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

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Alexandros Tsakos

The toponym Pourgoundi 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).

“I, Philo(n), the deacon, son (of) Marianta, having (the church at) Pourgoundi, written (this on the) feast (of) Raphael (during the) epagomenal (month).”

The name of the dedicator and scribe has been interpreted by Łajtar and Van der Vliet as Philo(theos). 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 θ in superscription. An alternative interpretation could be to read the two words (Φιλὸ and Διακονὸς) 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 ⲫⲓⲗⲟ as a variant of the Greek name ⲫⲓⲗⲟⲛ, since both the shift between Ⲝ and ⲣ, and the deletion of the final ⲛ are well-attested phenomena.

For other attestations of the female name Marianta, see I.QI 35 and 57. As regards the participle [ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲓⲉⲓⲟⲃ], 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 epagomenal days is accepted, but with changes in the translation, since the use of the masculine participle in the present inscription accompanied 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 ⲩⲟⲣⲅⲟⲩⲓⲓ 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 ⲥⲧⲉ “having,” it can be conjectured that ⲩⲟⲧⲣⲅⲟⲩⲓⲓ 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 published by Giovanni Ruffini confirm that indeed we are dealing with a church: dbmnt 1729.17 ⲩⲟⲧⲣⲅⲟⲩⲓⲓⲁ “Pourgoundi-pred”; dbmnt 1730.23 ⲩⲟⲧⲓⲣⲅⲟⲩⲓⲓⲁ “Pourgoundi-pred.” Both inventories mention three churches: Peter, John, and Mary, although it remains unclear which of these three is the church of Pourgoundi referred to in Tamit graffito.

ⲩⲣⲅⲟⲩⲓⲓ follows a morphological pattern that is found frequently Nubian toponyms: X-genitive -ⲓⲓ-Y “The Y of X.” Well-
known are, for example, the islands (ⲧⲧⲣⲉⲧⲉ) Kulubnarti, Meinarti “island of Michael,” and Banganarti “island of the locust.” There are two other attested toponyms in -ⲧⲧⲓ: dbmnt 1397.6 ḏⲟⲣⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩ “Mohondi-gen,” where Gerald Browne suggests there was a church and dbmnt 1044.8-9 τⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩ “Toudi-gen,” where there was a Michael Church, cf. DBMNT 1729.6-7 τⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩ Ⲣⲧⲑⲣⲓⲣⲓⲛ “Michael (Church) of Toudi.” There are several spelling variants of this name: DBMNT 1044.8 ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲩ “Tonde-pred”; and perhaps DBMNT 1730.7 ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ “Tonda-gen.”

Old Nubian ⲧⲓ/ⲧⲓ appears to be related to a noun featuring the same ⲧⲓ/ⲧⲓ alternation that appears as ⲧⲓ/ⲧⲓ in a land sale from Qaṣr Ibrīm (DBMNT 584), which Browne suggests could be “some kind of crop.” Considering the semantic field in which it appears this seems however unlikely. The first occurrence is DBMNT 584.i.16-17 <ⲧⲧⲣⲉⲧⲉ-ⲧⲧⲓ ⲃⲧⲣⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲩ “three plots for the di of the east,” which follows the pattern of dbmnt 584.18 ḏⲟⲣⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩⲣⲉⲣⲉ ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲩ “a waterwheel plot for the irrigation of the south.” The second is DBMNT 584.i.28-29 ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩ ⲩⲩⲣⲉⲣⲉ ⲧⲧⲩⲧⲩⲧⲩⲧⲓ ⲧⲧⲓ ⲧⲩⲟⲩⲩⲩ “two plots for the (of) the tašši tree plot.”

The only extant cognate of Old Nubian ⲧⲓⲧⲓ is Midob -ⲛⲏ/-ⲛⲓ, a “morpheme to express tribal subsection,” e.g., ⲧⲧⲛⲧⲛⲧⲛⲧⲛⲧⲟⲧⲛ “Elke-section; Kàagèdè “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 ⲧⲟⲩⲣⲓⲣⲟⲩ 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, 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. One of the lines sung by the dancers is dbmnt 1364.d.2-4 ⲧⲧⲓⲧⲧⲓ ⲧⲟⲩⲣⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲩⲩⲩ “You are the Queen Sister for the Pour.”
It is our suggestion that Old Nubian ρⲟⲩⲣ is related to the Meroitic pqr /bak ara/ or /bak ara/ “prince,” which can be analyzed as /bak/ “power, authority” (cf. Old Nubian ρⲧⲧⲟⲩy “power, authority”23) + masculine suffix /ara/.24 Meroitic q /k/ was probably already pronounced /w/ in Northern Meroitic,25 and appears to be a cognate of Nubian /w/, cf. Mer. qore “sovereign”26~ Old Nubian ρⲟⲩⲧ “king.”

Although it is as yet not fully determinable whether ρⲟⲩⲣ is also a cognate, like ρⲧⲧⲟⲩy, 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 ρⲧⲧⲟⲩy, does not appear to follow the currently known sound correspondences between Meroitic and Old Nubian.27

ρⲟⲩⲣ is probably also attested in an unpublished inscription from Banganarti, 424 + ⲁ<ⲅ>ⲫ ⲁⲟⲩⲣⲏⲣ “I, the Prince,”24 with determiner -ⲣⲫ /-ir/ < -ⲧⲧ /-il/, and has perhaps also and element of the place name ρⲟⲣⲓⲡⲡⲁ, attested in two Coptic texts: DBMNT 630.13–14 ϕⲧⲧⲣⲟⲧⲧⲁⲩ and DBMNT 631.11 ϕⲧⲧⲣⲟⲧⲧⲁⲩ.28 The first part ρⲟ-</p>
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