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A GREEK CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTION FROM GINARI, LOWER NUBIA

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Fifty one funerary stelae with the inscriptions in Greek were discovered in Ginari-Tafa (Lower Nubia) during excavations carried out by C.M.Firth in 1903/09.¹ The inscriptions display a composition which is typical of a large group of Nubian grave-stones: introduction, date of the stela owner's demise, a prayer for the dead.² The following prayer for the dead is to be found in one of these inscriptions:³

7 ο θεος ο των πνευματων και
 πασης σαρκος ανα
 9 παυσον την ψυχην
 αυτου μετα των ευαρ
 11 εστης.....
 εν χωρα ζωντων εν
 13 μοναις δικαιων εν
 κολποις αβρααμ και
 15 ισαακ και ιακωβ
 αμην †

All expressions occurring in this prayer are familiar in Nubian Christian epigraphy, both in Greek and in Coptic, except for the fragmentarily preserved formula in lines 8-9.⁴ Firth left it unsupplemented suggesting 12 letters missing, while H.Junker, in his fundamental work on Nubian gravestones, marked it with an exclamation mark.⁵ It is my opinion that the fragment under consideration may be supplemented almost certainly by comparison with the Psalm 114.9:

εὐαρετήσω ἐναντίον Κυρίου ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων.

The context in which the expression appears in our inscription clearly suggests that it was used here as a paraphrasis and not as a direct quotation from the Psalm. μετά + article in genitive plural exclude a personal form and suggest a participle, most probably a participle of

¹ C.M.Firth, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia. Report for 1908-1909, vol.I, Cairo 1912, pp.45-50.* Unfortunately, the epigraphical material has been printed "rather for the sake of completing the record than for its intrinsic value" (Firth, *op.cit.*, p.45), only in transliterations, without any commentary and without photographs which would enable a verification of Firth's readings.

² For this composition, see H.Junker, *Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens, ZÄS 60,1925, pp.126-128.*

³ C.M.Firth, *op.cit.*, p.45, grave 37.

⁴ The only possible epigraphical parallel to this formula is to be found in the funerary stela of Zacharias (?) from Old Dongola (A.D. 824), which in lines 15-16 has [ca.16]εὐαρετ | [τ ca.15]ν, ἀμήν. The inscription from Old Dongola, is however too damaged to allow for a sure reconstruction; for the publication of the stela of Zacharias, see A.Łajtar, *Two Greek Funerary Stelae from Polish Excavations in Old Dongola, Archéologie du Nil Moyen V [in print], no.2.*

⁵ H.Junker, *op.cit.*, p.124.

aorist active. On the other hand, κυρίου which with regard to the invocation to the God in line 6, would be syntactically incorrect should be replaced by a personal pronoun. Finally ἐναντίον is probably to be rejected because it would make line 9 too long when compared with the average length of lines which can be determined as 14-15 letters. Thus the whole supplemented fragment can be read as follows: ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν εὐαρετη[πάντων σοι] ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων; "rest his soul together with those who pleased you in the land of living."⁶

Also unusual in the inscription in question is the introduction paralleled only in another inscription from Ginari.⁷ Wrongly read by Firth, it was corrected and commented on by Junker.⁸ Putting together Junker's reading with my proposition for reconstructing line 9, we get the following full text of the inscription:

†

1 Ἐνθα κατάκειται
ὁ μακάριος καὶ

3 [πρὶν] οἰζυρός καὶ μὲν
νῦν θάλιος Cίλβετρ-

5 ος, ὁ διάκωνος, μηνὶ
Παῦνι λ, ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) δ. Κ(ύρι)ε,

7 ὁ θε(ε)ς ὁ τῶν πν(ευμάτ)ων καὶ
πάσης σαρκός, ἀνά-

9 παυσον τὴν ψυχὴν
αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν εὐαρ-

11 εκτη[άντων σοι]
ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων, ἐν

13 μοναῖς δικαίων, ἐν
κόλποις Ἀβραάμ καὶ

15 Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ,
ἀμήν †

1.3: οἰζυρός, μὴν, 1.5: διάκωνος

⁶ Possibly we are dealing here with the double influence of Psalm 114.9 on one hand and on the other of liturgical readings in which the expression πάντων τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος σοι εὐαρετηπάντων is frequently encountered. It is to be found for instance in the anaphora in the VIIIth book of Apostolic Constitutions (F.E.Brightman, Liturgies Eastern and Western, vol.I, Eastern Liturgies, Oxford 1896, p.21); in the Byzantine liturgies of St. Basil and of St. John Chrysostomus (Brightman, op.cit., pp.314, 330, 338) as well as in the funeral ritual of Byzantine Church: J.Goar, Euchologion sive Rituale Graecorum, Graz 1960 (reprinted from the 1730 Venice edition), pp.434, 453.

⁷ C.M.Firth, op.cit., p.49, grave 842.

⁸ H.Junker, op.cit., p.127.

A short comment is necessary as for the word οἰζυρός the use of which may be a little surprising in Mediaeval Nubia. This is a poetical word, typical of the early Greek epics, and after Apollonius Rhodius it appears only in quotations from earlier poets and in grammatical works. As a living word, it is to be found only in some epigrams from the Anthologia Palatina.⁹ In fact, Anthologia Palatina may provide us with a key to resolving the problem of the word's appearance in Nubia. We should keep in mind the enormous career of epigrams in Late Antique and Early Mediaeval Byzantium. It is at this time that epigrams, old and new, collected in a few extensive anthologies, are widely read throughout the Byzantine Empire and in almost every strata of Byzantine society. It is quite conceivable that the word οἰζυρός was borrowed by Byzantine funerary epigraphy from epigrams and was subsequently transferred to Nubian inscriptions.¹⁰ Though the word may have been transferred to Nubia in another way, one thing remains, in my opinion, beyond discussion: the presence of the word οἰζυρός in two inscriptions from Ginari reflects the Byzantine influence exerted in Mediaeval Nubia.

ADDENDUM: An expression similar to that used in the inscription from Ginari is to be found in a gravestone SB 10517, 7-10: ἄξιωσον αὐτήν | τῆς [βα]σιλίας(ς) σου μ(ε)τὰ πάντων τῶν εὐρετησάντ[ω]ν σεα[υ]τῶν.

The origin of the stone, which while being published was kept with a private collection of antiquities in Cairo, is unknown.

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⁹ Anthologia Graeca VI 117,4; VII 283,1; VII 336,4; VII 554,2; VII 738,4; IX 89,1; IX 335,1.

¹⁰ This supposition seems to be confirmed by the appearance of the word in question in an early Vth. cent. funeral epigram from Tanagra in Boeotia, N. Platon, Χριστιανική ἐπιγραφή ἐκ Τανάγρας, Arch.Eph. 100, vol.II, 1937(1940), pp.655-667; cf. also W.M. Calder, An early Christian monument of Tanagra, Cl.Rev. 1948, pp.8-11.