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NEW CHRISTIAN EPITAPHS FROM THE FAYUM

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NEW CHRISTIAN EPITAPHS FROM THE FAYUM<sup>1</sup>

On a recent visit to Egypt in February of 2014 as part of the Brigham Young University excavation in the Fayum we were shown some unpublished inscriptions in the storage magazine at Kom Aushim (Karanis) by the curator Mustafa F. Hemeida. Two of the inscriptions particularly caught our attention since they were Greek epitaphs and were clearly Christian because they contained distinct Christian markers such as crosses and *nomina sacra*. With the permission of the curator we present here editions of these two inscriptions. Regrettably, however, very little can be said by way of introduction about the discovery and background of the two pieces since the catalogue records at the Kom Aushim Magazine say very little about them; in fact, the catalogue records do not even preserve the dates of acquisition or their provenance.<sup>2</sup> Though it might be assumed that they must have come from Karanis, the site of the storage magazine, this cannot be established; however, it seems safe to assume Fayumic provenance for both pieces since all of the provenanced inscriptions in the storage magazine have come from the Fayum. Furthermore, both inscriptions share some specific parallels with other Christian epitaphs known to have come from the Fayum, which lends additional support to Fayumic provenance.

## I. Funerary Stele for a Man Named Thenes

The first stele bears the Kom Aushim inv. no. 309 and measures 50.5 cm (H) × 26.0 cm (W) × 15.5 cm (D). The stele is made of limestone and contains a rounded triangular pediment at the top that is slightly damaged; two notches from the pediment intersect the first line of the inscription. The triangular pediment that crowns the present stele is well attested in Coptic funerary stelae and the present form is similar to certain types that appear in O.Cair.Monuments.<sup>3</sup> The inscription on the stele is written in Greek along the top third and is comprised of five lines. It is preceded and immediately followed by small crosses (ll. 1, 5) of the pattée form where the four arms have equal lengths and the extremities of the arms are spread out.<sup>4</sup> The Greek script is upright, clear, and deliberate; the average line height is 2.8 cm and average letter width is 1.9 cm. On the whole the letter forms are rather unremarkable but on two occasions in l. 1 and l. 2 the cutter of the inscription has inscribed the nu backwards; elsewhere, however, the nu is written correctly (ll. 2–5).

The grammar of the Greek text is at times a little shaky and leads to some uncertainty with regards to the meaning of the text. The inscription begins with an invocation to the “Lord” (κύριος) but instead of employing the vocative κύριε the inscriber mistakenly employs the genitive κυρίου (see 1 n. below). In ll. 3–4 the inscription reads ειρη την ψυχην, which is problematic, and so it seems most likely that ειρη is to be read as εἰρή(νη), perhaps through haplography. It also appears that the cutter of the inscription has mistakenly employed the accusative τὴν ψυχὴν when the dative τῇ ψυχῇ was intended; parallels for the phrase εἰρήνη τῇ ψυχῇ are attested in epitaphs (see 3–4 n. below).

Visually the most striking feature of the stele is the large cross that is inscribed on the stone below the inscription. The cross measures 25.5 cm × 15.5 cm (H × W) and is carved in bas relief; below the large cross there is a 12.0 cm gap of blank stone before the bottom of the stele. This large cross takes the form

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Mustafa F. Hemeida, curator of the Kom Aushim Magazine, for showing us these inscriptions and for permission to photograph and publish them. We also want to thank Paul Evans for his help with imaging these inscriptions and John Gee for providing some useful feedback on this article.

<sup>2</sup> The catalogue records are written in Arabic. All that they preserve is a brief description of the pieces and mention that they were acquired through an individual named Yusef Mishrefy concerning whom no additional information is given.

<sup>3</sup> 8494 (Pl. XVI), which is very similar in style, or more generally to nos 8445 (Pl. IX), 8461 (Pl. XII), 8540 (Pl. XXIV), 8672 (Pl. XLVI), and 8717 (Pl. LVI). While these stelae contain brief descriptions and transcriptions, it is unfortunate that Crum made no effort to assign any dates to them. Stele no. 8414 (Pl. II) is also noteworthy because the triangular pediment is similar and the overall form of the stele is comparable to the present one where the inscription appears right under the pediment and is then followed by a large decorative cross in the center of the stele.

<sup>4</sup> I. Kamel, *Coptic Funerary Stelae (Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée copte)* (Le Caire 1987) 24, 36.



of the cross potance where each arm of the cross ends with a beveled bud, symbolizing either a pearl or diamond, which protrudes between two points.<sup>5</sup> The cross is incised through the center with diagonal striations that give the appearance of a spiral center. The lower arm of the cross is distinctively longer than the other three arms so that the cross potance is of the Latin type that appears on Christian stele in Egypt during the sixth century, thus providing a *terminus post quem* for the inscription.<sup>6</sup>

Assigning a precise date to the inscription is difficult. The reference to the indiction cycle in ll. 4–5 is not particularly useful for dating. The type of ornate cross inscribed in the middle of the inscription suggests that a date much before the sixth century for the epitaph can be effectively ruled out. Paleographically the letter forms cannot be easily assigned to a specific period. Therefore, in light of these difficulties a

<sup>5</sup> S. Schaten, Christian Funerary Stelae from the Fayum, in G. Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis* (Cairo 2005) 260; cf. Kamel, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 36. The style of the cross appearing in this epitaph is very similar to one appearing in Crum, *Coptic Monuments*, no. 8673 (Pl. XLVII) and T. K. Thomas, *Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture: Images for this World and the Next* (Princeton 2000) no. 105.

<sup>6</sup> Kamel, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 23–24.

broader latitude in dating is required and so a date falling somewhere in the sixth or seventh century seems most likely.

+ κ(υρίο)υ ἀνάπα-  
 υσον τὴν ψυχ-  
 ῆν· εἰρή(νη) τη{ν} ψυχῆ  
 {ν} Θένου. Θῶθ α', ἰ-  
 5 ν(δικτίονος) γ'. +  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 1. l. κύριε.

### Translation

O Lord, give rest to the soul; peace to the soul of Thenes (who died) Thoth 1 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiction.

### Notes

1–3 κ(υρίο)υ ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχῆν. The phrase κύριε ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχῆν is well attested in a number of inscriptions from Egypt: Bernand, *Mus. du Louvre* 107.1–2 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); Bernand, *Inscr.Métr.* 61.11–12 (= IEgChr 63; A.D. IV/V; Hermopolis Parva); IEgChr 62.1–2 (A.D. 693; Hermopolis Parva); IEgChr 76.1–2 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 81.1–2 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 85.1–2 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 96.1–5 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 99.1–2 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 101.1–3 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 105.1–7 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 172.1–3 (date ?; Antinoopolis); IEgChr 185.5–7 (date ?; Antinoopolis); IEgChr 186.2–4 (date ?; Antinoopolis); IEgChr 195.5–7 (date ?; Antinoopolis); IEgChr 513.1–2 (date ?; Hermonthis); IEgChr 657.2–4 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 663.4–6 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 786.1–3 (date ?; Fayum); IEgChr 788.1–2 (date ?; Fayum); SB I 609.1–3 (date ?; Alexandria); SB I 562.3–4 (date ?; Antinoopolis); SB III 6193.7–8 (date ?; Antinoopolis); SB III 6198.8–10 (date ?; Antinoopolis ?); SB IV 7297.1 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); SB IV 7298.1–2 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); SB IV 7320.1–3 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown); SEG XXIV 1204.1–3 (A.D. 590; Fayum). See also P.Strasb. gr. inv. 254 II.11–12 (IV–V): τῶν κεκοιμημένων τὰς ψυχὰς ἀνάπαυσον. On this formula in inscriptions see A. Łajtar, *Bemerkungen zu drei kürzlich veröffentlichten griechischen Inschriften aus der Spätantike*, *ZPE* 114 (1996) 144; cf. J. Hammerstaedt, *Griechische Anaphorenfragmente aus Ägypten und Nubien* (Pap.Colon. XXVIII), 28 n. 11–12.

While this phrase is well attested in Christian epitaphs from Egypt it is little attested in Christian epitaphs outside of Egypt: IG II<sup>2</sup> 13564.2 (A.D. V/VI; Attica); IGLSyr II 301.2–4 (date ?; Ansaratha); IGLSyr II 634.2–4 (date ?; Antioch); SEG XXVIII 1396.13–15 (A.D. 581; Palestine); IPal.Tert. Ia 129.1–3 (A.D. 425; Arabia/Pal. Tertia). The phrase is hardly used in Christian literary sources and the only pre fourth-century occurrence of the phrase appears from the second century in Herm. *Sim.* 9.5.4 (82.4): ἀνάπαυσον τὴν ψυχῆν μου κύριε.

In IEgChr 185.5 the genitive κ(υρίο)υ is also mistakenly used in this phrase. While the interchange ε > υ is attested, it is rare: see F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Volume I, Phonology* (Milan 1976) 273.

3–4 εἰρή(νη) τη{ν} ψυχῆ{ν}. A parallel occurs in IFayum I 31 (= SB I 3905; A.D. IV–VI; Arsinoe): εἰρή[νη] | τῷ ψυχῶ [τη] | ἀναπα[υσα]μένῃ ἐν [Κ(υρίο)φ].

4 Θένου. The letter combination θενου must surely represent a name since τὴν ψυχῆν in epitaphs is often followed by a name in the genitive. The Greek name Thenes (Θενῆς, -ου) lends itself as the most likely possibility: SB IV 7402.13 (mid III B.C.; Thebes): Θενητι; P.Petr. III 58e.2.23 (230–220 B.C.; Egypt, exact provenance unknown): Θενης; P.Strasb. Gr. 9 823.2 (A.D. 42; Philadelphia): Θενης.

## II. Funerary Stele for a Woman Named Kyra

The second stele bears the Kom Aushim inv. no. 310 and measures 27.5 cm (H) × 34.5 cm (W) × 6.5 cm (D). The stele is made of limestone and contains three lines of Greek text with a fourth line comprised of three crosses. The stele was apparently covered in plaster of which some fragments are still extant, and there are still faint traces of black ink on some of the inscribed letters. To the right of the text, just to the left of the right edge of the stele, there is a deliberate carved vertical line that gives the impression that the surface of the inscription had been inset deeper into the stone. The left edge of the stele is damaged so it is not possible to determine whether such a cut was made on this side of the stele also.

The letter forms are very clear and the letters are inscribed in an upright form; average line heights measure 4.7 cm and average letter widths are 3.7 cm. In l. 1 the phrase ἐν εἰρήνῃ is phonetically rendered ἐν ἡρήνῃ, a common spelling in inscriptions (see 1 n. below), and the participle κεκοιμημένη in ll. 2–3 is rendered κεκυμημένη, a less frequently attested spelling (see 2–3 n.). The last line (l. 4) of the inscription contains three crosses with the one in the center being distinctly larger than the other two. The first cross near the left edge of the stele is partially effaced so that only its right arm and bottom arm are extant. The cross in the middle takes the form of a cross pattée, and the cross on the far right takes the form of an ordinary Greek cross.<sup>7</sup>

Two inscriptions that are structurally very similar to the text of the present inscription are IEgChr 87 (=SEG XLI 1618), which even attests the same misspelling for κοιμᾶσθαι (εἰς θεὸς ὁ βοηθὸν [l. βοηθῶν] | τῇ κεκυμημένη Νιόννῃ ἐν ἡρήνῃ | ΑΩ [date ?; Fayum]), and IEgChr 102 (ἐν ἡρήνῃ τοῦ κεκυμημένου Γού(ν)θου ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ Θῶτ γί [date ?; Fayum]). While both of these inscriptions are undated it is worth noting that both come from the Fayum.

The date of the inscription is difficult to pinpoint. The use of crosses suggests that the inscription should not be dated before the fourth century and the use of the cross pattée suggests an even later date. Paleographically the letter forms are not distinctive enough or indicative of a single precise period. Therefore, a date for the epitaph falling somewhere between the fifth century and no later than the seventh century seems most likely.

ἐν ἡρήνῃ τῇ  
κεκυμημέ-  
3 νη Κύρα.  
+ + +

1. l. εἰρήνῃ. 2–3. l. κεκοιμημένη.

*Translation*

For Kyra, who has fallen asleep in peace.

*Notes*

- 1 ἐν ἡρήνῃ. On εἰ > η interchange see Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri*, 240–42. This phonetic spelling of εἰρήνῃ is attested with some frequency in Christian inscriptions throughout Egypt and especially the Fayum: IFayum I 30.2–3 (= IEgChr 90; A.D. IV–VI; Arsinoe); IEgChr 75.4 (date ?; Gurob); IEgChr 77.1 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 83.2.7–9 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 86.3–4 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 87.3 (= SEG XLI 1618; date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 90.2–3 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 91.1 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 102.1 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome); IEgChr 106.1 (date ?; Arsinoite Nome).

The prepositional phrase ἐν εἰρήνῃ is widespread in Christian epitaphs from the Fayum. See A. Łajtar, *Bemerkungen zu griechischen christlichen Inschriften aus dem Koptischen Museum in Kairo*, *ZPE* 97 (1993) 230. The phrase ἐν εἰρήνῃ occurs frequently in the LXX in a variety of contexts and only seven times in the NT: Luke 2:29, 11:21; Acts 16:36; 1 Cor. 16:11; Jas. 2:16, 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:14. As part of an epistolary formula it occurs first in *Barn.* 1:1: χαίρετε υἱοὶ καὶ θυγατέρες ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς ἐν εἰρήνῃ

<sup>7</sup> Kamel, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 36.



(“Greeting, sons and daughters, in the name of our Lord, who loved us in peace”). In the context of finding “peace” in the grave LXX Isa. 57:2 is particularly noteworthy: ἔσται ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ ταφῇ αὐτοῦ.

- 2–3 κεκυμημένη. On the spelling κυμ- instead of κοιμ- see PWuerzb. 3V.6 (late III); PCair. 10395A.8 (late VI); on the σι > υ interchange see Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri*, 197–98. The same variant spelling of the verb κοιμάομαι is also attested in IEgChr 87.2 (= SEG 41.1618; date ?; Fayum) and IEgChr 102.1–2 (date ?; Fayum). In the reedition of IEgChr 87 in Łajtar, *Bemerkungen zu griechischen christlichen Inschriften aus dem Koptischen Museum in Kairo*, 230 in ll. 2–3 he gives the following reconstruction: τῇ κεκυμημένη Νλόννα. But it seems most likely that Nonna should be in the dative (Νόννα), and not the nominative (Νόννα), so that it agrees with τῇ κεκυμημένη.

As a euphemism for death κοιμάομαι is employed in the New Testament at Matt. 27:52, 28:13; John 11:11–12; Acts 7:60, 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39, 11:30, 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13–15; 2 Pet. 3:4. However, it should be noted that the use of “sleeping” or “resting” vocabulary (κοίμησις, ἀνάπαυσις, *dormitio*, *requiescere*, *pausare*) for death occurs throughout Jewish, Christian, and Pagan antiquity for death. See M. B. Ogle, *The Sleep of Death*, *MAAR* 11 (1933) 81–117 who provides considerable documentation for the metaphorical use of “sleep”. On pp. 114–17 Ogle notes, however, that in Jewish and Christian contexts the use of sleep vocabulary is more widespread. On the different uses and meanings of κοιμάομαι in epitaphs see P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millenium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)* (Kampen 1991) 115–24; cf. I. Kajanto, *The Hereafter in Ancient Christian Epigraphy and Poetry*, *Arctos* 12 (1978) 27–53.

- 3 Κύρα. The female name Kyra (Κύρα; Copt. ⲕϣⲣⲁ) is of Greek origin and is etymologically derived from the name Kyria (Κυρία) meaning “lady” or “mistress”. As the name is presently spelled it is attested only a few dozen times in Greek and Coptic papyri, most of these attestations are in texts of the fourth century A.D. and later. The name is attested in two other Christian Greek inscriptions from Egypt: IEgChr 475.3 (date ?; Hermonthis); SEG XXXVI 1458.6 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown).

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