

## Two Christian Funerary Stelae in the Magazine at Fustât (Old Cairo)

During an inventory of the lower level of the storage magazine in Fustât (Old Cairo) in the Fall of 2019 a small collection of inscriptions was uncovered. <sup>(1)</sup> The collection comprises about 20 pieces that range from fully intact texts to fragments preserving a handful of legible letters. Most of the pieces are Greek, but one is bilingual (Greek and Coptic), and two are entirely in Coptic. The date of acquisition and the provenance of the pieces are unknown as they were hitherto uncatalogued, <sup>(2)</sup> but upon further investigation we discovered that one of the Coptic pieces had been previously published and was part of a collection of five Coptic inscriptions excavated in Manqabâd (Lykopolite Nome) in 1976. <sup>(3)</sup> Whether the other texts in this recently discovered collection were found at approximately the same time and in the same region is unknown, but as the lone published text in this group got separated from the four other texts it was excavated with, we are inclined to think that these texts likely represent a miscellany of texts found at different times and in different locations. Nevertheless, we do believe it is possible that some sub-groups could exist within the larger collection whereby a few pieces could be related to each other in terms of time of acquisition or provenance.

A unifying feature of most of the inscriptions is that they are Christian funerary stelae and can be readily identified as such through the use of various formula and distinct Christian symbols. Here we present editions of two of these inscriptions, the lone unpublished Coptic piece and the bilingual Greek and Coptic piece since they represent important contributions to Christian funerary epigraphy in late antique Egypt. <sup>(4)</sup>

### 1. COPTIC EPITAPH FOR BLESSED THEODOSIOS

This epitaph consists of eight lines inscribed on the top half of a polished marble slab that surmounts a large, forked cross, at the base of the stele that sits atop a pedestal and is adorned with foilage on either side and two smaller crosses. The lower right corner of the slab is broken off, but it does not affect the text or iconography at the bottom. The inscribed

(1) This was carried out under the direction of Mr. Muhammed Ismail, chief of committee for inventory at the magazine.

(2) A catalogue of these and other pieces found at the time of the inventorying was undertaken by Amer El Mesiry, in 2020. He reports that no one in the magazine that he spoke with had information about the provenance or acquisition of the inscriptions.

(3) It was originally published in A.-R. ABDAL-TAWAB, A. H. AL-MANSUB IBRAHIM, and S. SCHATEN, "Coptic stelae from Manqabâd," *BSAC* 40 (2001), pp. 53–58, at pp. 56–57 (no. 3 = SB Kopt. 4.1960). The article reports that these five inscriptions were stored in the Fustât Magazine and that they did not have inventory numbers at the time of publication.

(4) We are currently preparing for publication an article on the Greek epitaphs.

text is upright and has an almost grid-like appearance, although the first two lines are distinguished by *ekthesis*. Average line height is 3 cm and individual lines range between 11–19 characters per line. Letters are executed with skill and are generally consistent in terms of spacing and size, only the lone hori is inscribed in a distinctly smaller font than the surrounding text. Individual letters typically lack ornamentation, although alphas, deltas, and djandjas are inscribed with small hooks at the top. Other graphic features of the text include lunate epsilons and sigmas, mus inscribed with a rather high saddle, and broken bar alphas. There are faint traces of red paint on certain letters. Overall, the presentation of the text and inscribed illustration give the impression of a skilled cutter.

The inscription begins with the well-attested prayer in Coptic epitaphs that God “have mercy” (ΔΡΙ ΟΥΝΔ) on the soul of the deceased. A distinct feature of the prayer in the present text is that it is addressed to the “God of Saint Severus”; such prayers are most often addressed to God without any additional reference. The name of the deceased is then given, accompanied by the epithet “blessed”, followed by the common “rest formula” (ΝΤΑϞΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟϞ) before the date of death via day of month and indiction year. Overall, the epitaph is rather formulaic, and the most unique feature of the inscription is the reference to the “God of Saint Severus” in the opening line.

Assigning a specific date to the text is difficult. Paleographically the script does not contain any peculiarities that might point to a specific period; <sup>(5)</sup> e.g. the broken bar alpha that appears throughout the text is epigraphically well attested in Egypt from the fourth century onward. Similarly, the use of the forked cross (Ϟ) that precedes the text may suggest that the text is unlikely to be any earlier than the fifth century, but it is not diagnostic for a particular period. In the group of inscriptions uncovered at the storage magazine in Fustât, one Greek piece bears a date of A.D. 680/81. <sup>(6)</sup> If the present text is in some way related to that inscription, it might suggest it may be roughly contemporaneous, but any correlation between the two (beyond the fact that they are held in the same storage magazine) remains uncertain. As it has been noted that Coptic epitaphs that preserve prayers to God to “have mercy” on the deceased tend to date between the seventh and tenth centuries, this may provide the general chronological parameters for this piece. <sup>(7)</sup>

Turning to provenance, attempting to determine the origin of this piece is difficult since the magazine has no acquisition record and has historically stored artifacts from a diverse geographic area in Egypt. Furthermore, there are no dialectical hints in the text that point to a particular region and the prayer for mercy (ΔΡΙ ΟΥΝΔ) and “rest formula” (ΝΤΑϞΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟϞ) that appear in the epitaph are supraregional. <sup>(8)</sup> Perhaps the best indicator of the provenance of the piece is the opening address to “the God of saint Severus” (ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΣΔΓΙΟΣ ΣΕΥΗΡΟΣ) since this invocation is rather unique and could suggest that the stele

(5) A nice parallel for the text of this inscription, even though it is in Greek, is no. 25 (Pl. XI [= SEG 41.1672]) in I. KAMEL, *Coptic Funerary Stelae (Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée copte)* (Cairo, 1987), but it is dated rather broadly to the “Byzantine period”.

(6) This piece is an epitaph that carries an Era of Diocletian reckoning year 397. It is being published in an article with the Greek pieces.

(7) B. TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab Periods from Egypt* (Marburg, 2011), p. 195.

(8) TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 178–181, 196.

originated in an area where there was special devotion to this saint. <sup>(9)</sup> During his lifetime Saint Severus was associated with the city and vicinity of Lykopolis, <sup>(10)</sup> but the limited papyrological and epigraphic evidence for this saint is principally from the Hermopolite region that specifically commemorates his feast day. <sup>(11)</sup> However, there is an inscription from a church in Ansinâ that contains an invocation to the saint and there are a handful of Coptic epitaphs that begin in the same way as the present epitaph with the invocation “God of saint NN have mercy ...” that also come from the vicinity of Antinoopolis. <sup>(12)</sup>

Inv. 70/DH

Hermopolite or Antinoopolite

70 × 46 cm (FIG. 1)

VII–X

Ⲭ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΖΑΓΙΟΣ ΣΕΥΗ-  
 ΡΟΣ ΕΚΕΡ ΟΥΝΑ Μ̄Ν ΤΕ-  
 ΨΥΧΗ ΜΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ  
 ΘΕΟΔΟΣΙΟΣ Ν̄ΤΑϢ-  
 5 Μ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄ΜΟϢ Ν̄ΣΟΥ Μ̄ΝΤ-  
 ΧΜΗΝ Ν̄ΠΑΡΜΟΥΘΙ Ν̄ΤΙ-  
 ΡΟΜΠΕ ΤΑΙ ΔΩΤΕΚΑ-  
 ΤΗΣ ΙΝΔ(ΙΚΤΙ)Ο(ΝΟΣ). ΔΜΗΝ.

1 ἄγιος 3 ψυχὴ μακάριος 4 Θεοδόσιος 5–6. l. ΜΝΤΩΜΗΝΕ. 7–8 l. ΔΩΔΕΚΑΤΗΣ; δωδεκάτης 9 ΙΝΔ°, inscr.; ἰνδικτίονος ἀμήν

“The God of Saint Severus have mercy on the soul of the blessed Theodosios. He went to his rest on the eighteenth day of Pharmouthi in year twelve of the indiction. Amen.”

1–3 Ⲭ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΖΑΓΙΟΣ ΣΕΥΗΡΟΣ ΕΚΕΡ ΟΥΝΑ Μ̄Ν ΤΕΨΥΧΗ The opening invocation to the “God of Saint Severus” is paralleled in the first two lines of an oracle request from the seventh or eighth century: see SCHENKE, “Das Orakel des Heiligen Severus,” [n. 10], pp. 65–72 at p. 71: ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΦΑΓΙΟΣ Ι ΣΕΟΥΉΡΟΣ.

(9) The “saint Severus” referred to in the present inscription is almost certainly to be identified with St. Severus of Antioch who was a staunch Monophysite and was enthusiastically received in Alexandria c. A.D. 518 when he was deposed from the patriarchate of Antioch by the emperor Justin I. On the life of Severus see W. H. C. FRENCH, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 201–220. For Severus’ time, impact, and veneration in Egypt see W. E. CRUM, “Sévère d’Antioche en Égypte,” *ROC* 23 (1922–23), pp. 92–104 and E. DE L. O’LEARY, “Severus of Antioch in Egypt,” *Aegyptus* 32 (1952), pp. 425–436.

(10) G. SCHENKE, “Das Orakel des Heiligen Severus,” *APF* 57 (2011), pp. 65–72, at pp. 68–70.

(11) SB 18.13140.6 (A.D. VI/VII) calendar of saints; on the Hermopolite origin of this text see A. ΠΑΠΑΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L’apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris, 2001), p. 188. P.Vindob. G 14043.2 (late A.D. VII/early VIII) published by A. ΠΑΠΑΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ, “Un calendrier de saints hermopolite: P.Vindob. G 14043,” *Tyche* 8 (1993), pp. 101–104.

(12) A. DELATTRE, “Une inscription grecque inédite d’Ansinâ,” *APapyrol* 21–22 (2009–2010 [2012]), pp. 99–103 at p. 103: Ἄπα Σευῆρος, πατριάρχου (l. πατριάρχα) τοῦ Χριστοῦ, βοήθησον ἐγώ (l. μοι), ... (“Apa Severus, patriarch of Christ, help me, ...”). TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], p. 179. For parallels to the present inscription see n. 1–3 in *Notes* section below.



FIG. 1 — Inv. 70/DH (© Amer El Mesiry)

Close parallels to the larger phrase appear in the following texts: SB Kopt. 1.445.1–4 (Hermopolis Magna, date?): + ΠΝΟ[ΥΤΕ ΜΦΑ]ΓΙΟΣ ΚΟΛ[ΛΟΥΘΟΣ] | ΔΡΙ ΟΥΝ[Δ Μ̄Ν] | ΤΕΨ[ΥΧΗ ...]; SB Kopt. 2.1070.1–4 (Antinoopolis, date?): + ΠΝΟΥΤΕ Μ̄ΦΑΓΙΟΣ | ΚΟΛΛΟΥΘΟΣ | ΕΡΕΚ ΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ ΤΕΨΥΧΗ ...; SB Kopt. 3.1588.1–3 (Dayr Abu Hinnis, date?): + ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΖΑΓΙΟΣ | ΚΟΛΛΟΥΘΟΣ ΕΚΕΡ̄ ΟΥΝΑ | ΜΝ ΤΕΨΥΧΗ .... For the invocation ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΠΖΑΓΙΟΣ ΣΕΥΗΡΟΣ see discussion above. The prayer formula ΕΚΕΡ̄ ΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ ΤΕΨΥΧΗ (*vel sim.*) is widespread in Coptic epitaphs; see discussion in TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 178–181 and 301–303.

- 3–4 **ΜΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ | ΘΕΟΔΟΣΙΟΣ** The epithet ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ (μακάριος) is widespread in Christian inscriptions from Egypt and appears especially in epitaphs; thus, it was used mostly for the deceased. See L. DINNEEN, *Titles of Address in Christian Greek Epistolography to 527 A.D.* (Washington, D.C., 1929), pp. 81–83. On the Greek name Theodosios, see TM Name 5465.
- 4–5 **ΝΤΑΧΙΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟϞ** The phrase ΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟϞ is widespread in Coptic epitaphs and typically serves to introduce the date of death. The phrase is equivalent to the Greek ἀναπαύομαι (Lat. *requievit*) and is used to express hope for a future resurrection. See J. VAN DER VLIET, “‘What is Man?’ The Nubian Tradition of Coptic Funerary Inscriptions,” in *Nubian Voices: Studies in Christian Nubian Culture* (Warsaw, 2011), pp. 171–224 at pp. 195–197; see also TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], p. 196.
- 5–6 **Μ̄ΝΤΙΧΜΗΝ** On ΤΧ replacing ΤΩ see W. E. CRUM, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), p. 745a. The same spelling also appears in SB Kopt. 3.1588.11 (Dayr Abu Hinnis; date?).
- 6 **ΝΠΑΡΜΟΥΘΙ** Same spelling also occurs in SB Kopt. 1.596.6 (Aswan; A.D. VIII [?]); SB Kopt. 1.691.8 (Upper Egypt; date?); SB Kopt. 5.2221.6 (Hermopolis; A.D. 731). On the interchange of φ > π see P.Bal. 1, p. 132 and CRUM, *Dictionary*, p. 258a.
- 7–8 **ΔΩΤΕΚΑΙΤΗΣ** On the interchange of Δ > τ see P.Bal. 1, pp. 130–131 and CRUM, *Dictionary*, p. 389a.

## 2. GREEK AND COPTIC EPITAPH FOR BLESSED EUS

This epitaph consists of seven lines and, like inscription **1**, is inscribed on a polished marble slab. It is written entirely in Greek except for the name of the deceased that is written in Coptic. The inscribed text is clear, consistent, mostly bilinear, and lacks decoration or ornamentation; lines range between 9–13 characters with an average line height of 2.3 cm. There is only one instance of a phonetic shift in the inscription (ν > μ) and the inscriber marks abbreviations with a supralinear letter and oblique stroke and employs a *nomen sacrum*. Below the inscription centered in the middle of the stela is the inscribed image a large anchor. It takes a distinct ω-shape culminating with outward-facing curls on the fluke and has a cross bar at the top of the shank with forks that give it a distinct tau-shape reminiscent of the cross. <sup>(13)</sup>

The text is flanked by a forked cross and begins with the well attested “sleep formula” (ἐκοιμήθη) followed by the name of the deceased, written in Coptic, and then the date of death by reference to the day of the month and indiction year. The inscription concludes with the “rest formula” (ἀναπαύομαι) followed by amen. Overall, the epitaph is rather formulaic.

(13) The closest parallel we have found to the iconography of the anchor that appears in this inscription is in the sixth-century Syriac Rabbula Gospel folio 1r, where two anchors sit atop a depiction of Jesus with the twelve apostles. For a discussion of these anchors see E. ROBERTS, “Anchor,” *The Eerdmans Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2017), vol. 1 p. 59. For online image see:

<<http://teca.bmlonline.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=TECA0000025956&keywords=Plut.01.56#page/1/mode/1up>>.

Trying to determine the origin of this piece is difficult; as noted in the above discussion for inscription 1, the magazine has no acquisition record for these pieces. The “sleep formula” at the beginning of the text and the “rest formula” are ubiquitous in Greek epitaphs from Egypt so that their presence sheds no significant light on provenance. <sup>(14)</sup> The attestation of the name, ΖΗΥ, might prove suggestive since it is rare with only seven other attestations in documentary sources. <sup>(15)</sup> Of these attestations two are in unprovenanced texts while the remaining five come from Saqqara, the Arsinoite, Antinoopolis, and Hermopolis in two different texts. This evidence is by no means conclusive, but if this text were in some way related to the previous inscription, the region of Hermopolis and Antinoopolis could be a distinct possibility. But as it is, there are no compelling reasons—outside of the fact that both inscriptions are in the Fustât magazine—that these pieces are necessarily connected and there is nothing intrinsic to this inscription that ties it in any compelling way to a certain locale.

In terms of date, there is nothing in the epitaph that lends itself to a specific period and the graphic features presented in the text are attested over a wide period of time: e.g. the broken bar alpha is widely attested from the fourth century onward. On internal grounds, the text opens with the “sleep formula” (ἐκοιμήθη) that is most often employed in epitaphs inscribed between the fifth and eighth centuries. <sup>(16)</sup> Additionally, it concludes with the “rest formula” (ἀναπαύειν) and uses a verb that does not appear regularly in Christian funerary stelae before the fifth century, which suggests that the inscription is likely not any earlier than this time. <sup>(17)</sup> Therefore, all things considered, a date for this text falling somewhere between the sixth and eighth centuries seems probable.

Inv. 111/DH

37 × 27 cm (FIG. 2)

Unknown Provenance

VI–VIII

‡ ἐκοιμήθη ἡ  
μακαρία κύρα  
ΖΗΥ ἐμ μηνὶ  
Φαῶφι ἡ ἰνδ(ικτίον)ο(ς)  
5 τεσσαρεσκαίδε-  
κάτης, ὁ Θε(εὸ)ς ἀνά-  
παυσον. ἀμήν.

3 l. ἐν. 4 ιν<sup>ο</sup>δ, inscr. 6 θς inscr.

“The blessed lady Eus fell asleep in the month of Phaophi on the 8<sup>th</sup> in the fourteenth indication. O God, give (her) rest. Amen.”

(14) TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 152 and 161 notes that these formulae appeared in Christian epitaphs from all over Egypt.

(15) For attestations and additional discussion of this rare name see n. 1–3 in *Notes* section below.

(16) TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 263–267 who lists examples of the “sleep formula” in funerary stelae. Based on her table it appears that there is a cluster of the use of this formula in funerary inscriptions dated to the sixth century; however, it is first attested in the fourth century (a single instance) and last attested in the eighth century.

(17) TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], p. 152: “Prayers to God to give rest to the soul of deceased people occurred in Greek epitaphs between the fifth and the close of the ninth centuries and covered a large territory, from Alexandria to Latopolis. Between the fifth and seventh centuries, they were concentrated in the Greek cultural area of the Faiyum Oasis and Antinoupolis.” See also K. KORHONEN, “Between Meaningful Sentences and Formulaic Expressions: Fronted Verbs in Christian Epitaphs,” *Glotta* 87 (2011), pp. 95–125, at p. 110.

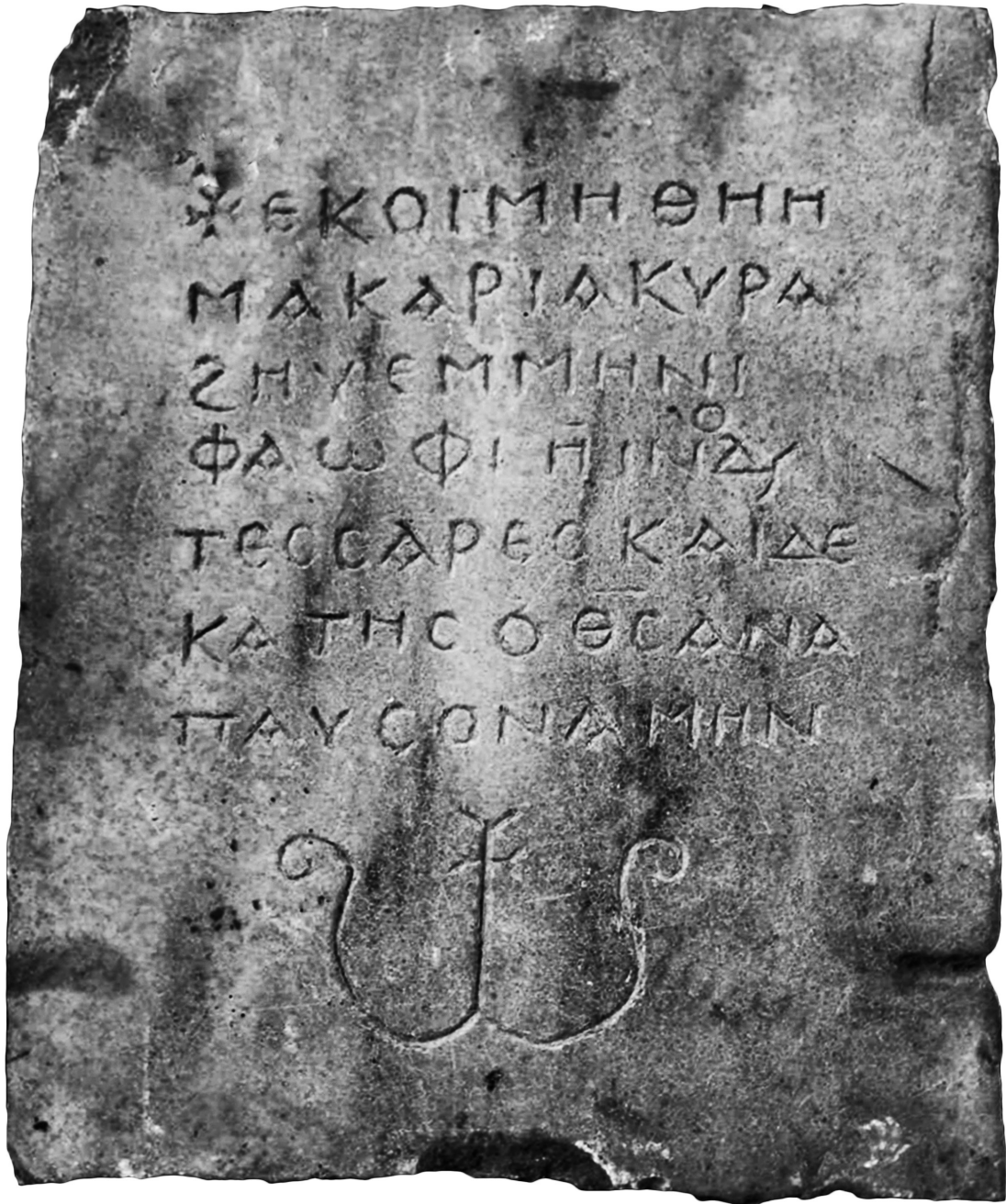


FIG. 2 — Inv. 111/DH (© Amer El Mesiry)

- 1** **ἐκοιμήθη** As a euphemism for death *κοιμάω* is employed periodically in the New Testament: 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. On the different uses and meanings of *κοιμάω* 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), pp. 115–124; and for its use in Christian epitaphs from Egypt see TUDOR, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 161–162.
- 1–3** **ἡ | μακαρία κύρα | ζηγ** On the epithet *μακαρία*, see n. 3–4 in inscription **1**. The spelling *κύρα* is a shortened form of *κυρία* that became common in the fifth century and later; see *LSJ<sup>9</sup>*, s.v. *κύριος*. For a discussion of the omission of the accented *ι* before a terminal vowel, see F. T. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Volume I, Phonology* (Milan, 1976), pp. 302–303.  
The name is clearly Coptic given the use of the *ζ*, although the following *η* and *γ* are no different from the *η* and *υ* that appear elsewhere in the text. The name *ζηγ* is an Egyptian unisex name that means “usefulness” or “profit”; on this name see TM Nam 6889. It is attested a handful of times: SB Kopt. 2.1155.4–5 (Saqqara; date?): *αμα ζηγ*; SB Kopt. 2.835.4 (provenance unknown; A.D. VIII [?]): *αμα ζηγ*; SB Kopt. 2.844.13 (Antinoopolis [?]; A.D. VII [?]): *ζεγ*; SB Kopt. 3.1435.64, 74, 83 (provenance unknown; 14 Dec. A.D. 837): *ζηγ*; O.Bawit 80.3 (Hermopolis; A.D. VI–VIII): *ζεογ*; P.Moscow Copt. 23.2 (Arsinoite; A.D. VIII): *ηογ*; B. L. Ms. Or. 6202.19 (=L. S. B. MACCOULL, “The Bawit Contracts: Texts and Translations,” *BASP* 31 [1994], pp. 141–158 at pp. 153–156 [Hermopolis; A.D. 850/51]): *απα ζηγ*. See also the text edited by M. Thérond in this volume, at p. 324.
- 3** **ἐμ μηνι** On the *ν > μ* see GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri*, p. 166 where he notes that a final *ν* is sometimes assimilated to a *μ* before another *μ* as is the case here.
- 6–7** **ὁ Θ(ε)ς ἀνάπαυσον** This formula (*vel sim.*) is well attested in Greek epitaphs from Egypt between the fifth and ninth centuries. On this formula see A. ŁAJTAR, “Bemerkungen zu drei kürzlich veröffentlichten griechischen Inschriften aus der Spätantike,” *ZPE* 114 (1996), pp. 141–146, at p. 144 and Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae* [n. 7], pp. 152–154.

*Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (Cairo)*

Amer EL MESIRY

*Brigham Young University*

Lincoln BLUMELL