάμ
ΡΑΔ'//ΟΝ'//ΡΥΦΗΣ · ΕΝ	κ(αὶ) Ἰσαάκ κ(αὶ) Ἰακώβ·, ἐν πα-
ΘΑ ΠΑΝ'//// ΦΡΑΙΝ'Μ'Ν	ραδ[εῖ](σφ) [τ]ρυφῆς·, ἐν-
ΗΚΑΤΟΙΚΣΙΑ · ΠΑΡΟΡΩΝ	15 θα πάν[των ε]ὐφραينوμέν(ων)
ΑΥ † ΑΜΑΡΤ Μ'Α ΠΑ'ΝΤΑ	ἡ κατοικ(ε)ία· παρορῶν
ΕΚΟΥΣΙΑ [Ε]ΚΟΥΣΙΑ +	αὐ(τ)(οῦ) τὰ ἁμαρτ[ή]μα(τα) πάντα
	ἐκούσια [κ(αὶ) ἀ]κούσια †

Translation: "O God our Lord, give rest to his soul in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the paradise of joy, (in the place) where there is a seat of all rejoicing; forgive him every sin unconscious and conscious".

As we see, the beginning and middle part of the inscription (ll. 1–10) is almost completely damaged and its reconstruction is impossible. On the grounds of what we know of the structure of Christian funerary inscriptions from Nubia² we may suppose, that an introduction to the inscription, more or less developed, stating the death of the stela's owner as well as a presentation

¹ U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia Medioevale I*, Le Caire 1935, p. 238.

² Generally, on the structure of Christian funerary inscriptions from Nubia, see H. Junker, *Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens*, ZÄS 60, 1925, in particular pp. 124-134; cf. also M. Krauze, *Die Formulare der christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens* [in:] *Nubia. Récentes Recherches*, Varsovie 1975, pp. 76-82.

of the deceased giving data related to his life were contained in this lines. What has been preserved is a prayer for the dead.

Il. 9–11: [κ(ύρι)ε ὁ θε(ε)ός, ἀνάπαυσον τῆ(ν)] ψυχὴν αὐ[τ](οῦ). The proposed reconstruction is almost entirely certain, because prayers for the dead in inscriptions from Nubia always start with this invocation. It could have been supplemented only with additional designations of the God, e.g. κύριε ὁ θεός ὁ τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός κτλ³

At the beginning of l. 11, the intention of the lapicide was, most probably, to abbreviate the word αὐτοῦ similarly as in l. 16, where Π (for T; U. Monneret de Villard's mistake?) is visible above AY. The shifted letter marking an abbreviation has either been omitted by the lapicide or damaged, but it is impossible to decide with only Monneret de Villard's copy at our disposal.

Il. 11–12: ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ. This is one of the most characteristic expressions of Christian epigraphy of Egypt and Nubia, both in Greek and in Coptic⁴. It is composed of several different quotations from the Bible but the date and the author of this composition is unknown. It appears frequently in Early Christian literature, the eucharistic and funerary liturgies of Eastern Churches and, sporadically, funerary inscriptions from beyond the Nile valley.

Il. 12–13: ἐν παραδείσῳ τῆς τρυφῆς. The original source of this expression is Gen. III 23–24, from where it was borrowed by the funeral liturgies of Byzantine and Coptic churches⁵. It occurs quite frequently in Coptic inscriptions both from Egypt and Nubia⁶ while in Greek inscriptions it has been attested, as far as I know, only four times: in an epitaph of a certain Leontios coming most probably from Nubia⁷, a funerary stela of Ioannes from Wadi Ghazali⁸, a funerary inscription of Paulos presbyter written on a wooden cross-beam found during Polish excavations in Deir el-Naqlun (Fayum)⁹, and a funerary inscription of Pitronia from Esna¹⁰

In Il. 12–13, the reading ἐν παραδ[εῖ]⟨σῳ⟩ [τ(ῆς) τ]ρυφῆς or ἐν παραδ[εῖ]⟨σῳ⟩ [τῆ(ς) τ]ρυφῆς with an *eta* written above *tau* is possible as well.

³ Various invocations to God, opening prayers for the dead in inscriptions from Nubia are discussed in H. Junker, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-126.

⁴ Generally on this expression, see W. Steark, Abrahams Schoss. RE I, coll. 27-28; H. Leclercq, *Le séjour des âmes dans le sein d'Abraham*, DACL I, 1907, coll. 1522-1542; as for its appearance in inscriptions, see G. Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Égypte*, Le Caire 1907, Introduction, p. XXX and J. Kubińska, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes (=Faras IV)*, Warszawa 1974, pp. 77-78.

⁵ General discussion of this expression in A. Łajtar, *Two Greek Inscriptions from Deir el-Naqlun, Nubica III* [in press]. Greek and Oriental sources of the Septuagint expression παραδείσος τῆς τρυφῆς are studied by G. Husson, *Le paradis de délices (Genèse 3, 23-24)*, REG 101, 1988, pp. 64- 73.

⁶ To the material gathered in A. Łajtar the following examples may be added: U. Monneret de Villard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 219sq. (Coptic inscription from Meilnarti); W. K. Simpson, JARCE III, 1964, p. 21sq. (Coptic inscription from Arminna in Nubia); M. Bietak, M. Schwarz, *Naga el-Sheima Eine Befestigte christliche Siedlung und andere christliche Denkmäler in Sayala-Nubien, I (=Denkschr. Akad. Wien, Band 191)*, Wien 1987, p. 171.

⁷ M. Seymour de Ricci CRAI 1934, p. 259 (=SB V 7906, SEG VIII, 798, M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni Nubiane*, Pavia 1964, no. 36).

⁸ S. Donadoni *Trois nouvelles steles de Ghazali*, [in:] *Nubische Studien*, Mainz am Rhein 1984, p. 225.

⁹ A. Łajtar, *op. cit.* (note 5), no. 1.

¹⁰ G. Lefebvre, *op. cit.* (note 4), no. 541.

Il. 13–15: ἔνθα πάντων εὐφραινομένων ἢ κατοικία. This is a slightly modified version of Psalm 86. 7: ... ὡς εὐφραινομένων πάντων ἢ κατοικία ἐν σοί. In the form identical as in our inscription it appears in John of Damascus¹¹ and in the Byzantine funerary ritual¹². I know only one attestation of its appearance in funerary epigraphy, in the inscription of Pitronia from Esna already mentioned in this paper (commentary to line 12-13)¹³.

U. Monneret de Villard's copy may suggest that on the stela there was ἔνθα πάν[τα ε]ὐφραινομένα ἢ κατοικία.

Il. 15–16: παρορῶν αὐτοῦ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα πάντα ἐκούσια καὶ ἀκούσια.. This expression, in its fundamental part, is an adaptation of Sap. 11. 24: καὶ παρορῶς ἁμαρτήματα ἀνθρώπων εἰς μετάνοιαν¹⁴. It has its close analogies in the prayer for the dead from the Apostolic Constitutions: ... δεηθῶμεν, ὅπως ὁ φιλόανθρωπος Θεὸς προσδεξάμενος αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν παρίδη αὐτῷ πᾶν ἁμάρτημα ἐκούσιον καὶ ἀκούσιον¹⁵, as well as in funeral liturgy of the Byzantine Church: παρορῶν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὰ πλημμελήματα αὐτοῦ τε ἐκούσια καὶ τὰ ἀκούσια καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ καὶ γνώσει¹⁶. In the area of the Christian culture of the Nile valley it finds its parallel in the great epiclesis of the Coptic anaphora of St. Marc¹⁷, which in turn is almost word for word counterpart of the expression from the Byzantine Euchologion Mega quoted above. As for inscriptions, it appears here for the first time to my knowledge.

The reconstructed text of the prayer discussed above is an exception in Nubian epigraphy. It finds, however, very close analogy in the funerary inscription of Pitronia from Esna, already mentioned twice in this paper, in which the prayer for the dead reads as follows¹⁸:

6 ... [Κ(ύρι)]ε ὁ θε(εὸ)ς ὁ παντο-
κράτωρ, ὁ θεὸς [ς] ὁ τον προ(ε)μ(α)-
[τ]ον θείων καὶ κύριος πάσης

¹¹ Joh. Damasc., hom. 2 (in ficum arefactum), 6 (PG XCVI, col. 587): ...ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ τῶν πρωτοτόκων, ἔνθα εὐφραινομένων ἢ κατοικία.

¹² J. Goar, EYXOLOGION sive rituale graecorum, Graz 1960 (photographical reprint of 1730 Venice edition), pp. 427, 429, 441, 447, 462: τὸν μεταστάντα ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀνάπαυσον, ἔνθα πάντων ἐστὶν εὐφραινομένων ἢ κατοικία ἐν σοί.

¹³ G. Lefebvre, loc. cit., Il. 13–15 gives ενθα | ευφραινομενων εμ[-]†[-]αν[-]. The exact reading of this fragment of the Pitronia inscription has been recognized by H. Junker, op. cit. (note 2), p. 142, note 2.

¹⁴ Cf also Const. Apost. II, 15 (ed. M. Metzger; = Sources Chrétiennes), Paris 1985: παρορῶς τὰ ἁμαρτήματα τοῦ λαοῦ.

¹⁵ Const. Apost. VIII, 41.

¹⁶ J. Goar, op. cit., p. 426. No doubt, this sentence from the Byzantine euchologion influenced the prayer for the dead in an inscription from Asia Minor: παρορῶν τὰ πλημμελήματα τὰ ἐν γνώσει (read γνώσει) κ(αὶ) ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ φιλιαν[θρωπία σου]; for publication of the inscription, see J. R. S. Sterrett, The Wolfe Expedition to Asia Minor, Papers of the American School of Classical studies at Athens III, 1884-1885 (Boston 1988), p. 314 (*non vidi*, cit. after DACL I, col. 246); cf. also J. Goar, op. cit., p. 453: παρορῶν ὡς ἀγαθὸς τὰ πλημμελήματα, ἃ ὡς ἄνθρωπος θνητὸς ἐν βίῳ ἔπραξε.

¹⁷ It is the Bohairic redaction of the anaphora, used since XIIIth century onwards; cf. R. –G. Coquin, L'anaphore alexandrine de Saint Marc, Le Muséon LXXXII, 1969, p. 343: "Praeteri nostras iniquitates (ἀνομία), remitte (συγχωρεῖν) nostra delicta (παράπτωμα), quae fecimus nostra voluntate et quae non fecimus nostra voluntate, quae fecimus scientia et quae fecimus ignorantia, occulta et manifesta".

¹⁸ G. Lefebvre, loc.cit.

σαρκ[ό]ς, ἀ[ν]άπαυσον {ι} τ-
 10 ἥς ψυχ(ῆς) αὐτῆς ἐν κ[ό]λ[ποις]
 Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαάκ καὶ
 Ιακώβ, ἐν παραδείσ-
 φ τῆς [τ]ρυφῆς, ἔνθα
 14 εὐφραϊνομένον ἐ(σ)-
 [τὶν ἢ κατοικία].

As we see, apart from the invocation to God which in the inscription from el-Chandaq is not preserved, there is a striking similarity between these two inscriptions. The question is what was the relation between them. With regard to the large distance between the places where they were discovered, I consider it to be impossible for one of the two inscription to have served as a direct model for the other. I think that both of them belonged to a wider group of funerary monuments displaying the same prayer for the dead used, at least in epigraphy, both in Egypt and in Nubia; such a group has not been recognized hitherto. Undoubtedly, the direct source for this prayer was the funerary liturgy of the Coptic Church. While publishing the funerary inscription of Paulos presbyter from Deir el-Naqlun I found, that the sequence "in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the paradise of joy" is characteristic of Coptic funerary ritual and Coptic inscriptions¹⁹. After that, Coptic inscriptions usually have "from where pain, grief and lamentation have fled away"; in Greek texts this sequence appears only in the funerary stela of Leontios. In turn, the expression "in the place where there is a seat of all rejoicing" after "in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the paradise of joy" is to be found in Greek inscriptions exclusively. The above deduction seems to suggest that we are dealing here with two variants of the same prayer. The first, with the sequence "in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the paradise of joy, from where pain, grief and lamentation have fled away" enjoy popularity in Coptic, the second one "in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the paradise of joy, in the place where there is the seat of all rejoicing" was used in its Greek redaction.

The discussed epigraphical prayer remaining under the influence of Coptic funerary ritual, which assumed its final shape only after the Arab conquest of Egypt²⁰, could come into existence in the 8th/9th century. This constitutes an *ante quem* date for the inscription from el-Chandaq. It was cut, I think, in the 9th/10th century, a date which coincides very well with the year A.D. 890 (year 604 of the Era of Diocletian, year 270 of Hegira) for the inscription of Pitronia from Esna.

¹⁹ A. Łajtar, loc. cit.

²⁰ On the subject of Coptic funerary ritual, see M. Cramer, *Die Totenklage bei der Kopten* (=Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 219, Band 2), Wien-Leipzig 1941, p. 96; R. W. Wolley, *Coptic Offices*, London 1930, Introduction, p. XIX.