NIKOLAOS GONIS

A FRAGMENT OF THE GREAT DOXOLOGY IN THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY


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This papyrus came to the Bodleian Library (Oxford) in 1888, the year of the acquisition of the famous ‘Hawara Homer’. It has been mounted on a glass frame together with ten documentary fragments datable to the seventh and eighth centuries; most of them are letters (one in Coptic), while there is one receipt mentioning Hermopolis (this need not be a clue to the provenance of our text).

The writing, in black ink, is along the fibres. The other side carries four line-beginnings in Arabic, written across the fibres and upside down in relation to the text on the front. The generous right-hand margin left by the scribe of the Arabic text may suggest that not much text has been lost to the left of the actual line-beginnings of the Greek text.

The hand, heavyish, with very modest, if any, pretensions to elegance, is of a common type: a degenerate specimen of the ‘sloping pointed majuscule’, if one opts for grouping it with Greek bookhands, a plain one, if one sees it as Coptic. Remarkable letter-forms: elongated right-hand oblique and horizontal of δ, split κ, ν occasionally somewhat similar to μ. It bears some resemblance to G. Cavallo, H. Maehler, Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period (1987) nos. 53a, 53c (both VII/VIII), 54b (VIII). It may therefore be assigned to the late seventh or, more likely, early eighth century.

The fragment comes from the so-called δοξολογία μεγάλη or hymnus angelicus, printed in A. Rahlfs, Psalmi cum Odis (1967) as Ode 14 ἐνυνῶς ἐκεῖνος. For literature on this text, which counts a fair number of ‘papyrological’ attestations, see H. Quecke, Untersuchungen zum koptischen Stunden-gebet (1970) 274–99, and F. Maltomini, ZPE 60 (1985) 268–71, whose sigla I have adopted. It is probable that the sheet originally contained only the Great Doxology and no other text. This seems to be the case with P and V too. It will presumably have served for liturgical purposes, or in private worship.

The text was written continuously, without colon divisions. No lectional signs are in evidence. Nomina sacra have been contracted in all possible cases.

‘Ortografia selvaggia’ wrote Maltomini, loc. cit. 267, about the piece he published (V); this also applies to the Bodleian papyrus (as well as to M1-2 and C), and is no great surprise in view of the nature and date of the text. There is little doubt that the writer was not a native speaker of Greek. This is particularly obvious in the treatment of certain consonants (γ, δ, θ), clear evidence of ‘bilingual interference’; there also seems to be evidence for a Coptic orthographic convention, see further 1 n. (The phonetic renderings of the /e/ and /i/ phonemes cannot be conclusive: such orthographic variants have never been absent from the writing of native Greek speakers since Hellenistic times."

If the papyrus comes from an Egyptian-speaking environment, we may recall that the Greek version of the Great Doxology was inscribed in the White Monastery (I), that V contains a Coptic form ( Qedained), and that most of the Egyptian testimonies of this text in Greek are transmitted in otherwise

1 I am grateful to the Keeper of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts of the Bodleian for the permission to publish the text and reproduce the photograph here.
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Coptic manuscripts (S, M 1-2, C). Although a Coptic version was available, it did not lead to the demise of the Greek. In fact, Greek continued to have a place in functions of the Coptic church long after the Islamic conquest of Egypt, at a time when Greek was understood by only a few – and it still does. (Naturally, there were translations, cf. the texts published by Quecke, op. cit.) What was perceived as a part of the ecclesiastic tradition was allowed to survive across the centuries, even if it were largely incomprehensible. But of course such phenomena are not restricted to the Coptic church.

There are a number of variants, all of them corrupt, but the most noticeable feature is the omission of verses 32–41 Rahlfs. I have found nothing similar in the MSS. The Coptic version shows a remarkable state of textual flux at this point, see Quecke, op. cit. 287–89, and we might consider whether we are dealing with a transposition, or an otherwise unattested textual tradition. But, given that the text was probably copied for private use, it is perhaps more likely that the omission is due to careless copying, or, if the text was written down from memory, to a memory lapse.

A normalised version of this part of the text, including the parts now lost, reads as follows (the parts preserved are underlined; the line breaks are only exempli gratia):

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καθημενος εν δεξια του πατρου ελεον ημας οτι και ει μονος άγιος, ει ει μονος κυριος, Ιησους Χριστος εις υμνον πνευμα οι εις δοξαν Θεου πατρου εως ημερας ευλογησεω εις οικνων και εις οικνων του αιωνος. (καιρε) προς εως κατεφυγα διδαιον ιτo το ποιειν το θελημα σου κτλ.

1 In printing γυναικα, I have assumed Coptic influence; a copying mistake, i.e. to read καθημενος εν δεξια του πατρου ελεον ημας οτι και ει μονος άγιος, ει ει μονος κυριος, Ιησους Χριστος εις υμνον πνευμα οι εις δοξαν Θεου πατρου εως ημερας ευλογησεω εις οικνων και εις οικνων του αιωνος. (καιρε) προς εως κατεφυγα διδαιον με το ποιειν το θελημα σου κτλ.
is not isolated to manuscripts of the Great Doxology; the Easter hymn PKöln IV 173 also displays many of the phonetic spellings found in the Bodleian papyrus, cf. PKöln IV pp. 60–61.

τεκσι[α], l. δεξιώδης. For τ instead of initial δ, and κκ instead of ξί, see F. T. Gignac, A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods i.80, 139; for the spelling, cf. C and V.

2 κνον ογιον: so I (πνευμα): κνον ἀγιο (πνευματι) K C 55: κνον τὸ ἀγιο S; om. A T. On this passage see Quecke, op. cit. 289–91. The reading of B and I mars the grammar. It is probably an influence from the collocation Ἰησοῦς Χριστός και ἀγιον πνευμα in v. 16, while the disappearance of the dative at that time may also have played a role.

Spacing excludes that after ἀγιο the papyrus had κὸ εἰ μόνος ὑμεῖος with S.

3 καττ, l. κοθ'. A phonetic spelling, see Gignac, op. cit. 91. Other MSS have theta.

eίμερος, l. ἤμέραν. For the interchange η > ει, see Gignac, op. cit. 239.

4 ευφα κε, l. αύόνα και. For οι > ε, a common interchange, see Gignac, op. cit. 192–93.

5 κατέφυκα (l. κατέφυγα): so P K I C A: κατέφυγον 55.

For intervocalic γ > κ, see Gignac, op. cit. 79.

διόδοξον, l. δίδοξον. The interchange α > ο is well attested, see Gignac, op. cit. 286–87.

to ποιεῖν; τοῦ ποιεῖν MSS. A banalisation, unless this is another phonetic spelling, cf. Gignac, op. cit. 211.

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