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ON THE PROVENANCE OF THE FOUR CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTIONS SB X  
10515–10516, M. G. TIBILETTI BRUNO, ISCRIZIONI NUBIANE 49,  
56

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**ON THE PROVENANCE OF THE FOUR CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTIONS:  
SB X 10515-10516, M.G.TIBILETTI BRUNO, ISCRIZIONI NUBIANE 49, 56\***

SB X 10515-10516 are Christian funerary texts written on stelae that were first published by B. Boyaval in 1966<sup>1</sup>. At the time of their publication the stelae formed part of the private antiquities' collection of Despoina Michaelides in Cairo who bought them at antiquities dealers<sup>2</sup>.

B. Boyaval provides the following note about the provenance of the stelae<sup>3</sup>: "La provenance des stèles XIII, XIV, XV, XVI et XVII a été indiquée par les antiquaires qui les ont vendues à leur actuelle propriétaire. En ce qui concerne les quatre stèles chrétiennes XIV - XVII, leurs indications ne concordent pas avec les conclusions auxquelles G. Lefebvre était parvenu dans l' introduction de son *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Egypte*, 1907. En l'absence de tout travail récent sur la question et notamment de tout publication complète des inscriptions funéraires grecques d'Egypte et de Nubie actuellement connues, nous donnons sous réserve les déclarations des antiquaires". However, the provenance given by the antiquities dealers, at least in case of the two inscriptions in question (Boyaval's nos XV and XVI), is demonstrably false, as the following remarks shall show.

1. SB X 10515 = Boyaval XV surely does not come from the Fayum. The initial formula stating the death of the stela's owner,

τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο,

never occurs in Greek Christian inscriptions from Egypt<sup>4</sup>. It is, however, one of the most characteristic formulae of Christian epitaphs from Nubia<sup>5</sup>. It appears there in several variants: τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο<sup>6</sup>, θεοῦ θέλοντος τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο<sup>7</sup>, τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ

\* I would like to thank R. Daniel for his correction of my English.

In this article I use two abbreviations in addition to commonly accepted ones:

Lef. = G. Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes d'Egypte*, Le Caire 1907

T. B. = M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni Nubiane*, Pavia 1964

<sup>1</sup> B. Boyaval, 21 documents inédits de la collection Despoina Michaelidès, BIFAO 64, 1966, pp. 75-93.

<sup>2</sup> It should be mentioned in this place that the whole epigraphical part of the Michaelides collection was considered by J. Bingen to have been composed of forgeries; cf. SEG XXIV 1252. However, this is not true in the case of the two inscriptions here discussed.

<sup>3</sup> Boyaval, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> The inscription Lef., no 382 (= T. B., no 42a = SB V 8718), which starts with this formula and is known as coming from the Theban Valley of the Kings, is evidently of North Nubian and not Egyptian origin as was decisively proven by H. Junker, *Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens*, ZÄS 60, 1925, pp. 115-116.

<sup>5</sup> For this formula, cf. H. Junker, op. cit. p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> T. B., nos 24 (= Lef. 659, SB I 2034), 25, 26 (the exact provenance within Nubia not known) C. M. Firth, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia. Report for 1908-1909*, vol. I, Cairo 1912, p. 46 (Grave 254), p. 47 (Graves 270 and 302), p. 48 (Graves 598 and 728) (all of them from Ginari); J. W. Barns in: P. L. Shinnie. H. N. Chittick, Ghazali. *A Monastery in the Northern Sudan* (= Sudan Antiquities Service Occasional Papers 5), Khartoum 1961, p. 74, no 13; R. Koerner, *Eine griechisch christliche Grabinschrift aus Nubien*, AfP 18, 1966, p. 44 (provenance unknown); H. Junker, op. cit., p. 120 (improved reading of Lef. 607: from Wadi Ghazali).

<sup>7</sup> This variant appears only in two inscriptions from Ermenne (Armenna): T. B., nos 37 (= SB V 8237, SEG VIII 865) and 38 (= SB V 8238, SEG VIII 866).

δεσπόζοντος ζῶντας δε καὶ νεκροὺς προνοία ἐχρήσατο ὁ δεῖνα τέλει τοῦ βίου τούτου<sup>8</sup>. These occur on the whole vast Nubian territory from Wadi Ghazali in the south to Kalabshah in the north, with predominance of Lower Nubia (Nobadia). Also the prayer for the dead woman,

ἀνάπαυσον αὐτήν, ὁ θεός, ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων

does not appear in Egypt but is very characteristic of Nobadia<sup>9</sup>. In fact, it is from Nobadia, from the large cemetery in Ginari-Tafa, that SB X 10515 undoubtedly comes. It is to be identified with the inscription written on stela discovered in grave 598 during excavations carried out in winter 1908/1909 by C. M. Firth, and published by him in the report from this excavations<sup>10</sup>. With the help of Firth's reading prepared when the monument was no doubt in a better state of preservation than in Boyaval's day, the following text of the inscription may be established:

	† Τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐ-
	χρήσατο ἡ μακα-
	ρία Θεοδοσία μ(η)-
4	ν(ι) Φαμενῶθ ἴς',
	ἰνδ(ικτίονος) δ'. Ἡ ἀναπαυ-
	σοι αὐτή, ὁ θεός, ἐν
	κόλποις Ἀβραὰμ
8	(καὶ) Ἰσαὰκ (καὶ) Ἰακώβ
	κ(αὶ) πάντων τῶν
	ἁγίων, ἀμήν †
	† † †

1. τυυ Firth; 3. read Θεοδοσία; 34. ἦν (=ἐν) Boyaval, SB; μ(η)ν(ι) Firth; 4. Φαμενωθι ς Firth; 5. ινδ/ δ ιι Firth; 5-6. ἀνάπαυσογ or ἀναπαύσοι (?) 6. αὐτή(ν) Boyaval, SB; 8. κ(αὶ), κ(αὶ) Firth; 9. πάντων Boyaval, πάντων SB;

In line 5, two vertical strokes separating two sentences are probably the influence of manuscript writing.

<sup>8</sup> T. B., nos 39 (= Lef. 626, SB V 8723: from Kalabshah), 41 (= Lef. 804: provenance unknown), 42 (= Lef. 621, SB V 8719: from Kalabshah), 42a (for the provenance, cf supra, note 4). Cf also U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia Medioevale I*, Le Caire 1934, p. 41: τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ δεσπόζοντος ζόν[τα]ς [τε] καὶ θανάτου(ς) (suppl. προνοία) τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο (from Kalabshah) and T. B., no 40: † θεία προνοία τοῦ δεσπόζοντος θεοῦ τέλει τοῦ βίου ἐχρήσατο (from Anibah).

<sup>9</sup> In Junker's classification of Nubian epigraphical prayers, this is variant 3 of his prayer γ; cf. H. Junker, *op. cit.*, p. 127. The three known attestations of it are from Ginari; cf. C. M. Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 48 (Graves 486 and 598), p. 50 (second inscription from the top in the right column).

<sup>10</sup> C. M. Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 48 (Grave 598).

2. SB X 10516 = Boyaval XVI. The inscription was later acquired by the Amsterdam University Library and was republished by G. J. M. J. Te Riele<sup>11</sup>.

Just as in the preceding case, the Fayumic (one can generally say Egyptian) origin of the inscription is excluded by reason of the formula used. The introductory invocation to God,

ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός, τῶν ὀρωμένων καὶ τῶν ἀοράτων, though to be found in Coptic funerary ritual<sup>12</sup>, has not been attested till now on Egyptian funerary stelae. Its known six attestations are all from Lower Nubian epitaphs<sup>13</sup> - and probably all from around of Kalabshah; one of them is from Bab Kalabshah<sup>14</sup>, two from Ginari<sup>15</sup> and three of unknown provenance but most probably also from Nobadia<sup>16</sup>. SB X 10516 is in fact one from these six inscriptions. It is Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 49 (Grave 839) from the cemetery at Ginari-Tafa (cf. footnote 15). Its final version may be presented as follows:

ἰνδ(ικτίονος)  
 † ὁ θεὸς τῶν πν(ευμάτ)ων κ(αὶ) πά-  
 σης σαρκός, τῶν ὀρομένων' καὶ  
 4 τῶν ἀοράτων, ἀνά-  
 παυσον τὴν ψυχὴν  
 τῆς δούλη(ς) σου Μαρία  
 εἰς κόλπους Ἀβραάμ κ(αὶ) Ἰσαάκ  
 8 κ(αὶ) Ἰακώβ. μινὶ Παχων θ',  
 ἰνδ(ικτίονος) ἰδ'.

1. ἰνδ(ικτίονος) omitted by Firth; 2. πνων κ[αι] Firth; 3. read ὀρωμένων; 6. τῆς δούλη(ς) σου Μαρία(ς) Boyaval, SB, τῆς δούλη(ς) σου Μαρία(ς) Te Riele; 8. read μινὶ;

Till now, *Iscrizioni nubiane*, a small book published by Maria Grazia Tibiletti Bruno in 1964 is the most complete corpus of Greek Christian Inscriptions from Nubia (see above, footnote 4). She incorporated in her corpus several inscriptions from the collection of the Museum on Elefantine, supposedly all unpublished. But this is not the case for two of these inscriptions.

T.B. 49: "Museo di Elefantina 1038 (fotografia, inedita, copia di M. Vandoni)". This inscription is not an ineditum. It comes from the cemetery at Ginari-Tafa, from grave 807 and, like

<sup>11</sup> G. J. M. J. Te Riele, *Les pierres inscrites* [Appendix in:] P. J. Sijpesteijn, K. A. Worp, *Greek Texts from the Amsterdam University Library*, TAAANTA VIII-IX, 1977, p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> H. Junker, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> General discussion of this typically Nubian epigraphical prayer in H. Junker, *op. cit.*, pp. 125, 137: prayer β.

<sup>14</sup> L. V. Žabkar, *Three Christian Grave Stelas* [in:] H. Riecke et alii, *Ausgrabungen von Khor Dehmit bis Bet el-Wali* (The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, Vol. II), Chicago 1967, p. 19, no 1.

<sup>15</sup> C. M. Firth, *op. cit.*, p. 45 (Grave 79), p. 49 (Grave 839).

<sup>16</sup> T. B., nos 24 (=Lef 659), 25, 26.

the two inscriptions discussed above, its *editio princeps* is by C. M. Firth in his excavation report<sup>17</sup>. The inscription may be edited as follows:

† ἔνθα κατάκειται  
 ἡ μακαρία Ἄρουμι  
 ᾠρᾶ ἐν μην(ὶ) Τῦβι  
 4 ζ', ἰνδ(ικτίονος) δ', ὁ θ(εός), ἀνα-  
 παυσοὶ αὐτὴν ἐν  
 κόλποις Ἄβραάμ  
 καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώ-  
 8 β, ἀμήν † ☉θ.  
 Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστὸ)ς νικᾷ, ☉θ.

2-3: αρουμπιᾠρα Firth; 3. ᾠρᾶ = ἐκοιμήθη Tibiletti Bruno; 34. Τυβι ς Firth; 5. ἀναπαύσοι or ἀνάπαυσον;

I am not able to explain what is the meaning of ᾠρᾶ at the beginning of line 3. A horizontal stroke marking an abbreviation may suggest that this cannot be part of the name of the deceased person as it is in Firth's reading. On the other hand, I do not understand why for Tibiletti Bruno ᾠρᾶ = ἐκοιμήθη, though a verb or an expression stating the death of the stela's owner is in fact to be expected in this place.

T. B. 56: "Museo di Elefantina 1077 (fotografia, inedita, copia di M. Vandoni)". This inscription is also from Ginari-Tafa, from grave 230, and was first published by C. M. Firth<sup>18</sup>. The text is as follows:

† † †  
 † ἔνθα κατάκειται ὁ μα-  
 καρίος Ἄξιος· ἐκοιμήθη  
 4 μηνὶ : Χοιακ : ἰβ', : ἰνδ(ικτίονος) :  
 : η' : ἀνάπαυσον ὁ θ(εὸς)  
 τὴν ψυχὴν τὸν  
 δοῦλον σου ἐν κόλ-  
 8 ποῖς Ἄβραάμ καὶ Ἰ-  
 σαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ,  
 ἀμήν : ☉θ ☉θ †

10. ☉θ Ἰθ † Tibiletti Bruno;

<sup>17</sup> C. M. Firth, op. cit., p. 49 (Grave 807).

<sup>18</sup> op. cit., p. 46 (Grave 230).

That these four inscriptions originate from the cemetery at Ginari-Tafa in Lower Nubia is of significance for understanding the fates of the rest of the 51 inscriptions that Firth discovered among the four thousand graves excavated there. Unfortunately, the epigraphical material was printed by him "rather for the sake of completing the record than for its intrinsic value"<sup>19</sup>, without punctuation and accentuation as well as without a minimum of commentary. It is no wonder then that these inscriptions from Ginari are almost unknown in the scholarly world and remained unknown even to the author of the corpus of Nubian Greek inscriptions. The inscriptions apparently have made their way into various museums and private collections throughout the world; some of them are probably lost. To my knowledge, except for the four inscriptions discussed here, none of the other of the Ginari inscriptions has ever been either re-identified or published as a supposedly new discovery.

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<sup>19</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 45.