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The Etymology of the Toponym “Pourgoundi” (Notes on Medieval Nubian Toponymy 5)

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The toponym ⲡⲟⲩⲣⲅⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓ was first recorded in a Greek–Old Nubian graffito on a wall of the Church of the Archangel Raphael in Tamit, originally published by Sergio Donadoni (DBMNT 451).1

The name of the dedicator and scribe has been interpreted by Łajtar and Van der Vliet as Philo(theos).2 This seems an over-interpretation of what stands in the text, since an abbreviated form of this name would be expected to have the letter ο in superscription. An alternative interpretation could be to read the two words (φίλο and Διάκονος) as a single personal name, meaning “Friend of the Deacon.” The authors opt for a third alternative though, which would

1 The authors would like to thank Adam Łajtar, Claude Rilly, and Robin Seignobos for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

2 ŁAJTAR & VAN DER VLIET, “Rich Ladies of Meinarti and Their Churches: With an Appended List of Sources from Christian Nubia Containing the Expression ‘Having the Church So-And-So.’”
see the name ⲏⲗⲟⲩ as a variant of the Greek name ⲏⲗⲁⲓⲧⲉ, since both
the shift between ⲏ and ⲑ, and the deletion of the final ⲙ are wellass
attested phenomena.

For other attestations of the female name Marianta, see I.QI 35
and 57. As regards the participle [ⲉⲡ̣ⲁⲅⲱⲙⲛⲟⲥ], there are six attestations of the verb in the DBMNT, five of which are participles:
two feminine, one neuter, one without suffix, and the present one,
which is masculine. Łajtar and Van der Vliet’s general interpretation
as the participle referring to the calendar traditions of the epagome
nal days is accepted, but with changes in the translation, since the
use of the masculine participle in the present inscription accompa
nied by a reference to a feast, which refers to a precise day, shows
that the scribe had in mind a sort of an “epagomenal month.”

Finally, it should be stressed that it is difficult to estimate whether
the owner of the church at Pourgoundi was Philon or Marianta, due
to the degradation of the language.

Donadoni identifies ⲑⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓ as the modern village Furgundi
on the eastern bank of the Nile, about 5 kilometers north of Abu
Simbel, across from Tamit. Łajtar and Van der Vliet suggest that on
the basis of the presence of the verb ⲫⲏⲩⲧⲓ “having,” it can be con
jectured that ⲑⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓ had a church. The name of the village was
“for some reason so distinctive,” that its church was not called by its
official name, “but by the name of the village.”

Two inventories of churches with payment from Qasr Ibrim pub-
lished by Giovanni Ruffini confirm that indeed we are dealing with
a church: DBMNT 1729.17 ⲑⲡⲣⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓⲐ “Pourgoundi-pred”; DBMNT
1730.23 [ⲡⲟⲩ]ⲣ̣ⲅⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓⲐ “Pourgoundi-pred.” Both inventories men
tion three churches: Peter, John, and Mary, although it remains un-
clear which of these three is the church of Pourgoundi referred to
in Tamit graffito.

工业园 follows a morphological pattern that is found fre-
quently Nubian toponyms: X-genitive -ⲏⲩ-Y “The Y of X.” Well-

3 Łajtar & Van der Vliet, The Greek and Coptic Inscriptions Published on Behalf of the Egypt
Exploration Society.
4 For a more accurate identification of the time of that feast, see Ochala, Chronological
Systems of Christian Nubia, p. 322, n. 4. It should be noted that the verb can also mean other
things, such as “brought forward,” or even “contributed,” but the interpretation as “the
epagomenal month” is preferable.
5 For the general degradation of the Greek language in Nubia, as witnessed also by this
inscription, see Łajtar, “The Greek of Late Christian Inscriptions from Nubia – The
Evidence from Banganarti and Other Sites.”
7 Łajtar & Van der Vliet, “Rich Ladies of Meinarti and Their Churches: With an Appended
List of Sources from Christian Nubia Containing the Expression ‘Having the Church So-
And-So,’” p. 46.
8 Ruffini, The Bishop, The Eparch, and the King: Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim (P. QI IV),
pp. 144, 150.
9 Bell, Place Names in The Belly of Stones, p. 6.
known are, for example, the islands (ⲧⲉⲧⲉⲧⲉ) Kulubnarti, Meinarti “island of Michael,”11 and Banganarti “island of the locust.”12 There are two other attested toponyms in - настоящее: dbmnt 1397.6 ⲥⲟⲣⲥⲓⲓ “Mohondi-gen,” where Gerald Browne suggests there was a church13 and dbmnt 1044.8-9 ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ “Toudi-gen,” where there was a Michael Church.14 cf. DBMNT 1729.6-7 ⲥⲟⲣⲥⲓⲓ ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ “Michael (Church) of Toudi.” There are several spelling variants of this name: DBMNT 1044.8 ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ “Tonde-pred”; and perhaps DBMNT 1730.7 ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ[ⲧ] “Tonda-gen.”

Old Nubian ⲛⲡ ⲛⲡ appears to be related to a noun featuring the same ⲛⲡ alternation that appears as ⲛⲡ in a land sale from Qaṣr Ibrīm (DBMNT 584), which Browne suggests could be “some kind of crop.”15 Considering the semantic field in which it appears this seems however unlikely. The first occurrence is DBMNT 584.i.16-17 ϱⲧⲉⲡ υⲣⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲡⲩⲣⲓⲟ “three plots for the di of the east,” which follows the pattern of dbmnt 584.18 ⲟⲣⲇⲟⲩⲡⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲡⲩⲣⲓⲟ ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ “one waterwheel plot for the irrigation of the south.” The second is DBMNT 584.i.28-29 ⲛⲡⲩⲣⲓⲟ ⲡⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲡⲩⲣⲓⲟ ⲧⲟⲩⲧⲉ “two plots for the de (of) the tašši tree plot.”

The only extant cognate of Old Nubian ⲛⲡ is Midob -ⲧⲉ/ⲧⲉ, a “morpheme to express tribal subsection,”16 e.g., ḫⲧⲉⲧⲉ “Elke-section”; ḫⲧⲉⲧⲉ “Kaagedi (Shalkota)-section.” This gives us for the two phrases from the land sale above the respective translations of “three plots for the tribal section of the east,” and “two plots for the tašši tree plot tribal section.”

The meaning of ⲧⲟⲟⲣⲧⲡ was recently clarified through the translation of a legend on a painting in Room 5 of the South-Western Annex of the Monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola. The painting, discovered during excavations in Dongola in 2004,17 shows a group of dancing and singing Nubians, performing a ritual that appears to be related to birth of a new male heir to the royal throne.18 One of the lines sung by the dancers is dbmnt 1364.d.2–4 [ⲧⲡ ⲧⲟⲟⲣⲧⲡ ⲧⲟⲟ ⲧⲟⲟ “You are the Queen Sister for the Pour.”

10 Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary, p. 20.
12 Żurawski, St Raphael Church I at Banganarti, Mid–Sixth to Mid–Eleventh Century: An Introduction to the Site and the Epoch, p. 41, n.1.
15 Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary, p. 45.
18 Van Gerven Oei, “A Dance for a Princess: The Legends on a Painting in Room 5 of the SW Annex of the Monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola (DBMNT 1364).”
It is our suggestion that Old Nubian ṭⲟⲣ is related to the Meroitic pqr /bak ara/ or /bak ara/ “prince,” which can be analyzed as /bak/ “power, authority” (cf. Old Nubian παγοι “power, authority”) + masculine suffix /ara/. Meroitic q /k/ was probably already pronounced /w/ in Northern Meroitic, and appears to be a cognate of Nubian /w/, cf. Mer. qore “sovereign” ~ Old Nubian ṭⲟⲣ “king.” Although it is as yet not fully determinable whether ṭⲟⲣ is also a cognate, like παγοι, or a loan word, there are several indications that it is the latter. First, Old Nubian does not have an agentive suffix /-ar/; second, court functions and royal titles are regularly prone to borrowing, and as the Nubian kingdoms have, to a certain extent, inherited the matrilineal inheritance of the throne, it would not be surprising if they also borrowed accompanying titles from Meroitic; third, the absence of the first /a/, present in παγοι, does not appear to follow the currently known sound correspondences between Meroitic and Old Nubian.

ⲡⲟⲩⲣ is probably also attested in an unpublished inscription from Banganarti, 424 + ⲉⲕⲏⲧⲡⲟⲩⲣⲏⲩ “I, the Prince,” with determiner -ⲡⲣ /-ir/ < -ⲧⲩ /-il/, and has perhaps also and element of the place name πⲟⲣⲓⲧⲡⲋⲉ, attested in two Coptic texts: DBMNT 630.13–14 ⲡⲓⲣⲟⲩⲣⲓⲧⲡⲋⲉ and DBMNT 631.11 ⲡⲓⲣⲟⲩⲣⲓⲧⲡⲋⲉ. The first part ⲡⲟⲩⲣ may very well be related to pⲟⲣ-, while the second element ⲧⲡⲓⲧⲡ- is a common Old Nubian word meaning “town” or “city.” ⲧⲡⲓ /ⲧⲡ may have originally formed the first element in a form that in later stages of the language was no longer interpreted analytically. A similar element may in that case also be found in word deffufa, referring to the ancient mud-brick constructions found in Nubia.

DBMNT 1364.d.2–4 [ⲉⲧⲧⲧ ⲡⲟⲩⲣⲣⲁ ⳟⲟⲛⲁⲥⲁ ⲉⲧⲣⲁ ⲇⲧⲣⲟⲥ ⲇⲟⲁⲧ] “You are the Queen Sister for the Prince,” and the place name ⲡⲟⲩⲣⲓⲧⲡⲁ as “Tribal Section of the Princes,” with pⲟⲣⲓⲧⲡ the plural of pⲟⲣ. That this place name was still experienced by Nubian speakers as analytical, i.e., consisting of two words connected by a genitive, is shown by church inventory DBMNT 1728.4–5, which, features the place name without -ⲧⲡ and the predicative -ⲧ̣: ⲡⲟⲣⲓⲧⲡⲇ ⲙⲃⲃ ⲡⲧⲣⲁ ⲇⲟⲧ “John of (the tribal section of) the Princes: 2; Mary: 1; Peter: 1(?).”

19 Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary, p. 144.
20 Rilly, Le méroïté et sa famille linguistique, p. 115.
21 Rilly, La langue du royaume de Méroé: Un panorama de la plus ancienne culture écrite d’Afrique subsaharienne, pp. 39–42.
22 Rilly, Le méroïté et sa famille linguistique, p. 136.
23 Claude Rilly, p.c.
24 Adam Łajtar, p.c.
26 Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary, p. 45.
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