LINCOLN H. BLUMELL – MOHAMED HUSSEN

NEW CHRISTIAN EPITAPHS FROM THE FAYUM


© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
NEW CHRISTIAN EPIITAPHS FROM THE FAYUM

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visit to Egypt in February of 2014 as part of the Brigham Young University excavation in the Fayum we were shown some unpublished inscriptions in the storage magazine at Kom Aushim (Karanis) by the curator Mustafa F. Hemeida.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. 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. 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. 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).

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...
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.\(^5\) 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 \textit{terminus post quem} for the inscription.\(^6\)

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

---


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

\[
+ \kappa(\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\upsilon) \delta\alpha\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omicron\upsilon \tau\iota\nu \psi\upsilon\zeta\cdot
\]

\[
\eta\nu \varepsilon\iota\rho\iota(\upsilon\eta) \tau\iota(\nu) \psi\upsilon\zeta\eta \]

\[
\{\theta\epsilon\nu\omicron \upsilon \theta\omicron \alpha \iota \iota \upsilon\} \gamma \cdot +
\]

\[
5 \nu\delta\iota\kappa\iota\iota\iota\iota\omicron\omicron\omicron \gamma \cdot +
\]

1. \iota \kappa\iota\iota\iota\iota.

\[
\]

**Translation**

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

**Notes**

1–3 \kappa(\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\upsilon) \delta\alpha\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omicron\upsilon \tau\iota\nu \psi\upsilon\zeta\cdot The phrase \kappa\iota\iota\iota\iota\iota\iota \tau\iota\nu \psi\upsilon\zeta\cdot 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 ?, Hermontios); IEgChr 657.2–4 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 663.4–6 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 786.1–3 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 853.1–2 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 186.2–4 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 195.5–7 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 657.2–4 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 663.4–6 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 786.1–3 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 853.1–2 (date ?, Antinoopolis); IEgChr 657.2–4 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 663.4–6 (date ?, Egypt, exact provenance unknown); IEgChr 185.5 the genitive \kappa(\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\upsilon) is also mistakenly used in this phrase. While the interchange \epsilon > \upsilon 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 \varepsilon\iota\rho\iota(\upsilon\eta) \tau\iota(\nu) \psi\upsilon\zeta\eta[\nu]. A parallel occurs in IFayum I 31 (= SB I 3905; A.D. IV–VI; Arsinoe): \varepsilon\iota\rho\iota(\upsilon\eta) [\tau\iota\nu] \upsilon\zeta\eta \iota \alpha\nu\alpha\upsilon\alpha\upsilon\sigma\upsilon\iota\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu \epsilon\nu [K(\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\upsilon)].

4 \theta\epsilon\nu\omicron \upsilon \theta\omicron \alpha \iota \iota \upsilon\nu \upsilon\zeta\eta\cdot The letter combination \theta\epsilon\nu\omicron must surely represent a name since \tau\iota\nu \psi\upsilon\zeta\eta\cdot in epitaphs is often followed by a name in the genitive. The Greek name Thenes (\theta\epsilon\gamma\iota\zeta, -\omicron\upsilon) lends itself as the most likely possibility: SB IV 7402.13 (mid III B.C.; Thebes): \theta\epsilon\nu\gamma\iota\zeta; P.Petr. III 58c.2.23 (230–220 B.C.; Egypt, exact provenance unknown): \theta\epsilon\nu\gamma\iota; P.Strasb. Gr. 9 823.2 (A.D. 42; Philadelphia): \theta\epsilon\nu\gamma\iota.
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 ἠρήνῃ, 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.7

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 (ἐξίς θεός ὁ βοηθόν [l. βοηθόν] ἐν κεκυμημένη Νόννας ἐν ἠρήνῃ ὁ ΑΩ [date ?; Fayum]), and IEgChr 102 (ἐν ἠρήνῃ τοῦ κεκυμημένου Γοῦ⟨ν⟩θου ἐν κυρίῳ Θὸτ γα' [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 ἠρήνῃ τῇ
κεκυμημένη

3 νη Κύρα.
+++  
1. l. εἰρήνῃ. 2–3. l. κεκοιμημένη.

Translation
For Kyra, who has fallen asleep in peace.

Notes
1 ἐν ἠρήνῃ. On ἐν ἠρήνῃ see Gignac, A Grammar of the Greek Papyri, 240–42. This phonetic spelling of εἰρήνη 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 νικο καὶ θυγατέρες ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς ἐν εἰρήνῃ

---

7 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 ἡ ταφή αὐτοῦ.

2–3 κεκυμημένη. On the spelling κωμ- instead of κοιμ- see PWuerzb. 3V.6 (late III); PCair. 10395A.8 (late VI); on the οι > ϊ 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 Lajtar, Bemerkungen zu griechischen christlichen Inschriften aus dem Koptischen Museum in Kairo, 230 in ll. 2–3 he gives the following reconstruction: τῇ κεκυμημένη Νόννα. 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.


3 Κύρια. The female name Kyra (Κύρα; Copt. ⲫⲡⲣⲁ) 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 ?; Hermomithis); SEG XXXVI 1458.6 (date ?; Egypt, exact provenance unknown).

Lincoln H. Blumell, Brigham Young University – lincoln_blumell@byu.edu

Mohamed Hussen, Kom Aushim Magazine – hussenegy@gmail.com