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A VERSE INSCRIPTION FROM THE TEMPLE OF AIN LABAKHA

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In ZPE 111 (1996), pp. 98-101 G.Wagner publishes a series of graffiti and three votive inscriptions from the temple of the divinised Piyris. The most interesting is a large stele of 74 cm high with a verse inscription. It is written in an unattractive and irregular script and has been reconstructed from at least three non-joining fragments. It is not surprising that the Greek and the metre should sometimes be erroneous, but a few unusual errors nearly render the text incomprehensible and arouse suspicion about the reading and interpretation.

Our point of departure is the strange expression σῶστρον ἰὸ[φεί]λῶ[ν] ἔσοιμ ἀνείδ[ην] μάκαρ in ll. 3-5. At the beginning of a votive inscription the group ΣΟΙΜΑΝΕ strongly suggests σοι μ' ἀνέθηκεν: the inscription (με) is addressed to the god (σοι) and tells him why it has been dedicated. This would eliminate the irregular future optative ἔσοιμι without ἄν. This solution is of course excluded if the next line starts with *delta*, as the editor thinks, but this *delta* is on a separate fragment, which has in our opinion been wrongly placed. By putting this fragment one line lower, we obtain a more normal and meaningful text, which runs as follows:

- | | |
|----|--------------------------|
| 1 | [E]ὕξάμ[ε]νος με- |
| 2 | [γάλ]ωι Ἀμμώνιος |
| 3 | [N]ικολά[ο]ν σῶστρον |
| 4 | [. . .]λ[.]ς σοι μ' ἀνέ- |
| 5 | θ[ηκε] μάκαρ. Σῶζε |
| 6 | δέ[ε] μιν γνωτῆς τε δύ- |
| 7 | ω [π]ινυτόφρονας υἱας |
| 8 | Φίλον Πουλύβιον τ' |
| 9 | [ἀ]στέρας ἀμφοτέ- |
| 10 | ρους, παῖδά τε Χρυ- |
| 11 | σογένιαν, ἀδελφι- |
| 12 | ήν τε Τιμοῦθιν. |
| 13 | Ἔστι δ' ἐμείο πα- |
| 14 | τήρ ἴν[.]οοσπ[.] |
| 15 | μ[.]ος |

The inscription has been executed in two stages, perhaps by two different stonecutters. From παῖδα (l. 10) onwards the letters become much bigger. This corresponds with the beginning of the third distich, so that one wonders whether this last distich might have been a later addition. The epigram makes sense indeed without this distich, although it is more attractive as a whole. Of the two first distichs the verse-ends are marked with a special sign (a dot or short stroke), a practice abandoned by the second hand. Some other examples of signs used to indicate verse-ends in Greek verse inscriptions can be found in E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine. Recherches sur la poésie épigrammatique des Grecs en Égypte*, Paris, 1969, nos. 49 and 93.

- 1-2. The editor read [E]ὕξάμ[ε]νος μέ[λπ]ωι and translates “je rends grâce et je chante”. But in a dedicatory inscription εὐξάμενος refers to the promise made by the faithful: the inscription has been set up to show that a prayer was granted by the god. See for instance the prose dedication on Ain Labakha Stèle III (published by Wagner on p.101): ἀνέθηκαν ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας εὐξάμενος ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ, where the three elements of our text recur. For the same use of εὐξάμενος/-ένη

in verse-inscriptions, see e.g. G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca ex lapidibus conlecta*, Berolini, 1878, Epigrammata dedicatoria 803.2; E. Cougny, *Epigrammatum Anthologia Palatina cum Planudeis et appendice nova ...*, III, Parisiis, 1927, dedicat. 249.4; *CEG* I 345.1; II 863.1 (εὐξαμένα μ' ἀνέθηκε). In the two last examples the participle is also the Incipit of the poem. The dative then refers to the god and may go with the lost word in l. 4 or stand by itself. For μεγάλη as an epithet of Piyris, compare with μεγίστω in the dedications on Stele IV and Inscr. Graff. 9, 12, 16 and μέγιστον in Inscr. Graff. 5. The phrase μ' ἀνέθηκε with the name of the person who offered the dedication constructed as the subject and με referring to the personified monument, is a standard introductory formula in votive epigrams: see e.g. Kaibel, *Epigrammata dedicatoria* 756, 794b, 926, ..., and numerous other examples quoted in M. Burzachechi, *Oggetti parlanti nelle epigrafi greche*, Epigraphica 24 (1962), p. 3-54.

Ἀμμώνιος is unmetrical, in that the *iota* is treated as a long syllable. It is not exceptional, however, for this common proper name to have an irregular scansion: cf. Bernand, p. 627 n.1; see also W. Peek, *Griechische Vers-Schriften I. Grab-Epigramme*, Berlin, 1955, Nr. 1157.3. The same applies to Νικόλαος: cf. Bernand, p. 265.

3. According to *LSJ* the singular σώστρον or σώστρον is only attested in App., *BC* 4.62, but we have found it also in Herodianus, *Epim.* 1.30.11 and in several Byzantine texts. The term is very adequate, as it refers in several inscriptions (see e.g. *IG* 14.967 a1, b1) to thank-offerings to Asklepios, another healing god, and is closely followed here by the imperative of the verb σώζειν from which it is derived.
4. [. . .]λ[. . .]: we would expect a dative referring to the god, but the last letter looks like *sigma*, and cannot possibly be a *iota*. Therefore we suggest [ναυτι]λ[ίη]ς. For the genitive in the corresponding sedes of the hexameter, see Hes., *Op.* 618, 649, A.P. 1.16, Theocr. 13.27 (ναυτιλίας), Opp., *Hal.* 5.343, Nonnos 23.123. For a dedication of a σώστρον after a successful voyage, see Ach. Tat. 1.1.2: ἐκ πολλοῦ ψειμῶνος σώστρα ἔθνον ἐμαυτοῦ τῆ τῶν Φοινίκων. The use of the genitive ναυτιλίας with σώστρον or σώστρα is unparalleled, but one should compare A.P. 6.245 (Diodorus), where a votive object, probably a cloak, speaks of its dedication to the Boeotian Kabeiroi by someone who has survived a stormy voyage: (3-5) εὐξάτο κῆρα φυγῶν, Βοιώτιε, σοί με, Κάβειρε / δέσποτα, χειμερίας ἄνθεμα ναυτιλίας / ἀρτήσειν. . . . On the genitive, see *The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and some Contemporary Epigrams*, edited by A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page, II, Cambridge 1968, p.268.
5. Μάκαρ may be used as an acclamation for a god, but since Piyris is in fact a divinised mortal, the epithet is all the more fitting. Compare with its use as an epithet of Asklepios in the hymnic verse inscription Kaibel 1027.33, 43 and of Christ in Kaibel 1060.2. Here it may even be a Greek poetic rendering of Egyptian ḥsy, which elsewhere is transcribed as ἔσης or perhaps as ἦσι in the graffito published by Wagner on p.104. For divinised persons in Egypt and for the notion of ḥsy, see J.Quaeghebeur, *Les saints Égyptiens préchrétiens*, Orient. Lovan. Periodica 8 (1977), pp. 127-143.
6. Since Wagner's γνωτής is nowhere attested, γνωτῆς is probably meant here with the meaning of 'sister': cf. Nicaenet. 1.9, Nonnos 3.313. Compare with γνωτός meaning 'brother' in another local verse inscription MAMA VII 230.2. This interpretation implies that Philos and Polybios are the sons of Ammonios' sister, who is then named herself at the end in l. 12.

We had also envisaged a correction to γνωτούς, a general indication of 'his relatives, his acquaintances' (cf. Ilias 3.174, Cougny, sepulcr. 415.2 = Peek, 781.2), which would be specified in the following lines: his two sons, his παῖς and his sister. However, the spelling η instead of ου would be a strange error (F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I*, 1976, p. 217).

7. Here the wrong placing of the fragments lead to the addendum lexicis ὑπόφρων (for the Pindaric hapax ὑπίφρων). Πινυτόφρων on the other hand is a standard epithet in late poetry, attested for the first time in Simmias, A.P. 7.22.
8. Since there are two sons Φίλος must be a proper name. The name is in fact very rare in Egypt, but seems unavoidable here (the Latin Φίδος is in Egypt only attested in P.Oxy. III 653). Most examples listed in the onomastica of Preisigke and Faraboschi were eliminated by Hagedorn, *ZPE* 65 (1986), p. 87, but there remains a banker Philos in BGU II 415 = Mitt. Chrest. 178.12, a doubtful graffito from Silsile and the inscription SB I 1739. Four examples outside Egypt are listed in the first two volumes of Fraser's onomasticon. Φίλον is unmetrical, but calls to mind the Homeric usage of placing the vocative φίλε at the head of a hexameter: see e.g. *Il.* 4.155.

Πουλύβιος is a poetic form, metri causa, of Πολύβιος, a rare name in Egypt. The lexicis give only four examples, of which only two are certain: P. Oxy. Hels. 1.40 (3rd century B.C.), SB III 6612 (4th century A.D.).

9. The first word of this line must be a qualifying noun for the two brothers, probably ἀστέρας: for the use of the term in this *sedes*, cf. A.P. 7.64.4, 7.85.4, 9.25.2. The word ἀστήρ is used metaphorically for an illustrious person in A.P. 1.7.8 and in SEG 39.972, the plural stands for illustrious or admirable persons in A.P. 7.373.6, 16.315.1.
- 9-11. Χρυσογένεια is a rare name. We could only find one doubtful example from third century Rome (cf. H. Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom*, I, 1982, p. 172; Solin also gives an example for the masculine equivalent Χρυσογένης). The example listed in Preisigke is based on an erroneous reading: see SB XIV 11993. In Greek literature the name only occurs in Paus. 9.36.1, 4, where it is set in the royal dynasty of Orchomenos. It is not clear if παῖς here indicates that she is a daughter or a slave of Ammonios.
- 11-12. ἀδελφίην: as an epic variant of ἀδελφή, ἀδελφεῖή occurs e.g. in Call., *Aitia* fr.43.1, Peek 564.3, Q.S. 1.30.

Τιμοῦθις is rare and typical of the oasis. We find it again in two graffiti published by Wagner on p.100 and 104, in a funerary stele published by G.Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, Bibl. d'Étude 100 (1987), p.75 and in P.Grenf. II 71, all from the same area. Our family is therefore clearly of local origin.

14. The editor here wondered if Nikolaos, the father of the dedicant Ammonios, had a second Egyptian name. This time indeed, the first person singular pronoun can only refer to Ammonios. Another votive epigram where the speaking person changes in the course of the poem, is Kaibel, *Epigrammata dedicatoria* 926: in Παντακλῆς μ' ἀνέθηκε (l. 1a) "me" refers to the monument but subsequently the speaking person switches to Pantakles himself (l. 1b: ἀδελφεός εἰμι δ' ἐκείνου), and at the end of the poem still another person is speaking. Likewise in Kaibel, *Epigrammata sepulcralia* 679 opens with Μαρκέλλης τάφος εἰμί, but in the second distich Marcella's mother is speaking (αὐτὴ ἡ γεννήσασα ... ἐπέγραθα). Clearly, the self-presentation of the monument at the beginning of the epigram was a topos, but was not necessarily maintained in the rest of the poem. A good illustration of the stereotyped character of this self-presentation is the formula ὁ δεῖνα μ' ἀνέθηκε τόδ' ἄγαλμα, found in some verse inscriptions. It is a contamination of ὁ δεῖνα μ' ἀνέθηκε with the non-personifying formula ὁ δεῖνα ἀνέθηκε τόδ' ἄγαλμα (see Burzachechi, p. 53 n. 2), and shows that the personification inherent in μ' ἀνέθηκε was no longer understood.

For ἐμεῖο πατήρ in an epigrammatic pentameter, see Cougny, sepulcr. 316.6.

After ἐμεῖο πατήρ Wagner read Ἰνα[ρ]ῶοος, but gives no parallels for this name. Perhaps ἴνις? The traces of the letter following on τν suggest at first sight an alpha or delta, but a jota is certainly possible. For the use of ἴνις in an Egyptian verse-inscription, see Peek, Nr. 1302.6 (= Bernand, no. 8.6). In that case the subsequent letters should be read as the name, the ethnic or the function of Nikolaos' father or the grandfather of Ammonios. For another epigram closing with an explicit mention of the father's function, see e.g. Bernand, 100.4. The function and the ethnic origin of the person who has dedicated a verse inscription are stock ingredients of the genre: cf. Bernand, p. 19-22.

As a result of the preceding analysis, we obtain the following three distichs:

- 1 [E]ὐξάμ[ε]νος με[ι]γάλωι Ἀμμώνιος | [N]ικολά[ο]υ
 2 σῶστρον | [ναυτι]λ[ί]ης σοι μ' ἀνέθ[η]κε μάκαρ.
 3 Σῶζε | δ[έ] μ[ι]ν γνωτῆς τε δύω [π]ινυτόφρονας υἱας |
 4 Φίλον Πουλύβιόν τ' | [ἀ]στέρας ἀμφοτέλρους,
 5 παῖδά τε Χρυσογένειαν, ἀδελφειήν τε Τι[μ]οῦθιν. |
 6 Ἔστι δ' ἐμεῖο πατήρ ἴν[. .]οοσπ[. .]μ[. .]ος.

“After prayer Ammonios son of Nikolaos has dedicated me to you the great god as a thank offering for a sea voyage (?), o blessed one. Save him and the two wise sons of his sister, Philos and Polybios, stars both of them, and his child Chrysogeneia and his sister Timouthis. My father is [the son of (?)...].”

The Greek of this epigram, then, is much better than Wagner believed. The construction of the poem is perfectly in accordance with the traditional characteristics of the genre, words as πινυτόφρων and ἀδελφειή reflect the poetic language of the period, and the alliteration in ll. 2-3 gives evidence of stylistic refinement. The elegiac distichs are metrically sound, except for the proper names in l. 1 (Ἀμμώνιος Νικολάου) and 4 (Φίλον), but this is commonly tolerated in such inscriptions.