

Three Coptic Stelae from Middle Egypt

Ahmad Elnassari, Sohag

0. Introduction*

The three stelae, the subject of this article, are currently kept in the museum basement of Ashmunein (El-Minia-Middle Egypt). The first of them takes Serial no. 2841, inventory no. 148 / 9 & the second takes Serial no 1587, inventory no. 230 & and the third carries Serial no 1532, inventory no. 175. The three Stelae are all still unpublished until now. Everywhere the Coptic stelae are divided universally into three types, firstly the top rounded or triangular top stelae, secondly the rectangular stelae, and thirdly the stelae with the shape of the cross. But, whereas the first and the third group are relatively rare, the second is omnipresent.¹ In the present article more examples of the usual rectangular Coptic stelae are discussed.

I. The stela of ΔΠΑ ΗΩΡ and [ΔΠΑ] ϩωϣ̄ϥ̄ϥ̄

I.1. Definition: Plate (1)

I.1.1. The current location:

It is currently located in the Ashmunein museum basement, Serial no. 2841, inventory no. 148 / 9.

I.1.2. Materials and measures:

It is a limestone stela with height: 0.41 m, width: 0.395 m, thickness: 0.045m.

I.1.3. Location:

unknown?

I.1.4.Publication:

unpublished.

I.1.5.Dating:

unknown

I.1.6.Findings of the object:

It is a well-preserved rectangular limestone stela. The writings are only in incised with outlined color. Small red color remains are still at the top so far. No color remains elsewhere are still available. There is a little damage at the upper right edge that damages the second half of the letter μ at the end of the first row. Similarly, there is another great damage at the lower left edge but far from the text.

I.2. The text:

The text consists of 12 lines in incised relief:

I.2.1. Transcription:

1. ἀπαζωρ πζαμ

2. υε † ασητον μ

3. μοϥ η σοϥ χω η†

4. τασε μ παρμοϥ

5. τε † ζη ουειρη

6. ηη ητε πνοϥτε

7. ζαμηνη † μ^{ΠΟΛΛΩ}

8. ΜΩΥΣΗΣ ΠΑΤΕ

9. ΨΗΗ ΔΕΜΤΟΝ Μ

10. ΜΟΥ Ν ΣΟΥ ΧΟΥΤ

11. ΨΙΣ Ν ΕΜΨΙΡ ΖΗ ΟΥ

12. ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΖΑΜΗΝ

I.2.2. Translation:

(1) Apa Hor,² the car(2)penter, he died in (3) day Twenty-six (4) of Parmo(5)te in peace (6) of God, (7) Amin. A[pollw](8) Moses³ the gar(9)dener, he died (10) in day Twenty-(11)nine of Amshir in (12) peace Amin.

I.2.3. Comment:

I.2.3.1. general:

The stela does not begin as always with the sign of the cross, but the writer of the text has marked the end of sentences with it instead of the known full stop. The handwriting is clear; letters are equal and regular, but sometimes there is a ligature between two consecutive letters such as that in line eleven, between Ζ and η in the preposition Ζη. In the second half of line seven, the situation from Δ is not clear, at least five letters are visible. The first two letters do seem to be Δ and π, but after that the next letter seems to be ο. After that it seems to be very problematic; I could hardly see Ζ, ψ or ω, and then another similar letter, and still more traces after that.

Perhaps APOLLW? ΔΠΟΛΛΩ.

I.2.3.2. Dialect:

The text is written in a good clear Sahidic dialect, but without the over-lined strokes.

I.3. Criteria for location and dating:

I.3.1. Criteria for location:

I.3.1.1. In addition to these remains of the red color, the content of the text, i.e, the stela, is not dedicated for one person but for more than one.

I.3.1.2. The verb, which the writer has used for death i.e. $\overline{\text{ⲙⲧⲟⲛ}} \quad \overline{\text{ⲙⲙⲟ}}$, and the way of writing the date (day + month) without specifying the year are also peculiar to Stelae that come from Middle Egypt.⁴

I.3.1.. The end of the form $\text{Ⲓⲛ} \quad \text{ⲟⲩ} \quad \text{ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ} \quad \text{Ⲓⲁⲙⲏⲏ}$ is peculiar to stelae that come from Middle Egypt, certainly the Locality of Sheikh Ebadah.⁵

From the preceding criteria, it is suggested that the Locality of Sheikh Ebadah in Middle Egypt is its initial location.

I.3.2. Criteria for dating:

I.3.2.1. The preceding criteria of location are also criteria for stelae that go back to the seventh Century AD.

I.3.2.2. The stela, which carries the inventory no. 8599 at the Egyptian Museum and the stela, which carries the inventory no. A. 11751 at the Museum of Alexandria are as of much resemblance to this studied stela. Whenever, the former one has been dated back to the seventh century AD,⁶ the later one has been dated back to the eighth century AD.⁷

I.3.2.3. Although, the writing method of the Greek word ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ is more common in the 8th Century AD till the 10th Century AD, it is also well known in the writings' methods of the sixth and seventh centuries AD.⁸

From the preceding criteria, it is suggested that the end of the seventh century AD and beginning of the eighth century AD is the suitable date of this stela.

II The stela of ΝΟΒΡ

II.1. Definition, plate (2)

II.1.1. The current location:

It is currently located in the Ashmunein museum basement, Serial no. 1587, inventory no. 230.

II.1.2. Materials and measures:

It is a limestone stela with height: 0.35 m, width: 0.335 m, thickness: 0.04 m.

II.1.3. Initial location:

unknown?

II.1.4. Publication:

unpublished.

II.1.5. Dating:

unknown

II.1.6. Findings of the object:

It is a rectangular well-preserved limestone stela, its writings are incised with outline colors. The right, left and upper corners are irregular. The writer has encircled the entire stela with a red line. There are moderate damages everywhere on the surface of the stela, such as from the beginning of the first line to the beginning of the second line, where the upper half of the letter ε is lost. At the beginning of the fourth and fifth lines, the letters ε in (ⲙε) and ο in (ⲓⲗⲟⲃⲣ) are hardly damaged, and at the beginning of the seventh line ϣ is completely lost.

II.2. The text:

The text consists of 9 lines in incised handwriting, with red outlines color.

II.2.1. Transcription:

(1) πιωτ πωηρε ππνα

(2) ετουααβ απα αγεινη πα

(3) πουλη νετουααβ τηρο

(4) υ με πρπετθανανου ε

(5) νοβρ ηταβ κα σωμα

(6) εβρα η χοιακ ιζ δε

(7) υτεραε ηηδικ

(8) αποδιοκλητι

(9) ανου σο ετη

Α † ω

II.2.2. Translation:

(1) O Father, Son and the Holy(2) Spirit, O Appa Agenh, [A]ppa (3) Paul, O all the saints (4) may you give mercy⁹ for (5) Nofer,¹⁰ who layed the body (6) down (i.e. died) on 17th of Koihak, (7) in the second indiction, (8 &9) in the year 270 from Diocletian.¹¹

II.2.3. Comment:

II.2.3.1. general:

The cross is drawn twice, one in the middle (before the beginning of the fifth line) and the second below the text (between \aleph as a symbol for beginning and ω as a symbol for the end). It looks like two different manuscripts, one from the beginning until the end of the sixth line and the other is from the seventh line until the end of the text. The letters are massive and irregular. The Grecian influence can be simply noted in the letter α and λ . Also the letter γ is written like the Greek letter η .

II.2.3.2. Dialect

The text is written in Sahidic dialect with influences of the dialect of Middle Egypt, such as the relative pronoun in the perfect I: $\pi\tau\alpha\beta$ ¹² instead of $\pi\tau\alpha\gamma$.¹³

II.3. Criteria of location and dating:

II.3.1. Criteria of Location:

II.3.1.1. The roughly-made surface of the stela of limestone is a material for the stelae that come from Sheikh Ebadah in Middle Egypt.

II.3.1.2. The use of the initial form: $\pi\iota\omega\tau$ $\pi\omega\eta\rho\epsilon$ $\pi\pi\eta\alpha$ is a regular form for the stelae that come from Sheikh-Ebadah.¹⁴

II.3.2. Criteria of dating:

II.3.2.1. The use of the era of Diocletian in dating begins already in the sixth century AD, at least in some parts of Egypt.

II.3.2.2. The use of the swastika' sign, the writer used in the middle of the stela, came to end at the end of the seventh century AD.¹⁵

II.3.2.3. The list in Bagnall and Worp (cited in n. 10) shows that grave stelae as early as this period are known, although these are Greek. This would be the earliest dated Coptic grave stele to use the era.

From the preceding criteria, the stela may date back to the era from second half of the sixth century to early begin of the seventh century AD.¹⁶

III The stela of ΠΙΔΡΟΝ¹⁷

III.1. Definition, plate (3)

III.1.1. The current location:

It is currently in the Ashmunein museum basement, Serial no. 1532, inventory no. 175.

III.1.2. Materials and measures:

A marble stela with height: 0.751 m, width: 0.465 m, thickness: 0.04 m.

III.1.3. Initial location:

unknown?

III.1.4. Publication:

unpublished.

III.1.5. Dating:

unknown

III.1.6. Findings of the object:

A rectangular badly damaged marble stela, the writings are in hollow incised with outline colors. It seems that this stela has been subject to a great decay. This is clear in the broken parts in the lower part of the second half of the right side and this decay extends to the lower side, then the lower part of the left side. As a result, the outside frame of the stela seems uneven and the cross, which is in the lower part of the left side, has been partly lost.

It also seems that this stela was broken into two parts and it has been repaired since the decay extends to the width of the stela beginning from the center point of the left side until the lower part of the right side. However, the decay in the stela did not

prevent reading it. But it seems that the restoration of the stela has a great impact on making its reading easy.

III.2. The text:

The text consists of 9 lines in incised handwriting, with red outlines color.

III.2.1. Transcription:

✠

✠

(1) Ϝ πιωτ πωηρε πε

(2) πνα ετουααβ ∕ πεη

(3) ειωτ μιχαηλ ∕ τειη

(4) μααυ μαρια ∕ απα

(5) πωοι παυ[λ]ε ∕

(6) απα σουροϋε απα

(7) πετρε απα [Ϸ]ιδι

(8) ας [πι]α[ρ]οη ας μ

(9) τον μ[μοϷ] η σοϷ ∕ ιθ ∕

(10) μ παωοηε Ϸη οϷη

(11) Ϸηηη Ϸαμηη Ϝ

✠

✠ $\overline{\kappa\gamma}$ $\overline{\chi\varsigma}$ $\overline{\theta\gamma}$

III.2.2. Translation:

(1) O Father, Son and the Holy(2) Spirit, our (3) father Michael, our (4) mother Maria, Apa (5) Pshoi, Paul, (6) Apa Soruis, Ape, (7) Peter, Apa Eli(8)as, Piaron,¹⁸ he di(9)ed in day 19th (10) of Pashons in p(11)ease Amin.

III.2.3. Comment

III.2.3.1. general

The writer surrounded the four corners of the stela with the cross as a decorative religious element; he began and ended the text with it too. The handwriting is clear and the letters are in equal size and well organized. In the fifth line, the letter λ is written reversely in the name $\pi\alpha\gamma\lambda\epsilon$, likewise is the deformed name $[\rho]\lambda\iota\alpha\varsigma$ in line seven and eight. The same letter, however, appears in its natural form in the name $\mu\chi\alpha\eta\lambda$ in the third line. The letter ϵ in the seventh line is written closely to its Greek counterpart. As a dictation characteristic of the text, the writer used the inverted commas (") after each phrase, which appear only in the upper half of the text i.e. the lines which had not been covered with the restoration dry coated film. The Coptic word for father is written in its Bohairic form in the first line, then written in its Sahidic one in the third line. The abbreviated style is used at the beginning and the end of the text in the following Greek words: $\pi\epsilon\pi\eta\alpha$, $\overline{\theta\gamma}$, $\overline{\chi\varsigma}$, $\overline{\kappa\gamma}$.

III.2.3.2. Dialect

The text is written in Sahidic dialect with influences of the Bohairic dialect, such as the word $\iota\omega\tau$ instead of $\epsilon\iota\omega\tau$.

III.3. Criteria of location and dating:

III.3.1. Criteria of Location:

III.3.1.1. According Crum, the text begins with the first kind of the begging forms, which follows the atoning intercession (the Trinity form), these forms were famous in Saqqara and Middle Egypt.¹⁹

III.3.1.2. The text is begging local priests of sheikh-Ebadah, such as Apa Bishoy and Apa Paul, who lived in Sheikh-Ebadah.²⁰

III.3.1.3. The use of the initial form: $\pi\iota\omega\tau$ $\pi\omega\mu\rho\epsilon$ $\pi\pi\eta\lambda$ is a regular form for the stelae that come from Sheikh-Ebadah.²¹

III.3.2. Criteria of dating:

III.3.2.1. The use of Ⲛ $\rho\eta$ -sign as a cross, which began since the second century AD and continued until the middle of the sixth.²²

III.3.2.2. The catholic papal cross had been used on the Coptic stelae until the reign of the Emperor Heraclius (i.e. until the seventh century AD).²³

III.3.2.3. The use of the initial form: $\pi\iota\omega\tau$ $\pi\omega\mu\rho\epsilon$ $\pi\pi\eta\lambda$ as an initial form on this published stela and on a stela that comes from sheikh-Ebadah and dates back to the first half of the seventh century (620 AD)²⁴ suggests that this stela may date back to the era between the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh AD.

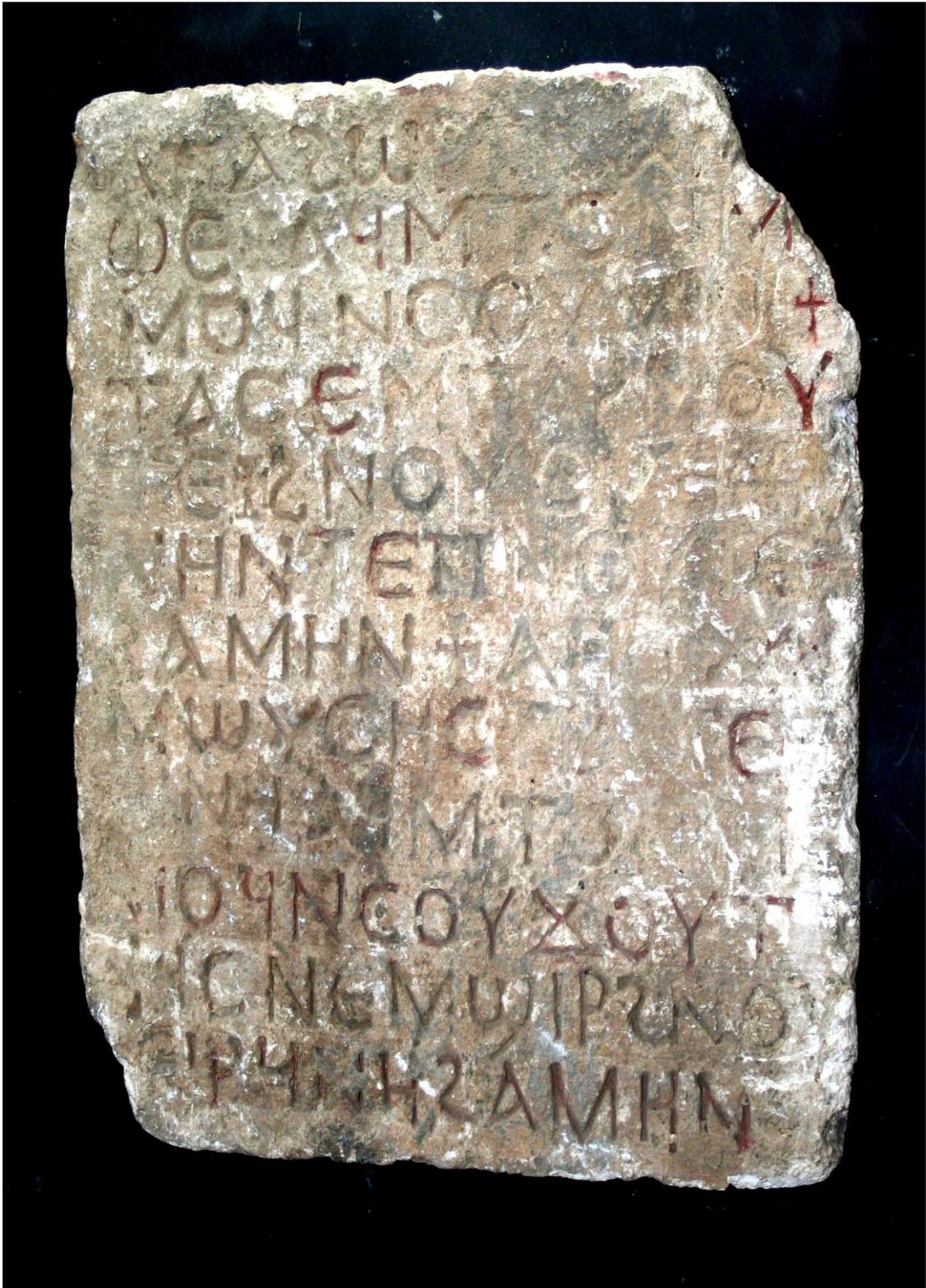


Plate (1)

Ashmunein Museum's basement: serial no. 2841, Inventory no. 148/ 9

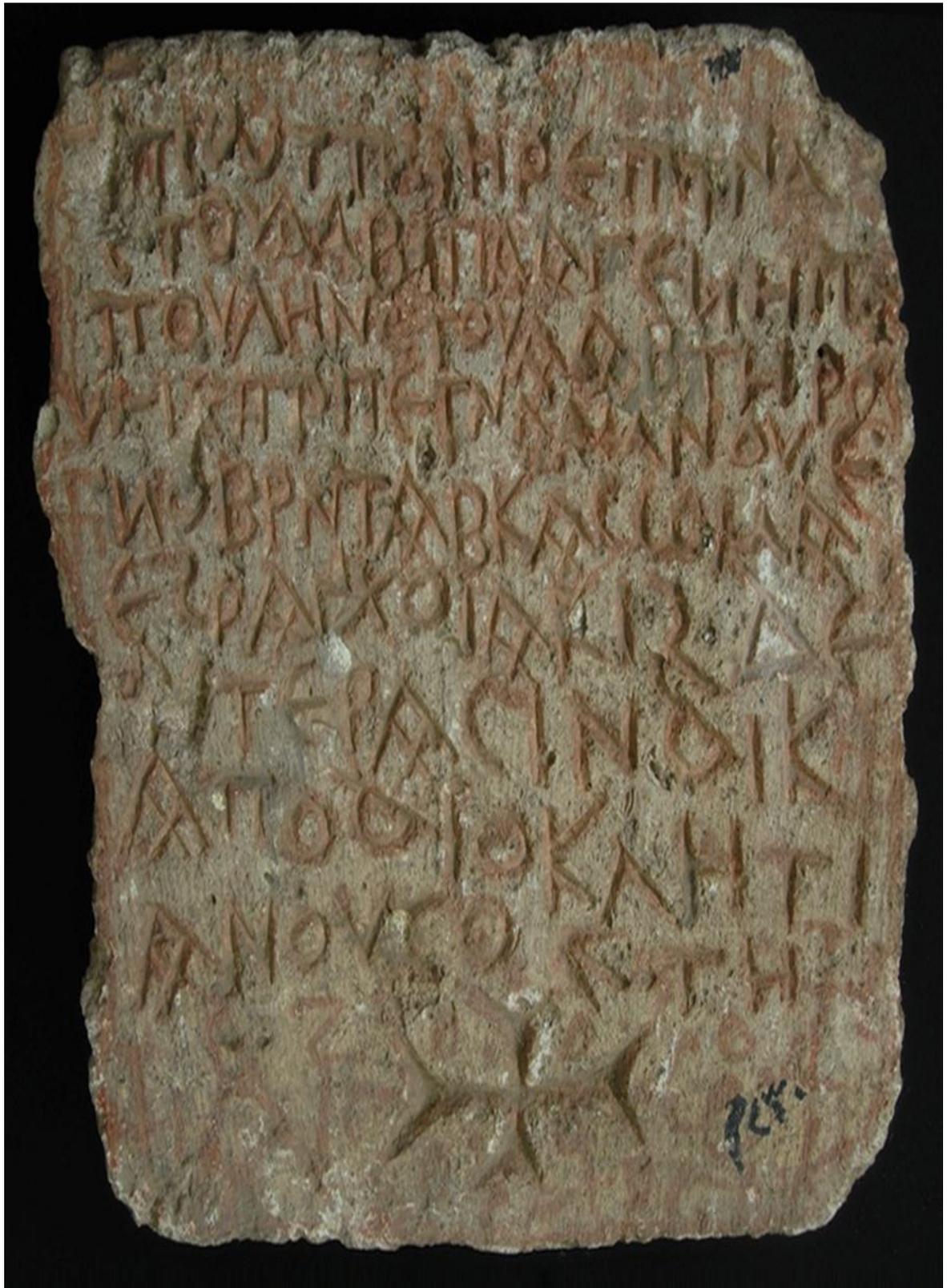


Plate (2)

Ashmunein Museum's basement: Serial no. 1587, Inventory no. 230

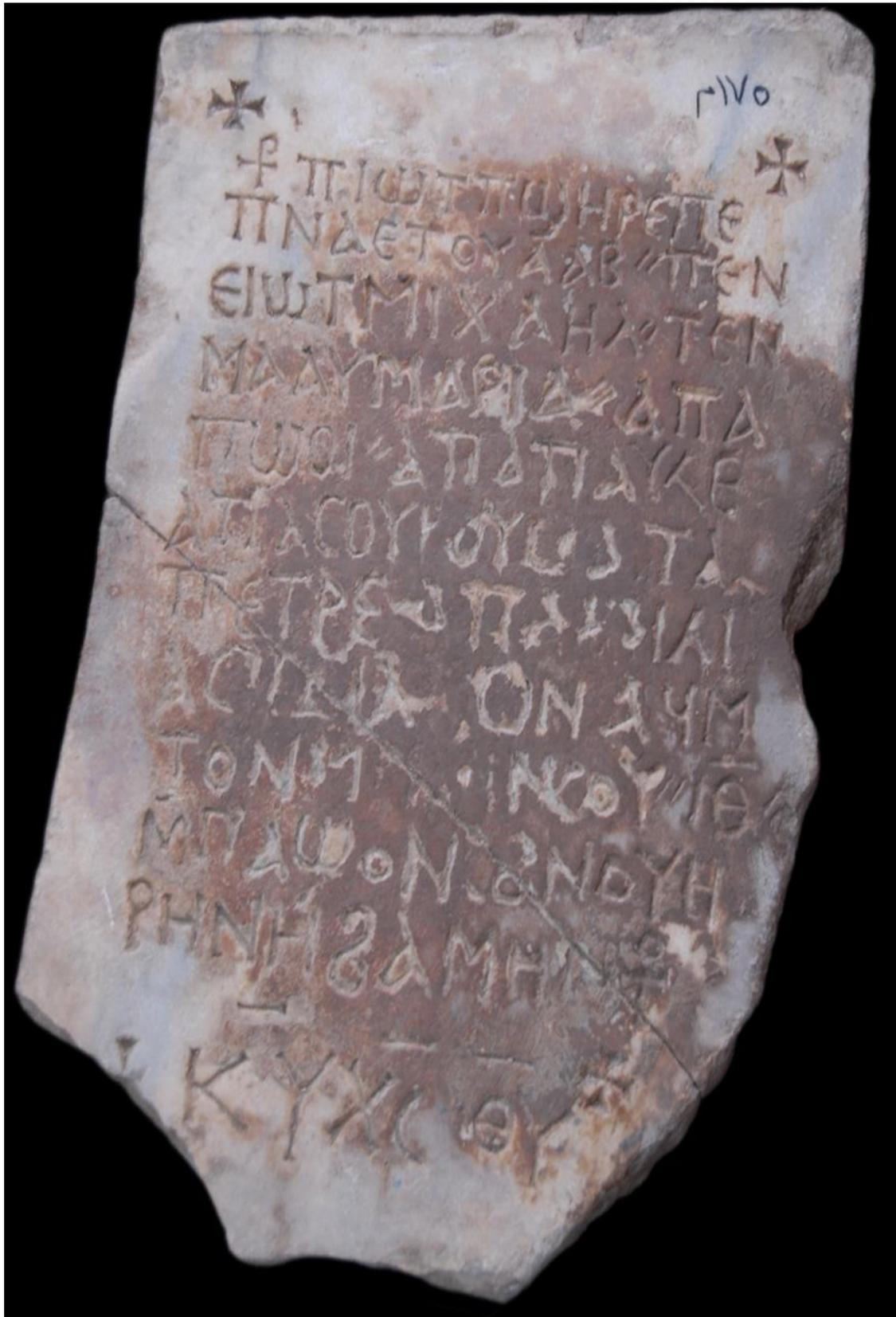


Plate (3)
Ashmunein Museum's basement: Serial no. 1532, Inventory no. 175

Notes

* Great many thanks are due to Dr. Zahi Hawas, the head of the Supreme Counsel of Antiquities in Egypt, for permission to publish these three Stelae. I'd like to thank Mr. Moustafa Abdulaziz (Inspector), who first suggested that I publish on Coptic stelae. My thanks also are due primarily to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schenkel of Tübingen University Germany, who has corrected my manuscript from the beginning.

1. Pelsmaekers, J., Stela, in: *Copt. Ency.* VII, S. 2150; Smith, S., *Coptic and Greek Gravestones*, in: *The British Museum Quarterly* 6, II, 1931, S. 33.
2. About ⲉⲟⲣ as a name of a Person, s. CPR XII 23, 16, 24, 12, 32, 11. 27. 35; KSB I 415, 5; KSB II 825, 24; KSB II 1112, 2; KSB III 1311, 6; — Heuser 6, 8, 19, 42, 44, 45, 57, 60; TO 114B; CPR IV 212A; BKU III 221B; BM 558A; Ryl. 251B; BKU I 3C; CM 158B; CTM 358B; WS 223B; ST 127; P.Mon.Apollo 174; P. Kell. V 321; Hall 153; CDB 149; Sa III 77C; Sa IV 124; SaW 262;
3. About ⲙⲟⲩⲥⲏⲥ as a name of a Person, s. MPER XVIII 102, 1, 131, 8, 151, 1. 8.12, 164, 1, 175, 7, 195, d; KSB I 422, 9; KSBI 745, 5; KSB II 855, 1; KSB II 866, 17; KSB II 903, 5; KSB II 906, 27–28; KSB II 952, 36. 73; KSB II 953, 36. 69; KSB II 954,107; KSB III 1382, [1]. 11; KSB III 1527,12; KSB III 1534, 14; KSB III 1536, 9; —Heuser 109; Sa III 76C; TO 112B; CPR IV 208B; KRU 446B; BM 548A; BKU I 2 (gr.); Ryl. 248C; M 84C; CO 105B; K 821C + 822A; L IV 562A; CM 157A; N 152B; COMH 46A; ST 123; O.Ashm.Copt. 269; Hall 155; Sa IV 124; Ep. 352; SaW 255; Tor 213; CTM 358A; WS 222B; KTM 195A; Kellia II 167; Ba 101; BdE copt. 16 (2004) S. 108
4. Cf. the Coptic Stela N° 8321 at the Egyptian Museum, which comes out from Dier-Abu-Hannes, nearby Sheikh-Ebadah and dated back to the Eighth Century, year 756 AD, see: Cramer, M., *Die Totenklage bei den Kopten, mit Hinweisen auf Totenklage im Orient überhaupt*, Leipzig 1942, Nr. 2, Abb. 1
5. Habib, R., *Stéle funéraire Copte en dialecte Saïdique*, in: *BIFAO* 55, 1955, S. 57- 60.
6. Crum, W., *Coptic monuments*, (*Catalogue Général Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*), p. 126- 127, Pl. XXXV.
7. Brunsch, W., *Koptische und Grieschiche Inschriften aus Alexandria*, in: *WZKM* 84, 1994, p. 18.

8. Förster, H., Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den Koptischen Dokumentarischen Texten, Berlin, 2002, pp. 231-232.
9. **ⲙⲉ ⲡⲣⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩ ⲉ** is a prayer formula, which consists of: **ⲙⲉ** is an imperative construct form of **ⲧ** (not mentioned in Crum, Coptic Dictionary, but in: Kasser, R., Compléments au dictionnaire copte de Crum, Publications de l'institut français d'archéologie Orientale , Vol. VII, Cairo, 1964, p. 155b); **ⲡ** is the weak form of the sahidic definite article; **ⲣ** is the short/ construct form of **ⲉⲣⲣⲉ**; **ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁ** is a compound of relative and demonstrative pronouns, which forms with the following qualitative form of a verb (here **ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩ**) an active participle used as a noun; and then comes the preposition **ⲉ**, the translation is to be read: (May you) give the goodness to ...
10. About **ⲛⲟⲃⲡ** as a name of a Person s. **ⲛⲟⲃⲉⲣ** — Sa IV 124; **ⲛⲟⲃⲣⲉ** — Heuser 56.
11. Bagnall, R., & Worp, K., Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt, 2nd edition, Boston 2004, p. 7- 8; Ib, Chronological reckoning in Byzantine Egypt, in: Greek, Roman and Byzantine studies 20, 3, (1979), p. 283; Bicherman, E., Chronology of the ancient World, London 1969, p. 78- 79; Ghali, I., Le Calendrier Copte et L' Éra des Martyres, in: *BIFAO* 66, 1968, p. 113- 120; Friend, W., Diocletian, in: Copt. Ency. III, p. 904- 908; Basilios, Martyrdom, in: Copt. Ency. V, p. 1548- 1549; Chaine, M., La Chronologie des temps Chrétiens de l' Égypte et l' Ethiopie, Paris, p. 14- 15.
12. Chaine, M., Les Dialectes Coptes Assioutiques a les Caractéristiques der leur phonétique, de leur Morphologie, de leur Syntaxe, Paris, V, p. 14- 15; Kasser, R., Lycopolitan (or Lyco-Dispolitian or Subakhmimic), in: Copt. Ency. 8, p. 151- 154; Kasser, R., Les dialects Coptes, in: *BIFAO* 73, 1973, p. 85; TILL, W.C., *Koptische Dialektgrammatik*. 2nd ed.; Muenchen, 1961, passim.
13. Cf. the coptic Stela E 12982 at Louvre Museum, which comes out from Sheikh-Ebadah and dated back to the Seventh Century, year 610- 611 AD, Thereof see: Coquin, R. G. & Rutschowskaya, M. H., Le stéle Coptes du Département des antiquités égyptienne du Louvre, in: *BIFAO* 94, (1994), p. 115, fig. 4.

14. Cf. the 3rd studied Stela that comes out from Sheikh-Ebadah and begins with: $\pi\iota\omega\tau$
 $\pi\upsilon\eta\rho\epsilon$ $\pi\epsilon\pi\eta\lambda$ $\epsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\lambda\lambda\beta$, thereof see: Habib, R., Stéle funéraire Copte en dialecte
 Saïdique, in: *BIFAO* 55, 1955, S. 57- 60; and: Lefebvre, Égypte Chrétienne, in: *ASAE* 15, p.
 118, No. 5, Line 1- 2.
15. Ezzat, Q., The Egyptian Antiquities till the Greaco-Roman Periods, (an in Arabic written
 book), Alexandria 2004, p. 109.
16. Chaine, M., Les Dialectes Coptes Assioutiques a les Caractéristiques der leur phonétique, de
 leur Morphologie, de leur Syntaxe, Paris, V, p. 14- 15; Lefebvre, Égypte Chrétienne, V, p.
 119- 124.
17. The owner of this stela was unknown and I have suggested that the lacuna is well suitable for
 the suggested name, since there are some remarkable letters thereof. The word can also be
 read as $[\pi]\lambda[\sigma]\omicron\eta$ my brother, but I prefer the first suggestion $[\pi\iota]\lambda[\rho]\omicron\eta$, because it is
 waited here to cite the name of the dead person.
18. About $\pi\iota\lambda\rho\omicron\eta$ as a name of a person, s. COMH 47a.
19. Quibell, J. e., Excavations at Saqqara, The Monastery of Ape Jermias, *IFAO*, Cairo 1912, p.
 48 & Crum, W. E., Bell, H. I., Wadi Saga Coptic an Greek texts, Haunia 1922, p. 58.
20. The tow inverted commas (∕) as a Punctuation-mark at the end of each phrase is used before
 on a published Coptic stela, comes from Sheikh-Ebadah, see: Habib, R., Stéle funéraire Copte
 en dialecte Saïdique, in: *BIFAO* 55, 1955, p. 58; Lefebvre, Égypte Chrétienne, V, pp. 119-
 124.
21. Habib, R., Stéle funéraire Copte en dialecte Saïdique, in: *BIFAO* 55, 1955, pp. 57- 60;
 Lefebvre, Égypte Chrétienne, V, pp. 119- 124.
22. Ezzat, Q., The Egyptian Antiquities till the Greaco-Roman Periods, (an in Arabic written
 book), Alexandria 2004, p. 109.
23. Ezzat, Q., The Egyptian Antiquities till the Greaco-Roman Periods, (an in Arabic written
 book), Alexandria 2004, p. 109.
24. Lefebvre, Égypte Chrétienne, V, p. 118, no. 5, L. 1- 2.