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Old Nubian Texts from Gebel Adda in the Royal Ontario Museum

Adam Łajtar

In a paper read during the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies in London in August 2010 I gave a survey of Christian textual finds made in the 1960s by the Mission of the American Research Center in Egypt on the site of Gebel Adda and now kept in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.¹ Here I would like to concentrate on the Old Nubian part of the material.

The collection of Old Nubian texts from Gebel Adda kept in the Royal Ontario Museum consists of 29 items. One text is bilingual Old Nubian-Greek (a Greek text was added to the original Old Nubian). In 12 cases, the language remains undeterminable (either Old Nubian or Greek) due to either the lack of clear language traits, e.g. when the text consists only of names, or the object's bad state of preservation.

The texts are inscribed on parchment, paper, ceramics, textiles, and wood. From the point of view of the contents they may be divided into three groups: literary texts, subliterary texts, and documentary texts. Some texts cannot be ascribed to these three groups because they are too fragmentarily preserved for any conclusion to be drawn.

Literary texts, all written on parchment, are six in number. Four of them I would like to present with some details.

ROM acc. no. 973.24.960 (fig. 1): This is most probably a leaf from a codex. It preserves one side margin and perhaps also the top margin; nothing seems to be lacking at the top. The text is written with black ink with the occasional use of red to reinforce horizontal strokes marking /i/. A continuous reading of the text is impossible

1 ŁAJTAR, "A Survey of Christian Textual Finds from Gebel Adda Kept in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto."



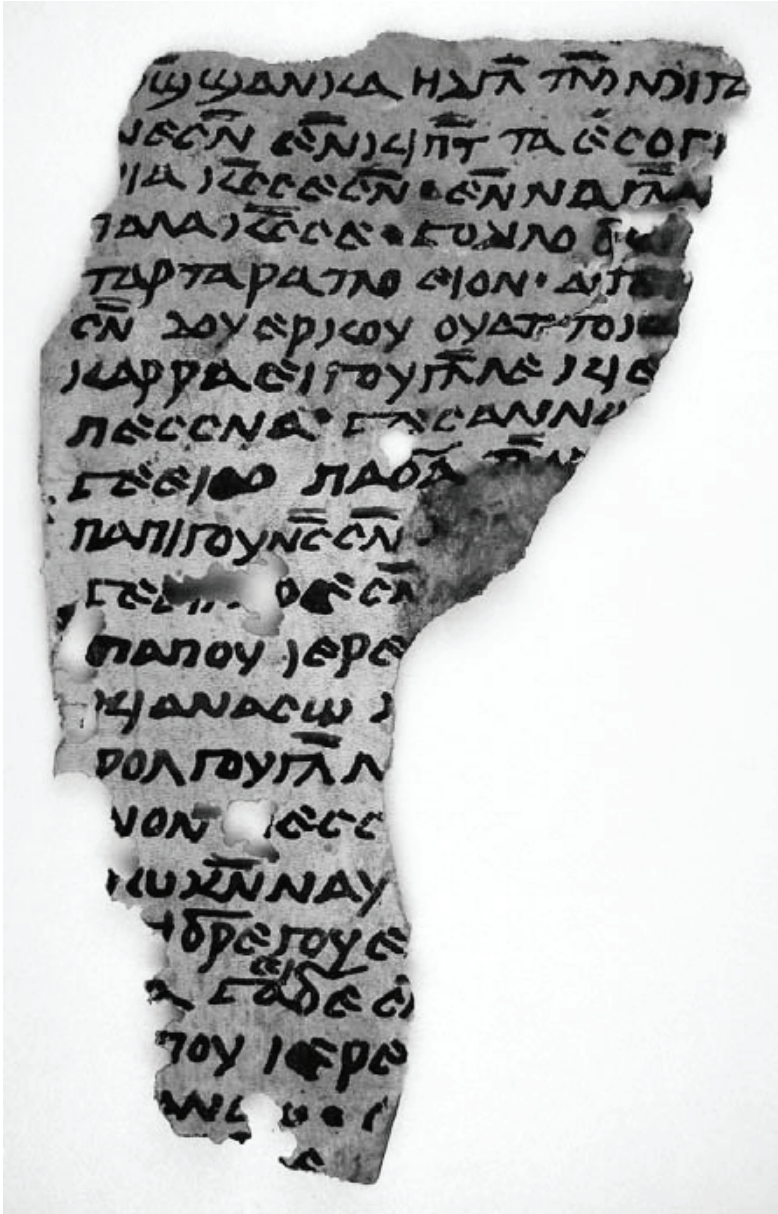


Fig. 1 ROM acc. no.
973.24.960
recto: hair side
verso: flesh side

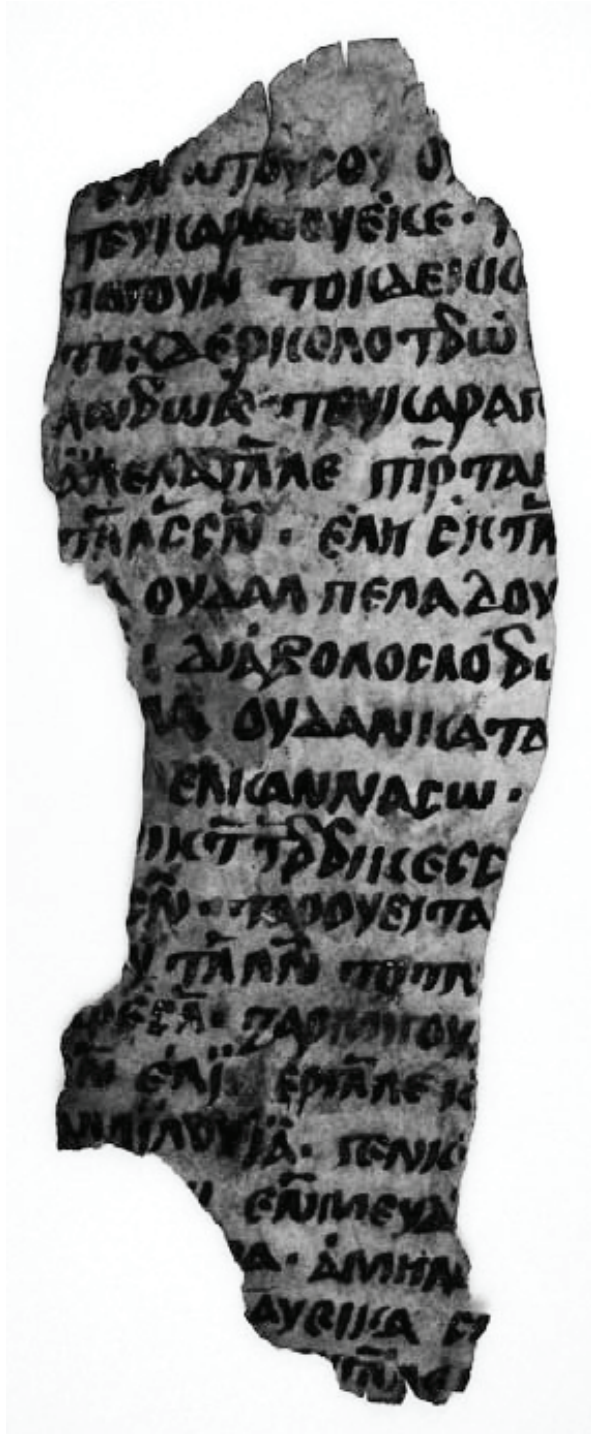
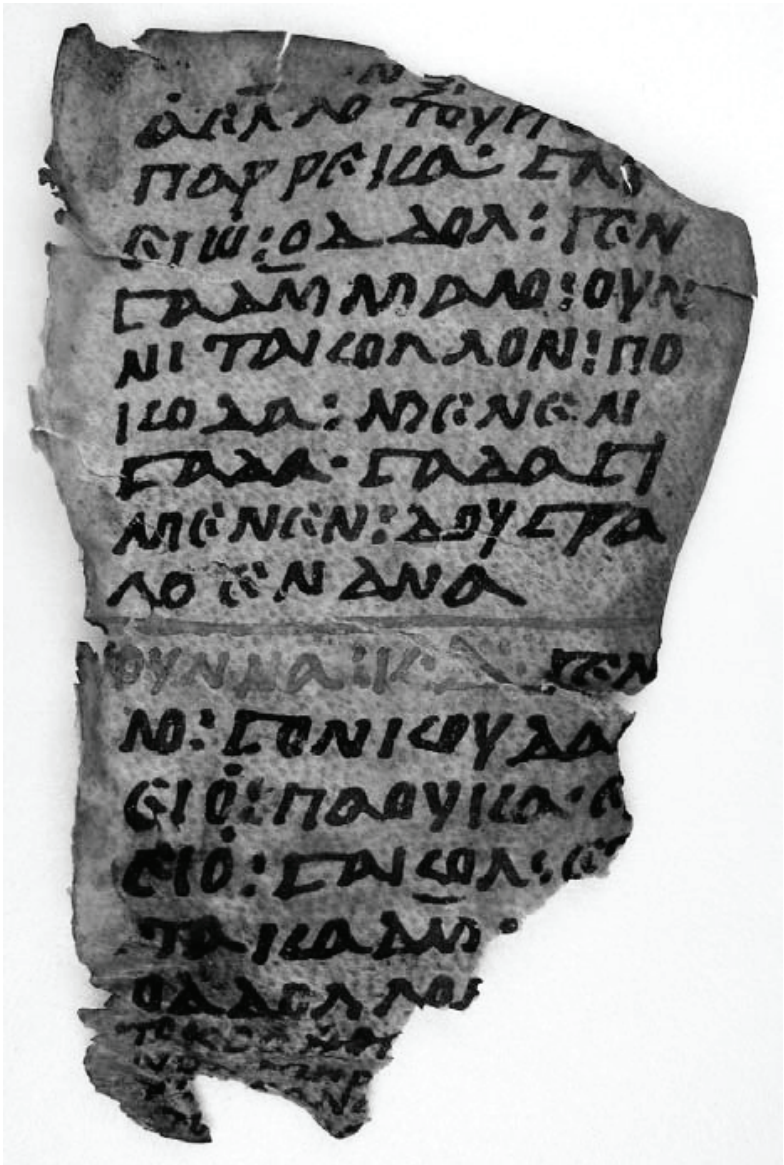




Fig. 2 ROM acc. no.
973.24.889
recto: hair side
verso: flesh side



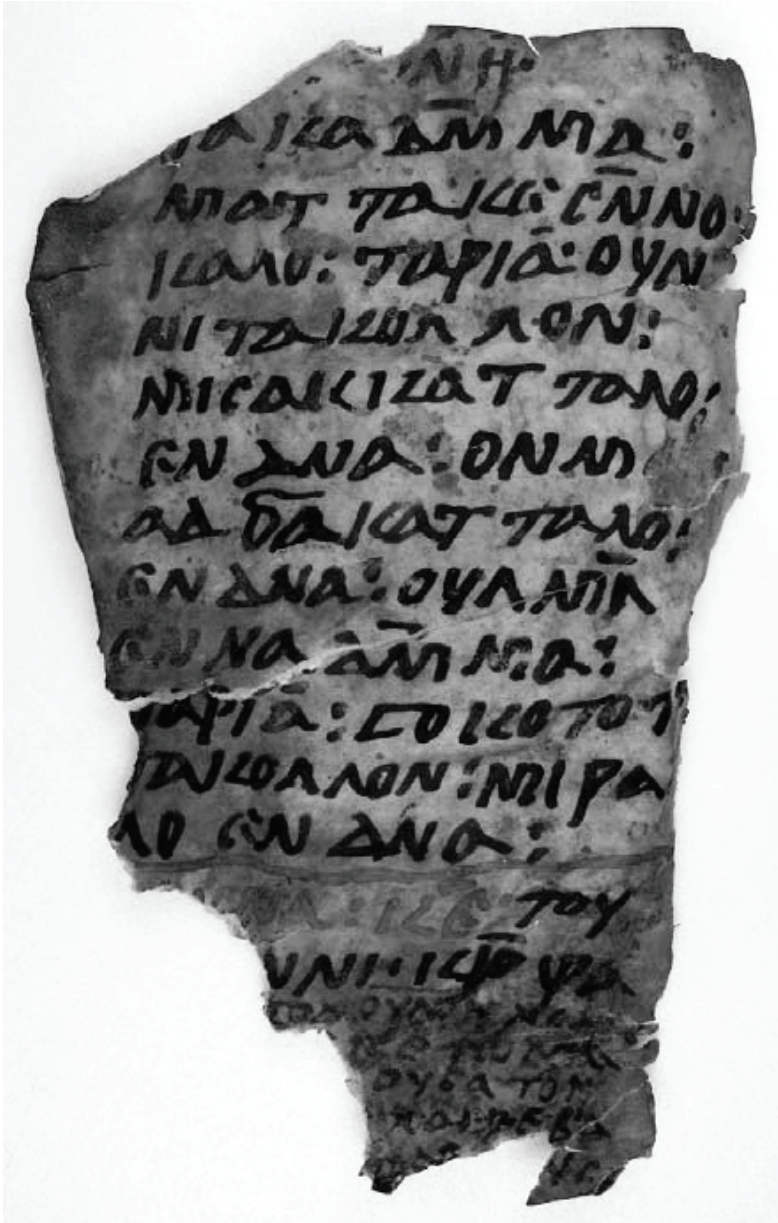


Fig. 3 ROM acc. no.
973.24.1185
recto: hair side
verso: flesh side

at this stage of my work on it; however, I can venture a hypothesis about its contents. The text mentions the prophecy of the “father Jeremiah” (παποϋ ιερεμιασι) three times, the “children of Israel” (ισραηλῑ τοϋφιγοϋνι) once, and the “people of Israel” (ισραηλῑ κιϋτ̄) once. There is also a question of a king who may be the king of either Israel or Judah, or of a foreign people. All this suggests that we are dealing with a text with an Old Testament subject: either an Old Testament book or a later work based on the Old Testament. Unfortunately I was unable to identify it.

ROM acc. no. 973.24.889 (fig. 2): This is undoubtedly a leaf of a codex as it preserves pagination on one side (p. 17). The leaf is complete at the top and perhaps also at the bottom. Unfortunately both side margins are lacking, which impedes a continuous reading considerably. Nevertheless there is actually no doubt that the text speaks about the birth of Jesus, but in a theological rather than a narrative way, as typical narrative elements like the stable, animals, shepherds, a star, angels, magi, etc., are lacking. The birth is mentioned explicitly in line 2 of the hair side (οϋννιϋ). Besides, there appear such key-words as “maiden” (παρθενος), “miracle” (εοκορη), Jerusalem, “the son of Mary” (μαριανελα[λ]), and “saviour” (αφδ). Jesus’s birth is apparently presented as food that came for us today, fulfillment of what was said by a prophet, joy for human hearts and guidance for those who went astray (τεγκαρροϋ). Two observations may be of interest from the linguistic point of view: “food” (figuratively the new-born Jesus) is rendered as τοϋκκλ̄. That word is known so far only from legal texts from Qasr Ibrim as a designation of a kind of food or beverage served during the ceremonies accompanying legal actions.² The literary parallel yielded by the text under consideration suggests that τοϋκκλ̄ may be a kind of bread. The word “prophet” has the form ε̄κκιδ̄ᾱσ̄ against ε̄κκιδ̄ᾱτ̄ known so far. The substitution of /s/ for /t/ may be dialectal, the more so as it is attested several more times in the Gebel Adda texts. I am unable to identify the text in this stage of my work; I suspect that it is a composition of Patristic times.

ROM acc. no. 973.24.993: This is another leaf of a codex, of which two side margins are lost, thus impeding a continuous reading. The text mentions: 24 rams (αοϋαδ̄ιλγοϋ κ̄ᾱ), the number 24 with a word for “the most high” (αοϋολαοϋλ̄ κ̄ᾱ), the word “throne” with the word “seven” (κολοτοϋ ερονος̄), Jesus Christ (ιϋοϋϋ ϋριτοϋϋ), “the one who has the faith” (π̄ςτεγε̄τ̄κολ), and “kings” (οϋρ[ο]ϋειρ[ο]ϋ). The portion of the text starting with the words “Jesus Christ” very much resembles Rev. 1.5, but the entire text surely is not an Old Nubian translation of the Book of the Revelation of Saint John. It rather

2 For references, see BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, s.v., and add P.QI 4 69.24.

looks like a composition based on Saint John's Revelation. Perhaps the text is an encomium on the 24 Elders of the Revelation. One has to remember that 24 Elders (and generally all angelic beings) enjoyed a vivid cult in Christian Nubia.³

ROM acc. no. 973.24.1185 (fig. 3). The text appears on a leaf of a codex with pagination preserved (57 on one side of the leaf, 58 on the other). Each side is divided in two parts by a horizontal line executed in red paint. Under the division lines, there are titles, also written in red, reading: ΟΥΝΝΑ ΚΑ, "in the lunar month (day) 24" (p. 57) and ΟΥΝΝΑ ΚΕ, "in the lunar month (day) 25" (p. 58). This shows that we are dealing with a text segmented according to days of the lunar month. The text seems to deal with benefits mankind received (ΓΕΝΕΑ ΔΉΜΑΛΟ, literally "took good things") through the holy birth (ΟΥΝΝΙΤΑ ΚΟΛΛΟΝ). They go to the lame (ΠΟΚΟΔ) and the blind (ΔΟΥΓΕΤ), to the one who is estranged (ΜΙΣΑΚΚΑΤΤ) and to the liar (ΜΑΔΔΟΔΚΑΤΤ). One category of beneficiaries is not recognizable because the word designating it (ΟΥΛΜΙ ?) seems not to have been attested so far. The text seems to run continuously, which makes one wonder why it was segmented under the heading of consecutive days of the lunar calendar. Perhaps it was destined for reading in this way. If so, this would be the only example of liturgical observance connected with the lunar calendar and not the civil one.

Subliterary texts are represented by only one item, a linen shroud found wrapped over the body buried in tomb 1039 (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2708; fig. 4). The shroud is in a lamentable condition, broken in numerous small fragments difficult to arrange with each other. They carry different parts of a long inscription in black ink. The largest fragment of the text preserves in its lower part rows of vowels, which show that we are dealing with a magical or apotropaic inscription destined to protect the person wrapped in the shroud.⁴

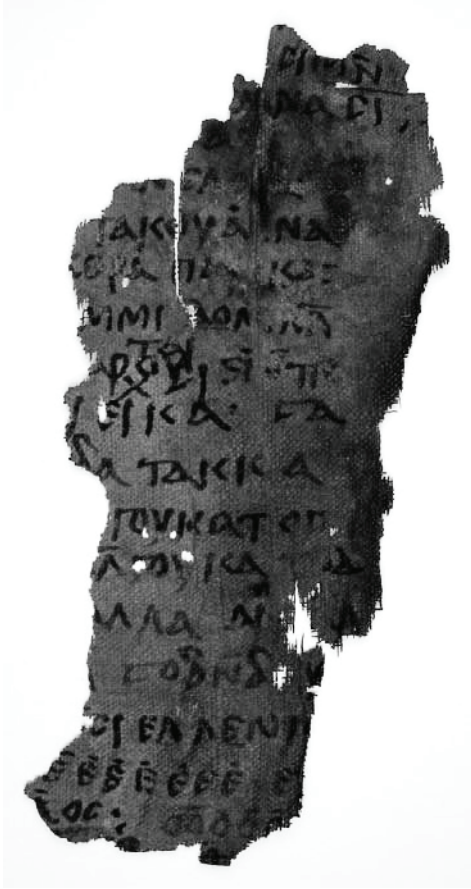
Documentary texts are by far the largest group among the Gebel Adda inscribed finds in Old Nubian. They are written mostly on paper and also on pottery. Unfortunately the state of preservation of these finds leaves much to be desired. Many of them have reached us as scraps with only a few letters, enabling us to recognize the language but hardly anything more. The two best preserved

3 A proof for that are inscriptions from Meinarti with the names of the 24 Elders, for which see ЁАЈТАР, "Varia Nubica x-xi," pp. 107-13. Four different lists of 24 Elders making together what is designated as a "seal of Solomon" are found in a Greek inscription on the north wall of a burial vault under Room 5 of the Northwestern Annex to the monastery on Kom H at Dongola. The inscription remains unpublished; preliminarily see ЁАЈТАР & VAN DER VLIET, "Wall Inscriptions in a Burial Vault under the Northwestern Annex of the Monastery on Kom H." Twenty-four Elders were probably represented in the scene of Maiestas Crucis on the north wall of the mosque building at Dongola (information provided by Dobrochna Zielińska).

4 An inscribed shroud from Qasr Ibrim (RUFFINI, "Qasr Ibrim's Old Nubian Burial-Shroud.") has precisely the same ending indicating the same sort of text.

Fig. 4 ROM acc. no.
973.24.2708

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items were presented in my London paper. They are a letter from Marianou, eparch of Nobadia, to the anteparch (“vice-eparch” or “deputy eparch”) Mena concerning fugitive slaves (ROM acc. no. 973.24.936), and a list of slaves, which originally could have been attached to this letter (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2916).

Here I would like to present another document, which bears more than statistical value (fig. 5). The text is inscribed on a sheet of paper (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2915), the preserved dimensions of which are: h. 9.7 cm, w. 9.5 cm. The upper and the left-hand edges are original. The right-hand and the lower edges are torn. The original text in Old Nubian is found on only one side. After the sheet had been inscribed it was folded. The unscribed back side of the sheet was later used as vehicle for a text in Arabic that mentions *sanjag al-sultan mamlûk*, “district of the Mamluk sultan.” The date of the original text in Old Nubian is unknown; it may originate from the 12th-13th century.

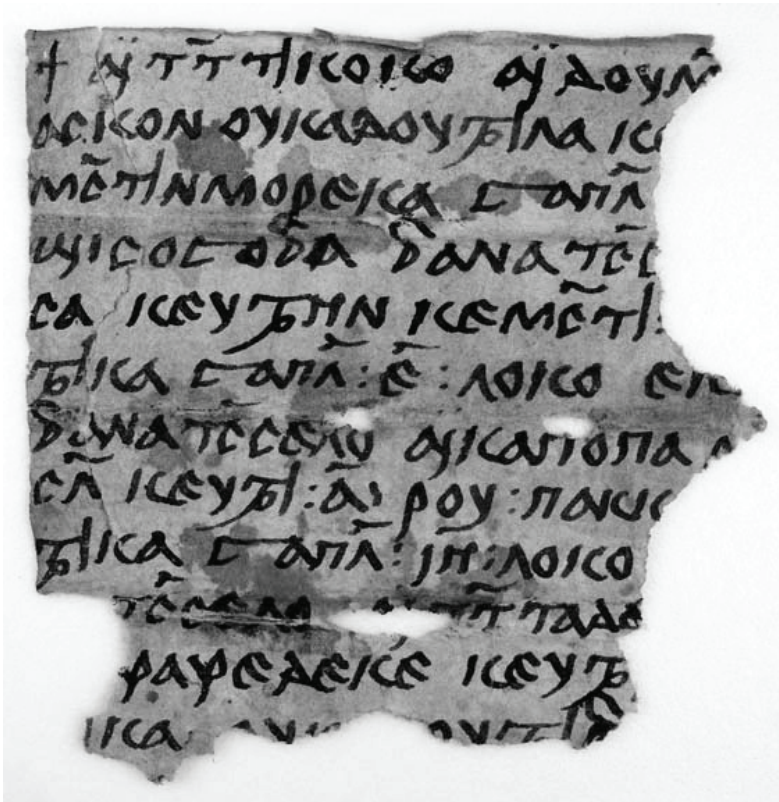


Fig. 5 ROM acc. no. 973.24.1185

- † αἰ τῖτικoko αἰ δογλῆ[τα -----]
 ασκον ογκα δογῆλα κ. [-----]
 μῆτιν moreka εαπῆ [-----]
 4 ου σοεοδα δανα τῆσελο. αἰ -----]
 σα κεγῆτην κεμῆτι. [----- ει]-
 ῆτικα εαπῆ : ἕ : λοκο ε. . [-----]
 δανα τῆσελο. αἰ καποπα ς[-----]
 8 ελ κεγῆτι : ἄ : ρογ : πακκ[αταλο --- ει]-
 ῆτικα εαπῆ : ἱη : λοκο [----- δα]-
 [να] τῆσελο. αἰ τιττα δε[-----]
 [μα]ραφεδεκε κεγῆτι [-----]
 12 [.] κα. γ. . [1-2]ογτιδ[-----]
 [. . .] [-----]

1-4. *I Tittikoko, I Doulista [- - -], and/after the daughter/asti seeking us, [- - -] and the price I received [from/through - - -]shi Songoja (is) five mor of mist (?), gold [- - -].*

4-7. *[INN - - -] and the price I received (is) one fourth of a cubit [- - -] grain, five pieces of gold [- - -].*

7-9. *I Kapopa [- - -] and the price I received (is) one and half cubit of [- - -], grain, 18 pieces of gold [- - -].*

9ff. *I Titta [- - -] and Maraṅe [and the price I received (is)] cubit [- - -].*

The text lists four different contracts of sale recognizable through the expression $\delta\alpha\lambda\alpha \tau\acute{\omega}\sigma\epsilon\lambda\omicron$ (“the price I received”). All contracts have the form of a first person declaration made by the seller stating that he/she received the price, a declaration well known from the Qasr Ibrim material.⁵ The sellers are: in the first contract, two women with the names Tittikoko and Doulista⁶; in the third contract, a certain Kapopa, undoubtedly also a woman⁷; and in the fourth contract, Titta (a name of indeterminate gender).⁸ In the second contract, the information about the seller has not been preserved, unless $\text{I}\alpha$ at the beginning of line 5 is the ending of his/her name, which in that case may have read $\text{I}\alpha\text{I}\alpha\alpha$ or something similar.

The document as now preserved does not inform us what was sold in each case⁹; information about the buying parties is also lacking except for contract number 1. Since it is difficult to imagine a sale contract deprived of these pieces of information, however, we have to assume that they were contained in the lost right-hand part of the document. The prices are pretty high. As a rule they consist of pieces of gold (preserved are the numbers 5 and 18), something that was measured in cubits ($\kappa\epsilon\chi\tau\acute{\iota}$), and grain. The first contract also mentions five $\mu\omicron\rho$ of $\mu\acute{\iota}\tau$, most probably a dry good.¹⁰ An interesting

5 RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, pp. 22–31.

6 The proper name $\tau\iota\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\kappa\omicron$ seems not to have been attested before. It belongs to a larger group of compound names with $-\kappa\omicron$, “having,” here connected with $\tau\iota\tau\iota$, “gift, grace,” hence “having grace.” Names in $-\kappa\omicron$ ($\mu\eta\sigma\upsilon\sigma\iota\kappa\omicron$, $\mu\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron$, $\delta\iota\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\sigma\kappa\omicron$, $\mu\eta\chi\alpha\eta\lambda\kappa\omicron$, etc.) apparently were borne only by women. $\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\alpha$ (written $\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha$) is found in Qasr Ibrim (P. QI 3.44.10) and as the name of the mother of an unnamed bishop of Faras (VAN DER VLIET, “Exit Tamer, Bishop of Faras”). The name could possibly mean “root,” as noted by *ibid.*, p. 191.

7 $\kappa\alpha\text{I}\omicron\mu\alpha$ undoubtedly is related to $\kappa\alpha\text{I}\omicron\mu\iota$, Old Nubian for “pearl.” The latter is attested as a female name in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim; for references, see BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, p. 240, s.v.

8 The name $\tau\iota\tau\iota$ is common in Qasr Ibrim; for references, see BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, p. 245, s.v. Among eight attestations of this name altogether, two refer to women. In the remaining six cases, the sex of the person is unknown.

9 Based on the parallels from Qasr Ibrim and the size of the prices, one can suppose that the object of the sales was land or slaves.

10 $\mu\omicron\rho$ is attested in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim; for references, see BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, p. 120, s.v., where the word is rendered as “artab.” $\mu\acute{\iota}\tau$ is unknown. One should observe that the latter word may lack the beginning placed at the end of line 2 of the text. It is rather improbable to read $\kappa\epsilon\text{I}\mu\acute{\iota}\tau\eta$, “of one fourth,” as the genitive is inexplicable in that case.

element of the first contract is that the two sellers declare they were led to make the sale by another person, either a daughter of one of the two or an official called “asti.” A similar clause is found in one of the Qasr Ibrim documents being a contract of donation of gold pieces by one person to another at the request of a Church of Mary.¹¹

One wonders what the purpose of this document is. It cannot contain the texts of the actual selling/buying contracts; the latter, as we can learn from the Qasr Ibrim material, were much longer and drafted according to a firm scheme, which is not present here. If these are not real contracts, they may however be summaries of the contracts, edited in a rather peculiar manner with a direct citation of the most important statement from the real contracts (“I NN received”). Accepting this hypothesis one can suppose that the document under consideration is a register of selling/buying contracts concluded in a certain place at a certain period.

Registers or summary lists of contracts were well known in Graeco-Roman Egypt, where they were called *anagraphai*.¹² As a rule they were compiled at the end of a given time-span, most frequently a three-month period, in an appropriate office (either the *agoranomion* or the *grapheion*), and give names of the parties involved, information about the object of sale, the price, and a note to the effect that a tax for registering the contract was paid.¹³ In spite of formal similarity between our document and the Egyptian *apographai*, I strongly doubt that the former is a Nubian counterpart of the latter. Even in Christian Nubia an official register of contracts must have been document of a considerable length, most probably recorded in a codex, whereas the document under consideration was written on a single sheet of paper, which apparently is complete on all sides but the right. What is more, the paper was folded to be sent as a letter.

This leads us to the conclusion that the document we are dealing with is an official letter, or an attachment to a letter, by which a notary office informs a higher official about contracts concluded in it recently, e.g. on a single day.¹⁴ That a notary office in Christian Nubia could have attended more than one contract a day is demonstrated by two documents from Qasr Ibrim’s Archive III, otherwise unconnected with one another, which largely have the same lists of witnesses.¹⁵ The notary office which compiled and sent the document could have been that of Gebel Adda and the addressee an official of the Kingdom of Makuria responsible for the economic and fiscal

11 P.QI 3.43.

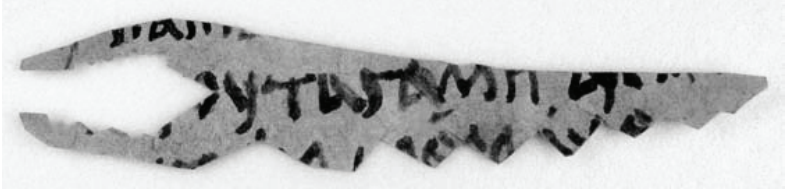
12 For notarial practices in Graeco-Roman Egypt, see WOLFF, *Das Recht der griechischen Papyri Ägyptens in der Zeit der Ptolemäer und des Prinzipats*, pp. 8–56, esp. pp. 35–45.

13 The best examples come from the notary office (*grapheion*) in Tebtynis in the Fayum oasis and are edited in P.Mich. v.

14 Information like this could have been used later in preparing a true register of contracts.

15 P.QI 3.37 and 43.

Fig. 6 ROM acc. no.
973.24.2912



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Fig. 7 ROM acc. no.
973.24.2935



matters, perhaps the eparch of Nobadia or *domestikos* of Faras, both residing probably in Qasr Ibrim (or in Faras).¹⁶ Another possibility is that the document was drafted in a notary office outside Gebel Adda and sent to Gebel Adda to a higher official. One should observe that Gebel Adda was probably the seat of the anteparch (“vice-eparch” or “deputy eparch”) of Nobadia, as suggested by the letter from the eparch Marianou to the anteparch Mena concerning fugitive slaves already mentioned above. If the above conclusion is correct one has to assume that the Kingdom of Makuria had a well-organized and well-functioning bureaucratic system close to the models known from the Mediterranean world.¹⁷

The letter of the eparch Marianou to the anteparch Mena concerning fugitive slave, the list of slaves, and the register of contracts may have several parallels in the Gebel Adda material. Unfortunately, the documents in question are so badly preserved that very little can be said about their contents. It is then more for the sake of completing the picture than for their intrinsic value that I would like to mention three such documents. One is a piece of paper cut as a

16 If this was the case one has to assume that the letter did not leave Gebel Adda for some reason.

17 This is a conclusion reached also by RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*.

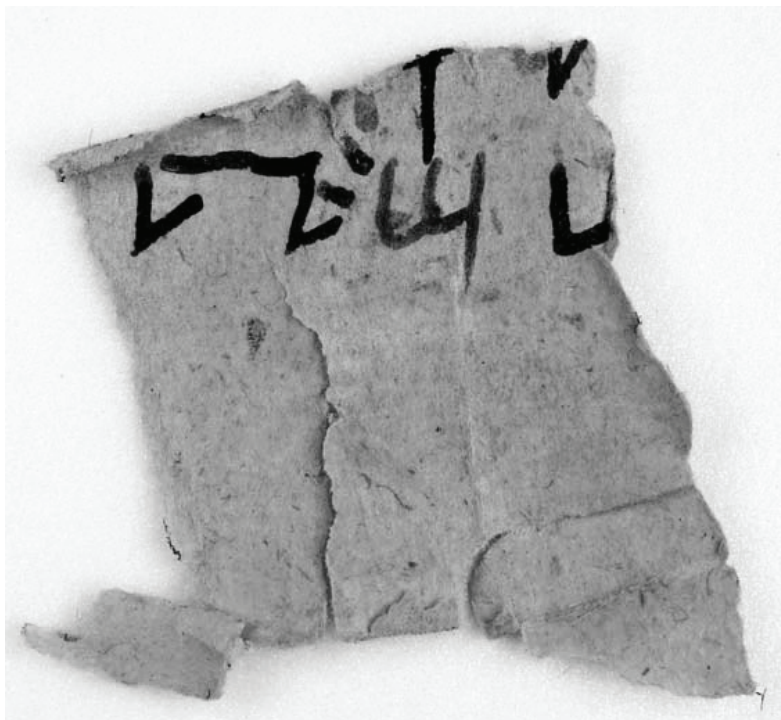


Fig. 8 ROM acc. no.
973.24.2926

crocodile (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2912) and preserving the Trinitarian formula (“In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen”), most probably the beginning of a document of some kind (fig. 6). The second, a scrap of paper inscribed on both sides (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2935), seems to come from a letter, either official or private, recognizable through the word $\Delta\Delta\Upsilon\epsilon\rho\epsilon\lambda\omicron$, “I have greeted (you)”¹⁸ (fig. 7). The third (ROM acc. no. 973.24.2926) preserves the word $\Gamma\epsilon\omega\omega$, designating a state official in the kingdom of Dotawo, mentioned in the protocols of documents from Qasr Ibrim (fig. 8).

All remaining documentary texts from Gebel Adda (leaving aside fragments) seem to belong to a single, well-defined group of lists of provision. The documents in question are written on paper, although one appear on a piece of pottery. They list persons, mostly if not exclusively men, and amounts of foodstuffs, including wine measured in $\mu\omicron\rho\iota\eta\alpha$, something that was measured in $\mu\alpha\rho\Gamma\alpha\Gamma\Gamma$, and something that was measured in $\mu\alpha\omega\epsilon$. In two cases, the provisions are listed by days. Thus the list ROM acc. no. 973.24.2914 lists provisions for days 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 2x of the month of Khoiak, day

¹⁸ The form $\Delta\Delta\Upsilon\epsilon\rho\epsilon\lambda\omicron$ is peculiar. It combines the PT_2 suffix $-\epsilon\epsilon$ and the $\text{PR}_{1\text{SG}}$ suffix $-\rho\epsilon$. Similar combined forms are attested in Old Nubian. I owe this information to Vincent van Gerven Oei.

2 of a following month (Tybi?) and two days of a preceding month (Hathyr?), and the list ROM acc. no. 973.24.2930 lists provisions for day 30 of an unnamed month and several days of a following one. It should be observed that, in the lists arranged according to the calendar, the provisions can occur without the name of persons.

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The lists of provisions from Gebel Adda have parallels in the form of wall inscriptions in the churches in Faras and Sonqi Tino, and documents on paper from Qasr Ibrim. This material was studied by Grzegorz Ochała in his paper for the London Nubian Studies Conference.¹⁹ His conclusion was that it actually is impossible to state whether the lists register what was received by the state or the Church from the individuals, or was distributed to them. One has to observe that the fragment ROM acc. no. 973.24.2936 has in its line 2 the word ΔΟΥΜΜΑ, “took, handed over,” which rather advocates for the first interpretation, the more so as one of the persons listed in this document is a king, obviously the king of Dotawo.

Summing up: Gebel Adda yielded the second largest collection of texts in Old Nubian after Qasr Ibrim. The texts enrich our knowledge of the literary culture of Christian Nubia and add important elements to our understanding of the functioning of the Nubian Christian kingdom of Dotawo.

19 OCHAŁA, “Old Nubian Lists of Goods and Money.”

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