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Remarks toward a Revised Grammar of Old Nubian

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Remarks toward a Revised Grammar of Old Nubian

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0. Introduction

This paper makes a number of brief proposals on pending issues in Old Nubian linguistics. I will argue that in order to advance Old Nubian studies toward a comprehensive grammatical description of the language,[1] it is necessary to adopt a point of view that moves beyond the classicist perspective that has dictated much of the field of Old Nubian studies so far, and to eschew the traditional categories that apply within philological investigations of Greek, Latin, or Coptic sources. Not only are the terminological conditions of this classicist tradition, such as for example a clear distinction between nominal and verbal functions and strong reliance on established textual traditions, less applicable to the Old Nubian context, their active imposition onto this non-Indo European language obscures its grammatical particularities.[2] However, this does not mean that Old Nubian would require its own idiosyncratic terminology, at a remove from universally recognized grammatical categories such as case, person, or number marking. Any grammatical description of the language will need to balance, on the one hand, an elegant de-

* I would like to thank Giovanni Ruffini and Marcus Jaeger for their valuable comments to different drafts of this text.

1 Previous grammars and grammatical sketches of Old Nubian include, most notably: Zyhlarz, *Grundzüge der nubischen Grammatik im christlichen Frühmittelalter*; Hintze's series "Beobachtungen zur altnubischen Grammatik I–VI"; Browne, *Old Nubian Grammar* (henceforth, *ONG*).

2 Old Nubian is considered to be a member of the Nubian language group, including Nobiin, Kenzi, and Dongolawi (Andaandi), which falls under the Nilo-Saharan phylum. There is some scholarly debate on whether Old Nubian is a direct ancestor to Nobiin (as argued by Bechhaus-Gerst, "'Nile Nubian' Reconsidered"; id., *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*), or whether the differentiation between Nobiin, Kenzi, and Dongolawi (Andaandi) occured in the period following the extinction of Old Nubian (as suggested by Rilly, *Le Méroïtique et sa famille linguistique,* p. 165). For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to make a decision either way, although the fact that Old Nubian dialectology remains thoroughly understudied suggests that much prudency as regards this question of parentage and heritage is needed.

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scription of grammatical features that does justice to the linguistic characteristics that are unique to it as well as those which it shares with its linguistic neighbors, and, on the other hand, universally established descriptive standards.

In order to do so I think it is first of all necessary to incorporate
166 the study of modern Nubian languages into Old Nubian grammatical research, instead of emphasizing supposedly parallel Greek or Coptic texts. Although previous grammatical outlines of Old Nubian have incidentally referred to the extant Nubian languages, the recent book by Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin,* sets promising precedent in the sense that it takes the relation between Old Nubian and Nobiin as point of departure. This approach, however, is not always feasible due to the disappearance of certain morphological features of Old Nubian, such as the determiner -ⲗ,[3] the predicative marker -ⲁ,[4] and several emphatic particles.[5] In these cases a thorough (inter)textual analysis of Old Nubian research remains our only recourse. This type of comparative research necessarily includes the extant Old Nubian materials beyond the well-studied literary texts. Initiatives such as the Medieval Nubia website by Giovanni Ruffini[6] and Grzegorz Ochała's Database of Medieval Nubian Texts[7] are indispensible to gain a definitive overview of these materials.

In what follows I would like to flesh out these remarks into a number of more concrete investigations, namely: 1) the state of the extant text editions and their underlying methodology; 2) terminology in the case system; 3) the organization of verbal suffixes; and 4) the question of documentary texts. As you may gather from the enormous amount of work that still remains to be done in these four areas, I can address them only briefly, and therefore only in an introductory and generalizing manner.

1. Editorial situation

We are familiar with the fact that Gerald Browne edited and published the majority of the extant Old Nubian textual material and that we still take these editions to be authoritative. Moreover, they form the basis for Browne's *Old Nubian Dictionary* and his *Old Nubian Grammar.* Many of Browne's editions are characterized by Greek and/or Coptic retrotranslations that may seem to be only a peculiarity of his own academic background, a certain pleasure somehow to

3 See Van Gerven Oei, "The Old Nubian Memorial for King George," pp. 256ff.
4 See Van Gerven Oei, "The Old Nubian Morpheme -ⲁ in Nominal and Verbal Predicates."
5 See Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin,* pp. 103–4.
6 <http://www.medievalnubia.info/> (Accessed April 25, 2014).
7 <http://www.dbmnt.uw.edu.pl> (Accessed April 25, 2014).

recreate a historical and philological context of which a certain text would have been part. This habit, however, becomes problematic at the moment it diverts our attention from the particulars of the Old Nubian texts and starts to obscure mismatches between the phantasmatic *Vorlage* and the extant Old Nubian text. Let me give one short, telling example, namely a fragment from Rev. 14.13 published as *P. QI* 1.9 and discussed in Browne's article "Old Nubian Philology"[8]:

ⲟⲩⲗⲅⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ | ⲉⲓⲛⲓⲥⲉ ⲗ̅ⲕⲁ ϩⲁⲣⲙⲗⲁ̇ ⲡⲉⲥ̅ⲛ̅ ⲁⲓ̈ⲅ̅ⲗ̅ⲗⲉ· | ⲡⲁⲉ̇ⲥⲟ ⲁ̇ⳟⲉⲛⲇⲉⲅⲟⲩⲉ̇ⲗⲟ ⲇ̅ⲗ̅ⲅⲟⲩⲗ ⲇⲓⲣⲁ|ⲅⲟⲩⲉ̇ⲥ̅ⲛ̅ ⳟⲟⲗⲗⲟⲕⲱ ⲇⲓⲉⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗ ⲉ̇ⲗⲉⲕ|ⲕⲁⲛ ⲁ̇ⲗⲟ ⲡⲉⲥⲥⲛⲁ̇ ⲥⲉⲩⲁⲣⲧⲗ· ⲧⲁⲛ ⲕⲟⲣ|ⲡⲁⲇⳝⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗⲟ ⲡⲁⳝⲁ ⳟⲉⲥⲁⲕⲕⲟⲁⲛ̀ⲛⲟⲁ̇ | ⳟⲉⲥⲉⲣⲁⲛⲛⲟⳝⲟⲩⲛ· ⲧⲉⲛ ⳟⲉⲉⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗ|ⲗⲟⲛ ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲁ ⲉⲣⲅⲓⳝⲟⲛⲁ ϩⲁⲣⲙⲓⲕ̅ⲥⲕⲗ̅· — *P. QI* 1 9.ii.11–18

Καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λεγούσης μοι,"Γράψον, Μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν Κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπάρτι· ναὶ, λέγει τὸ Πνεῦμα, ἵνα ἀναπαύσωνται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν· τὰ δὲ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ᾽ αὐτῶν." — *Textus Receptus*

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. — *King James Bible*

In this article Browne begins with the corresponding Greek *Textus Receptus*[9] of the Old Nubian Revelation fragment as, parenthetically, "a convenient point of departure,"[10] without citing the entirety of the Old Nubian text. Then, without looking at the Old Nubian passage as a whole, Browne begins by analyzing the "translation" of the *Textus Receptus* wording ἵνα ἀναπαύσωνται (meaning "that they may rest") in the Old Nubian text, where it is rendered *ŋesakkoannoa ŋeserannojoun*. I give a tentative glossing of the Old Nubian and the Greek passage in question below:

8 See for a different discussion of the same passage, Van Gerven Oei, "The Disturbing Object of Philology."

9 The *Textus Receptus* is the lineage of Greek texts, first compiled by Dutch humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus and used as a translation basis for many New Testament translations in the West, including the King James Bible and Martin Luther's German Bible. The Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament has in the meantime mainly replaced the *Textus Receptus*, and differs only slightly in its rendering of Rev. 14.13 as used by Browne: Καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λεγούσης· γράψον· μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνῄσκοντες ἀπ᾽ ἄρτι. ναί, λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα, ἵνα ἀναπαήσονται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν, τὰ γὰρ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ᾽ αὐτῶν. <http://www.nestle-aland.com/en/read-na28-online/text/bibeltext/lesen/stelle/76/140001/149999/>

10 Browne, "Old Nubian Philology," p. 292.

1a	ⲧⲁⲛ	ⲕⲟⲣⲡⲁϫϫⲓ-ⲅⲟⲩ-ⲗⲟ		ⲡⲁϫ-ⲁ
	tan	*korpajji-gou-lo*		*paj-a*
	3SG.GEN	labor-PL-LOC		cease-PRED
	ⲉⲉⲥ-ⲁⲕ-ⲕⲟⲁⲛ̀ⲛⲟ-ⲁ̀		ⲉⲉⲥ-ⲉⲣⲁⲛ-ⲛⲟϫⲟⲩⲛ	
	ŋes-ak-koanno-a		*ŋes-eran-nojoun*	
168	rest-TR-COND.3PL-PRED		rest-PR.3PL-LOC.because[11]	

1b	ἵνα	ἀναπαύ-σωνται	ἐκ	τῶν
	that	rest-AOR.CONJ.MED.3PL	from	DET.GEN.PL
	κόπ-ων	αὐτ-ῶν		
	labor-GEN.PL	DET-GEN.PL		

Based on the repeated verbal root *ŋes-* Browne concludes that the scribe must have given two alternatives based on different variations of the Greek *Vorlage* that he was familiar with, a "hitherto-unattested but hardly surprising combination."[12] He decides to ignore other anomalies in the Old Nubian rendering of the passage from Revelation, such as the addition of *dieigoul,* "many," the erroneous spelling of "their" as *tan,* and the addition of *harmikiskil,* "up to heaven," in the last line. Browne then continues his argument that the line *ŋesakkoannoa ŋeserannojoun* would be evidence for an Old Nubian philological practice, but what actually has happened is that elementary features of the Old Nubian text are glossed over under the pretext of discovering authorial intention.

Browne's intention to find evidence for an Old Nubian philological practice and his argument that Old Nubian scribes may have used large volumes of Greek commentary to construct their translations are in fact indicative of Browne's own tendency to rely solely on reconstructed *Vorlages* that retroactively validate emendations and corrections.[13] This practice becomes problematic at the moment these types of concerns impede a correct analysis of the Old Nubian

11 Glossing abbreviations: 1, 2, 3 – 1st, 2nd, 2rd person; ACC – accusative; AOR – aorist; C – complementizer/connective; COND – conditional; CONJ – conjunctive; CONSUET – consuetudinal; DAT – dative; DET – determinate pronoun; DIST – distal; FOC– focus; GEN – genitive; IMP – imperative; INSTR – instrumental; J – juncture vowel; LOC – locative; MED – medio-passive; NEG – negative; OBJ – object; PASS – passive; PR – present; PROX – proximal; PT1 – preterite 1; PT2 – preterite 2; PRED – predicative; PL – plural; PST – past; PTC – participle; QUOT – quotation marker; SG – singular; TR – transitive; VOC – vocative.

12 Browne, "Old Nubian Philology," p. 292.

13 See for example the enormous work undertaken to reconstruct the entire Greek *Vorlage* for the Old Nubian "Bible" in Browne, *Bibliorum Sacrorum Versio Palaeonubiana*. Cf. also the comments in *The Old Nubian Miracle of Saint Menas,* p. i: "I have also printed my attempt at reconstructing the Greek Vorlage which the Nubian translator may be presumed to have followed. I am certain that not all of my retroversion will be accepted, but in making it I have learned much about the text[.]" and in his edition of Griffith's *Old Nubian Lectionary,* p. 10: "After much hesitation I have decided to juxtapose to the Nubian text what could have been its Greek model, but I must urge extreme caution in making deductions from it." However, this caution disappears at the moment the Greek is authoritatively cited in *OND* and *ONG* without any such caveats.

material at hand. Let us attempt a more prudent approach, starting from the Old Nubian text itself, aiming to produce a translation that best reflects the Old Nubian sentence structure.

> ⲟⲩⲗⲅⲣⲓⲕⲟⲛ | ⲉⲓⲛⲓⲥⲉ ⲗ̄ⲕⲁ ϩⲁⲣⲙⲗⲁ̇ ⲡⲉⲥⲛ̄ ⲁⲓ̈ⲅ̄ⲗⲗⲉ· | ⲡⲁⲉ̇ⲥⲟ ⲁ̇ⲅⲉⲛⲇⲉⲅⲟⲩⲉ̇ⲗⲟ ⲇⲗ̄ⲅⲟⲩⲗ ⲇⲓⲣⲁ|ⲅⲟⲩⲉ̇ⲥⲛ̄ ⳟⲟⲗⲗⲟⲕⲱ ⲇⲓⲉⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗ ⲉ̇ⲗⲉⲕ|ⲕⲁⲛ ⲁ̇ⲗⲟ ⲡⲉⲥⲥⲛⲁ̇ ⲥⲉⲩⲁⲣⲧⲗ· ⲧⲁⲛ ⲕⲟⲣ|ⲡⲁϭϭⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗⲟ ⲡⲁϭⲁ ⳟⲉⲥⲁⲕⲕⲟⲁⲛ̀ⲛⲟⲁ̇ | ⳟⲉⲥⲉⲣⲁⲛⲛⲟϭⲟⲩⲛ· ⲧⲉⲛ ⳟⲉⲉⲓⲅⲟⲩⲗ|ⲗⲟⲛ ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲁ ⲉⲣⲅⲓϭⲟⲛⲁ ϩⲁⲣⲙⲓⲕⲥ̄ⲕⲗ̄·

> I took a voice to my ear from heaven that said to me: Write, blessed are the many dead who die in the Lord, they say. Yea, said the Spirit, so that they cease and rest from his (*sic*) labors because they rest, and their works followed (*sic*) them up to heaven.

The beginning of the passage already features an interesting construction that is not very well rendered by "I heard." The Old Nubian construction suggests something like "I took a voice to my ear," with a double accusative object (see section 2 below), with an attributive clause *pesin aigille* to *elka* instead of a participle as in the *Textus Receptus.* In ll. 13–14 we find *dilgoul* [...] *dieigoul,* "the many dead" instead of simply νεκροὶ. This is followed by the verb *elekkan* in ll. 14–15 which is absent in the *Textus Receptus,* supposedly related to l. 12 *ilka*. We then encounter the erroneous pronoun *tan* "his," ostensibly translating αὐτῶν. This may be a common type of error,[14] although we find a similar agreement mismatch in l. 18 where *ergijona* is singular whereas the subject *ten ŋeeigoullon* is plural. Moreover, *ergijona* is preterite I, whereas the Greek clearly has a present tense. To this we may then add Browne's observation about the double occurrence of the verb *ŋes-* and the final addition of *harmikiskil,* "up to heaven."

All in all, considering the doubtful grammatical decisions and many additions this particular scribe has made to the text, I have my reservations about Browne's suggestion that we are dealing here with a philologically motivated and mildly desperate scribe. It is impossible to determine without much speculation why or how these errors (or emendations) were made. We simply know too little about Old Nubian scribal practices or typical errors, especially because in absence of a general grammatical description of the languague that would somehow allow separating correct from erroneous practices (whatever they may turn out to be) such a distinction is impossible to make. Instead we first need to establish a grammatically faithful interpretation of the Old Nubian textual material, before we can venture into categories of correctness and error.

14 Greek cases were often interpreted erroneously by Nubian scribes, cf. the observations of Łajtar in *I. Khartoum Greek,* p.24.

2. The morpheme -ⲕⲁ

A typical question concerning terminology is posed by the Old Nubian case system. As it would take us too far to pose an overview of the entire case marking apparatus, I suggest that we take as a
170 sample one particular morpheme that is generally recognized to be some type of case marker, and does not seem to appear elsewhere with a different function: the morpheme -ⲕⲁ . Zyhlarz describes it as follows: "Zum Ausdruck des Hinweises auf ein Nomen als direktes oder indirektes Objekt dient das Suffix -ⲕⲁ."[15] Browne groups the ⲕⲁ-morpheme under "case inflection" (between inverted commas), signaling however in a footnote that the term "inflection" should be loosely understood, in the sense that Old Nubian is not an inflecting language.[16] He follows Zyhlarz in his terminology, calling the ⲕⲁ-morpheme "directive" (*ONG* §3.6), with a similar usage: as a marker of the direct or indirect object (*ONG*, §3.6.3a) or used in temporal expressions (*ONG*, §3.6.3c).[17] Bechhaus-Gerst refers to the same morpheme with the term "objective,"[18] whereas Smagina uses "Akkusativ."[19]

If we look at grammars of modern Nubian languages,[20] we encounter clearly related morphemes with similar syntactical functions. In his grammar of Nobiin Lepsius speaks about the morpheme *-g(a)* as the "Objektiv,"[21] whereas in Werner's grammar we find the term "Objektkasus," that is, the case marking of the direct or indirect object of a verb.[22] Abdel-Hafiz, in his grammar of Kunuz (Kenzi) speaks of the accusative case allomorphs *-g(i)* and *-k(i)*, indicating "the object or the entity that is acted upon."[23] The accusative in Kunuz is used for both direct and indirect objects.[24] El-Guzuuli and Jakobi employ the same terminology in their work on Dongalowi (Andaandi).[25]

We thus find three different terms referring to the same morpheme, "objective," "directive," and "accusative." No matter their name or whether they are called "inflection," "marker," or "suffix,"

15 Zyhlarz, *Grundzüge der nubischen Grammatik im christlichen Frühmittelalter,* p. 38.
16 *ONG*, p. 32, n. 14.
17 Although generally acknowledged as a secondary function of the accusative in modern Nubian languages, there is no space in the present article consider its precise temporal function.
18 Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin,* p. 35.
19 Smagina, "Einige Probleme der Morphologie des Altnubischen," p. 393.
20 Unfortunately, I was unable to consult Armbruster, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar* and Massenbach, "Wörterbuch des nubischen Kunûzi-Dialektes."
21 Lepsius, *Nubische Grammatik,* p. 35.
22 Werner, *Grammatik des Nobiin,* §3.1.10.2.
23 Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian,* 103.
24 Ibid., 242.
25 See Jakobi & El-Guzuuli, this volume, and El-Guzuuli & Van Gerven Oei, *The Miracle of Saint Mina,* pp. 129ff.

the different variants of this morpheme all behave similarly, both morphologically (e.g. the plural morpheme always precedes case marking) and syntactically (e.g. always marking (in)direct objects). As we know from comparative research, case does not necessarily manifest itself as a "Latin" type inflection in the sense of showing syncretic forms combining case and number into one inflectional morpheme. Case in Old Nubian is always analytical, and clearly separable from number morphology. So how do we decide between these different terminologies in our description of the Old Nubian language?

If we were to align the Old Nubian terminology with the standard linguistic terminology, we first have to figure out the behavior of the Old Nubian case marked by the ⲕⲁ-morpheme under the diagnostic tests developed to determine specific case structures and properties. In standard case theory there is distinction between structural and non-structural case,[26] with non-structural case often divided into lexical and inherent case.[27] The accusative is generally shared under the structural or "core" cases[28]: "The accusative is the case that encodes the direct object of a verb. It will encode both the objects where there is a double-object construction[.]"[29] Considering the fact that Smagina, Abdel-Hafiz, and El-Guzuuli and Jakobi identify the ⲕⲁ-morpheme (and its counterparts in other Nubian languages) with this term it would make sense to submit the Old Nubian ⲕⲁ-morpheme to a series of tests to determine whether what is called "directive" or "objective" in fact behaves precisely as a common accusative case is supposed to behave, as I strongly suspect. This would then give us strong support for the usage of the term "accusative" for the Old Nubian ⲕⲁ-morpheme.

One of the most well-known diagnostic tests is checking whether case is preserved under A-movement, e.g. in passive constructions. Non-structural cases will not change when an active sentence is transformed into a passive one, whereas structural cases will. For example, in an accusative language,[30] the patient of a transitive verb in an active sentence will be marked by the nominative case when the sentence is transformed into passive, whereas the agent of an active sentence will receive a non-structural case once the sentence

26 Chomsky, *Lectures on Government and Binding*, p. 170. Chomsky refers to non-structural case as "inherent." Nowadays, inherent case is considered only one type of non-structural case.

27 See e.g. Woolford, "Lexical Case, Inherent Case, and Argument Structure."

28 Blake, *Case*, p. 33.

29 Ibid., p. 133.

30 It is generally assumed that Old Nubian is an accusative and not an ergative language, i.e., the subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs are both marked with the same case, the nominative. The nominative in Old Nubian, like in other Nubian languages, is expressed by a zero morpheme, cf. Werner, *Grammatik des Nobiin*, p. 97; Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 102. See Van Gerven Oei, "The Old Nubian Memorial of King George," p. 261, for a brief discussion of the nominative case in Old Nubian.

is transformed into passive voice. As Old Nubian is a dead language, we can unfortunately no longer ask an informant to perform such a transformation. However, we can look at the distribution of cases in active and passive sentences and see whether they match the predicted distributions for an accusative language. This would give us
172 the first indirect evidence of the existence of a structural accusative case in Old Nubian. I give here two examples with the transitive verb "to call."

2 ⲉⲥⲥⲟⲩ ⲙⲏⲛⲁⲉⲓⲟⲛ | ⲙⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲧⲓⲛ ⲗⲟⲣⲗⲟ ⲅⲟⲣⲁ | ⲕⲓⲁ ϫⲁⲁⲕⲕⲁ ⲕⲏⲙⲁ ⲟ|ⲟⲩⲣⲥⲛⲁ[31]

M. 12.13–6

ŋiss-ou	*mēna-eion*	*man*	*eitt-in*
holy-J[32]	Mina-C	DEM.DIST	woman-GEN
ŋog-lo	*jor-a*	*ki-a*	
house-LOC	go-PRED	come-PRED	
šaak-ka	*kimm-a*	*ook-ir-sna*	
door-ACC	hit-PRED	call-TR-PT2.3SG.PRED	

"Saint Mina went to that woman's house, knocked on the door, and had her called."

3 ⲟⲩⲉⲗⲉⲛⲇⲉⲉⲓⲟⲛ ⲟⲩⲣ|ⲣⲱ ⲥⲟⲕⲕⲁ ⲗⲟⲕⲕ ⲉⲧⲏⲉⲛⲕⲉⲣⲁⲗⲟ ⲧⲭ̣|ⲗⲓⲗⲱⲟⲱⲁ

L. 105.2–4 ⲟⲕⲧⲁⲕⲟⲗⲉⲛⲕⲱ

ouel-ende-eion	*our-rō*	*sokk-a*	*ŋok-k*
one-NEG-C	3SG-LOC	take.up-PRED	honor-ACC
et-men-ke-ra-lo		*tilli-lō-jōa*	
take-NEG-CONSUET-PR.PRED-FOC		God-LOC-by	
ok-tak-ol-enkō			
call-PASS-PT1.PTC-but			

"And no one is to take honor on himself but the one called by God."

In both examples we find the verb *o(o)k-*, "to call." In ex. 2, an active sentence, we find a nominative subject and agent of the verb, *ŋissou mēna-* "Saint Mina," and in ex. 3 we find that the agent of the verb, *tillilōjōa* "God," is no longer marked by the nominative but has instead become an adverbative phrase marked by the postposition "by," as we would expect. That the Old Nubian accusative case is not preserved under A-movement, and is therefore structural, is corroborated by evidence from contemporary Nubian languages, such as Kunuz:

31 Most of the following examples will be from *M.*, *L.*, and *St.*, as these are the texts for which I have already been able to prepare a full morphosyntactical analysis.

32 I have glossed as a juncture vowel what is elsewhere known as the "appositive" (ONG §3.6.5). Pending a full analysis of the different occurrences of this morpheme, I can say that it appears to occupy the slot that would otherwise be filled with case morphology, that is, in case of adjectives, but also in the case of relative clause constructions and close coordination, as below in ex. 8.

ay	*ka:-g*	*goy-s-i*	4
I	house-ACC	build-PST-1SG	
"I built the house."			

ka	*(ay-gen)*	*goy-takki-s-u*	5
house	I-INSTR	build-PASS-PST-3SG	
"The house was built (by me)."[33]			

If we now turn to the behavior of the presumed accusative morpheme -ⲕⲁ, we expect another type of behavior that has been generalized as A-movement, namely the possible transformation of direct object-indirect object constructions into double object constructions, cf. the English "I gave the book to John" and "I gave John the book."

ⲧⲁ|ⲛ ⲟ̀ⲣⲱⲥⲉⲛ ⲱⲟⲕⲕⲁ | ⲡⲉⲓⲁ̀ ⲕⲥ̀ⲥⲉⲗⲁ ⲧ̄ⲥⲥ|ⲁⲣⲉⲛⲕⲁⲛ· 6

St. 12.12–13.1

tan	*orōse-n*	*šok-ka*
3SG.GEN	praise-GEN	book-ACC
pei-a	*kisse-la*	*tij-j-ar-enkan*
write-PRED	church-DAT	give-PL.OBJ-PT1.PRED-when(?)
"When(?) he wrote books of its praise and gave them to the church."		

In ex. 6 we find that the direct object of *tij-*, which coincides with the direct object of the verb *pei-*, is marked with the accusative case and a plural object marker *-j*, whereas the indirect object of *tij-*, *kissela,* is marked by the dative (or allative). Double object constructions, in which both the patient and the recipient are marked with accusative case, are however much more common:

ⲙⲁⲅ̄ⲣⲕⲟⲛ̀ⲉⲛⲇⲉ ⲉ̄ⲛ ⲕⲟⲩⲙ|ⲡⲟⲩⲕⲟⲛ ⲁⲓ̀ⲕⲁ ⲇⲓⲛⲉⲥⲱ. 7

M. 6.13–15

magirkonende	*ein*	*koumpou-k-on*
but	DEM.PROX	egg-ACC-C
ai-ka	*din-esō*	
1SG-ACC	give-IMP.2SG	
"But give me this egg."		

Thus it seems that Old Nubian conforms to the general case pattern of accusative languages, and that, moreover, the ⲕⲁ-morpheme consistently functions as what is commonly called an accusative case marker. Nonetheless, Browne rightly observed that Old Nubian case

33 From Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian,* p. 237. See also id., "Raising to Subject and Object in Kunuz Nubian," pp. 22f.

marking worked different from for example Latin case inflection. Different from Indo-European languages, Old Nubian has no concordant case; case is only marked once on the right edge of the noun phrase, cf. ex. 2 [*man eitt*]-*in*; ex. 3 [*tan orōse*]-*n*; ex. 7 [*ein koumpou*]-*k*-. This is most visible in the case of relative clauses.[34]

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8 ⲉ̀ⲗⲟⲛ ⲡⲁⲡⲟ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲁ̈ⲓ̈ⲕⲁ ⲅ̀ⲟⲕⲟⲩ ⲁ̀ⲓⲛⲉⲥⲱ ⳽ | ⲉⲓⲣⲓⲱ̀ⲣⲱ ⲅ̀ⲟⲕⲟⲩ ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥⲗ̀

L. 107.1–3 ⲧⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩ | ⲉⲓⲣⲓⲟ̀ⲧⲍⲱ̀ ⲁ̀ⲟⲩⲛⲕⲟⲩⲥⲥⲓⲕⲁ̀⳽

el-on	*papo*	*eir-ou*	*ai-ka*	*ŋok-ou*
now-C	father.VOC	2SG-J	1SG-ACC	glory-J
eir-iō-orō	*ŋok-ou*		*kosmos-la*	*tousou*
2SG-LOC-with	glory-J		world-DAT	before
eir-io-tjō	*doun*		*kou-ssi-ka*	
2SG-LOC-with	be-PTC.PR?[35]		have-PT2.1SG-ACC	

"Now father give you and me glory, the glory with you that I had being with you before the world."

In this sentence we find that the entire attributive sentence to *ŋok-* has been extraposed to the right edge of the sentence, with a repetition of *ŋokou*.[36] The accusative case marking follows completely at the end of the attributive clause, after the verb.[37] So we may conclude that although in morphological terms, the Old Nubian ⲕⲁ-morpheme behaves differently from Indo-European accusative inflection (no syncresis, no concordance), on a syntactical level it completely conforms to what we expect an accusative case marker to do. There is therefore no necessity to invent divergent terminology.

3. Verbal System

As one of the consequences of thinking about Old Nubian from out of its context within other Nubian languages, we have to resist the temptation to formalize its grammar into paradigms. This does not mean that there are no rules or regularities in Old Nubian grammar, nor should any claim that its grammar is less "developed" or more "primitive" than the elaborate systems of classical languages ever be warranted. What I mean is that the paradigm as such is the response of a very specific, particularly Indo-European linguistic situation, namely that its case and tense morphemes are not always

34 See Satzinger, "Relativsatz und Thematisierung im Altnubischen." See Abdel-Hafiz, "Nubian Relative Clauses" for an analysis of relative clauses in Kunuz Nubian.

35 We would expect something like *doul*, perhaps with assimilation *l*>*n* before *k*.

36 However, this does not seem to be always necessary, cf. *elka* […] *pesin aigille* in ex. 1.

37 Contrast this with for example the spreading of accusative case across the entire relative clause, as in Panyjima. See Blake, *Case*, p. 117, ex. 54.

analyzable, i.e., they are often syncretic.[38] For example, no separate element in the Greek verbal form *eluthē* tells me that it is aorist, passive, indicative, or third-person singular. Nor does any individual element of the Latin ending *-um* in *patrum* tells me that it is plural, masculine, or genitive. Moreover, forms are often ambiguous, e.g. *-um* in *patrum* and *manum*. In absence of clear one-to-one relations between form and meaning, the paradigm was invented to teach these syncretic forms by means of examples, by means of analogy, organized in the characteristic table form.[39]

The imposition of paradigmatic structures on an agglutinative[40] language such as Old Nubian, however, leads to a very unwieldy grammatical description. If we for example inspect the sections on the verbal paradigm in Browne's *Old Nubian Grammar,* we are immediately struck by the fact that the entire paradigm is completely imaginary, or at least idealized into a certain classical paradigmatic format. As Browne states himself, "The paradigm presented [...] is an idealized schematization based on the ON corpus and is meant to be merely illustrative."[41] The problem is that this descriptive, illustrative table contains the very core of the prescriptive strategy inherited from classical philology that Browne continuously applies. The morphemes that participate in constructing verb phrases are never articulated and analyzed individually, but are always already included in predetermined categories such as "indicative" or "verbid." Yet if we were to believe the footnotes, there are unattested forms that have been included,[42] as well as several – but not even close to all – phonological variations that have been excluded from this idealized scheme or not accounted for[43]; a paradigmatic approach simply cannot account for the phonological variation that occurs along the edges of different morphemes.

In agglutinative languages, certain sets of morphemes occur – from our Indo-European perspective – cross-categorically, while at the same time the large amount of available suffixes potentially destabilizes any attempt to categorize all possible combination of forms paradigmatically.

ⲟⲩⲕⲕⲟⲩⲧ-ⲧⲁⲕⲕ-ⲉⲛ	9
oppress-PASS-PR.*3SG*	*L.* 102.3

38 Blake, *Case*, p. 19.
39 Starting with Plato, *Statesman,* 277d–278d.
40 Zyhlarz, *Grundzüge der nubischen Grammatik*, p. 4, insists that "Nubisch keine agglutinierende Sprache ist," but see Hintze, "Beobachtungen zut Altnubischen Grammatik VI," p. 287.
41 *ONG*, p. 52.
42 *ONG*, p. 50, n. 49
43 *ONG*, p. 50 nn. 45–6, 50–6.

10 ⲙⲁⲓⲕ-ⲁⲣ-ⲓⲥ-ⲛ̲-ⲁ
M. 2.4 be.afflicted-TR-PT2-3SG-PRED

11 ⲡⲉⲩⲱ-ⲓⲟ-ⲁ̲ⲁ̲-ⲉⲛ̲-ⲕⲁ
St. 4.2 judge-PL.OBJ-FUT-3SG-ACC

For example, we can see in exx. 9–11 the second/third person singular personal suffix *-in/-en/-n* in three different contexts but in all three cases it is clearly recognizable. The same holds for the so-called predicative suffix, which again occurs cross-categorically (exx. 12–14).[44]

12 ⲡⲥ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲉⲓ-ⲣ-ⲁ̲
St. 14.5 believe-PR-*PRED*

13 ⲉϣ̄ⲥ-ⲁ̲-ⲁ̀-ⲗⲟ
L. 111.9 holy-*PRED*-QUOT-FOC

14 ⲙⲁⲓⲕ-ⲁⲣ-ⲓⲥ-ⲛ-ⲁ̲
M. 2.4 be.afflicted-TR-PT2-3SG-*PRED*

If we want to make any progress in the analysis of the Old Nubian verbal system we therefore need to move away from the idea of a paradigm and start thinking in terms of classes, sets of morphemes. Comparative evidence from Nilo-Saharan languages should be adduced as the main evidence for the organization of the Old Nubian morphological system. Greek or Coptic parallellisms, which depart from paradigmatic person and tense marking and a series of so-called "periphrastic" elements, have less explanatory force.

Let me give an example of what such approach might look like. My suggestion would be to start from the right edge of the verbal complex and work our way toward the left, up to the lexical core of the grammatical form. I will do so by passing through a number of morphological classes. This list is by no means intended to be exhaustive, and we will skip, for reasons of brevity, the nominal material, such as case marking (see ex. 8), that may cluster to the right of the verbal complex. Note also that all following examples are intransitive verbs, even though I have not yet observed any strong categorical difference between transitive and intransitive verbal morphology.

15 ⲡⲁⲟ-ⲫⲣ-ⲓ̲
M. 13.11 divide-PR-*1SG*

44 See for a more extensive analysis Van Gerven Oei, "The Old Nubian Morpheme *-a* in Nominal and Verbal Predicates."

ⲟⲩⲛⲛ-ⲓⲛ-ⲛⲟ	16
bear-*2/3SG*-FOC	*L.* 100.3
ⲧⲙ̄ⲙ-ⲁⲣ-ⲟⲩ	17
assemble-PT1-*1/2PL*	*St.* 3.7–8

ⲉⲓⲗⲯ-ⲓⲥ-ⲁⲛ-ⲁ	18
keep-PT2-*3PL*-PRED	*L.* 107.7

Upon entering the verbal part of the verbal complex from the right we first encounter a set of person markers, which are well attested in other Nubian languages (exx. 15–18).[45] They appear either with or without the predicative marker. The bare forms are usually deployed in non-declarative contexts, whereas the forms marked with the predicative marker correspond to what we call the finite verb of a main clause. But it is misleading to dub the forms with and without the predicative suffix as belonging to the respectively "indicative" and "subjunctive" paradigm. Within the Old Nubian context, these terms are properly meaningless.

ⲡⲁⲍ-ⲉⲣ-ⲓ	20
divide-*PR*-1SG	*St.* 13.11
ⲧⲙ̄ⲙ-ⲁⲣ-ⲟⲩ	21
assemble-*PT1*-1/2PL	*St.* 3.7–8
ⲉⲓⲗⲯ-ⲓⲥ-ⲁⲛⲁ	22
keep-PT2-3PL-PRED	*L.* 107.7

In Browne's paradigmatic approach, tense and person are conflated into one portmanteau form. This is understandable in the context of his background in classical philology, in which Greek person and tense can never be analyzed into separate parts. However, in Old Nubian the verbal forms appear to be synthetic. It is possible to distinguish between two or three separate tense morphemes, depending on the analysis of the underlying forms. Owing to a lack of evidence, this issue remains to be decided.[46] I give here an analysis with three separate morphemes (exx. 20–2). Both forms of the preterite have survived in modern Nubian languages. The precise distinction in usage between the two forms, however, remains to be fully articulated[47]; in Nobiin, both past tense suffixes have collapsed

45 Ibid, §3.9.6.

46 See Weschenfelder and Weber, this volume.

47 Zyhlarz, *Grundzüge der nubischen Grammatik*, p. 63, referred to the two past tenses "Aorist" and "Präteritum," respectively. According to *ONG* §3.9.7a, "The difference between

into a single paradigm,[48] whereas in Kunuz Nubian only the second preterite has survived.[49]

23 ⲟⲗⲗ-ⲫⲓⲣ-ⲓⲏⲉⲛ-ⲁ-ⲓⲥⲁⲛ-ⲁ-
P.QI. 1 7.ii.16 hang-TR-NEG-FUT-PT2-PRED-

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Browne's inclusion of the "future" tense in the temporal paradigm should be rejected, first because the morphological variation of the future suffix suggests that it follows another class of morphemes which include the inchoative, transitive, and causative suffixes, and second because there are in fact attestations of verbal forms with both the future suffix and a tense morpheme (ex. 23).[50] Apropos Nobiin, Bechhaus-Gerst notes that the future tense has a distinct modal aspect,[51] and the same may be inferred for Old Nubian, and the fact that many contemporary Nubian languages have an innovative future form, suggests that a semantically distinctive future tense had been lacking previously.[52]

Inchoative suffix

24a ⲁ̀ⲣⲟⲩ-ⲁ̀ⲓ̲ⲥ̲-ⲓⲛ
St. 16.11 protect (lit. rain)-*INCH*-3SG

24b ⲕⲓⲣ-ⲓⲓ̲ⲥ̲ⲓ-[ⲟⲛ]ⲛⲟ-[ⲁ̀]
L. 108.11 come-*INCH*-COND.3SG-PRED

24c ⳾ⲟⲩⲛⲧ-ⲟⲩ̲ⲥ̲-ⲁⲣⲣ-[ⲁ]
L. 100.2 pregnant-*INCH*-FUT-PRED

24d ⲧⲟⲩ|ⲉ-ⲉ̲-ⲁ
St. 28.10 be.secure-*INCH*-PRED

preterite I and preterite II appears to be aspectual in the indicative, where I tends to be either a descriptive imperfect or a resultative perfect, and II is regularly a punctiliar past." Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*, p. 79, moreover notices that "this distinction is already in the process of disappearing," and that "in the subjunctive [...] preterit I is adverbial, preterit II is adnominal."

48 Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*, p. 83.

49 Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 150.

50 Cf. *ONG*, p. 51, "There is also a rare future preterite." That the combination of different temporal and modal suffixes may extend beyond this example is suggested by the example adduced by Łajtar, this volume, p. 199: ⲁⲁⲩⲉⲥⲣⲉⲗⲟ, which seems to have both the preterite 2, and present tense 1SG suffix.

51 Bechhaus Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*, p. 86.

52 In Kunuz the future tense is formed by the circumfix *b(i)- -r*, with the *-r* element clearly reminiscent of the Old Nubian future suffix (Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 154), whereas Nobiin has the prefix *fa(a)-* (Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*, pp. 157ff; Werner, *Grammatik des Nobiin*, p. 151).

Causative suffix

ⲡⲟⲟⲣ-ⲣⲁⲣ-ⲁ	25a
raise-*CAUS*-PRED	*L.* 106.10
ⲁⲉⲕⲕ-ⲓⲣⲣ̄-ⲙⲥ̄-ⲥⲉ-ⲗⲟ	25b
be.concealed-*CAUS*-NEG-PT2.1SG.PRED-FOC	*St.* 6.3
ⲟⲩⲗ-ⲣⲟⲩⲁ-ⲁ-ⲉⲣⲟⲩ-ⲗ	25c
ear-*CAUS*-FUT-PR.1PL-DET	*St.* 29.9
ⲟⲩⲗ-ⲣⲣ-ⲉⲛ	25d
ear-*CAUS*-PR.3SG	*L.* 113.9

Transitive suffix

ⲉⲓⲧ-ⲁⲣ-ⲓⲑ̣-[ⲁ	26a
take-*TR*-PL.OBJ-PRED	*L.* 114.6
ⲟⲗⲗ-ⲩ̈ⲣ-ⲉⲥⲁⲛ|ⲛ-ⲟⲛ	26b
hang-*TR*-PT2.3PL-C	*St.* 8.12
ⲥⲟⲩⲣ-ⲟⲩⲁ-ⲁ-ⲛⲁ̀	26c
shade-*TR*-FUT-PR.3SG	*St.* 12.3
ⲧⲥ̄ⲥ-ⲣ-ⲁ̀-ⲁⲉⲛⲟⲩ	26d
hate-*TR*-PRED-C	*L.* 101.4

Next we may inspect the four "modal" suffixes in Old Nubian, which are not separately listed by Browne: the aforementioned future suffix (ex. 23); the inchoative, which signals the onset of an action (exx. 24a–d); the causative, which turns a transitive verb into a ditransitive verb (exx. 25a–d); and the transitive suffix (exx. 26a–d), which is not clearly marked by Browne, but is present in many lemmata in his *Old Nubian Dictionary*.[53] Its function in Old Nubian is to transform intransitive verbs into transitive verbs. As may be clear, these suffixes have a full form with the vowel *a*, forms with the reduced vowels *i* and *u*, and fully phonologically reduced forms without vowels.

It may well be possible that this group of suffixes has developed out of the final verbal suffix class that I would like to discuss, namely a series of verbs that are often used in so-called "adjunctive constructions"[54] and have often become proper verbal suffixes

53 Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin,* p. 113, refers to this form as the "old causative," even though it is still productive in for example Kunuz, cf. Abdel-Hafiz, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian,* p. 118.

54 *ong*, §3.9.19.1.

in modern Nubian languages. These types of grammaticalizations, which start with the semantic bleaching of a verb, a constriction to certain syntactical environments, and phonological reduction, still have not been properly studied,[55] but considering that the extant Old Nubian material stretches across several centuries, it might be

possible to use the frequency of the occurrences of grammaticalized (i.e. "modern" forms) for the relative dating of texts. But this must remain pure speculation.

4. Documentary material: The final frontier

On a last note, I would like to address the problematic issue that most of our knowledge of Old Nubian grammar is based upon the major literary texts, such as the ones I just cited. In general, Old Nubian literary material is more easily accessible to research because Browne has already prepared most of the editions, the language is less condensed, and in a considerable number of cases we have Greek or Coptic texts that allow for interlinguistic comparison. However, this is not the case with documentary texts, whose language is usually more compact and colloquial, and more difficult to interpret and/or interpolate due to the largely unknown context in which these materials were produced. Yet their study is indispensible to a complete analysis of the Old Nubian language and its grammar during the period of its currency, for which I have argued in this paper.

Although a considerable amount of documentary evidence has been collected in the Qasr Ibrim editions (*P.QI* 1–3 and *P.QI* 4, forthcoming), there is still a sizeable number of letters, sales, and contracts that remain unpublished to date. This situation does not only give us a distorted image of the written tradition of Old Nubian, the documentary evidence also confronts us with quite a gap in our actual knowledge of Old Nubian grammar. A grammatical analysis of the Old Nubian documentary material, and reflection of that analysis in our grammatical description of the language, would potentially solve many issues, not only in the documentary texts themselves, but also in the many unexplained details of the already published literary documents.

I would like to close with an illustrative example. In the spring of 2010, Joost Hagen, with whom I first delved into Old Nubian texts at Leiden University, sent me images of two letters by email, one of them shown on the next page, asking me to have a look at them. I know nothing of the provenance of this material, except that it appears to be written in Old Nubian, comes from Qasr Ibrim and is

55 However, see Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*, pp. 137-67; Jakobi & El-Guzuuli, this volume.

currently housed in the British Museum. I have produced a first transcription of the first page of the text below.[56]

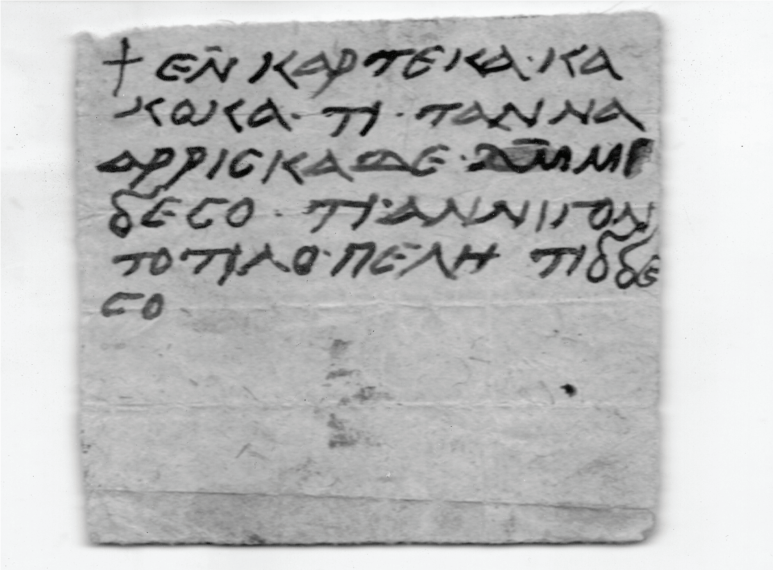

Fig. 1 An Old Nubian letter from Qasr Ibrim

† ⲉⲛ̅ ⲕⲁⲣⲧⲉⲕⲁ · ⲕⲁ
ⲕⲟⲕⲁ · ⲧⲓ · ⲧⲁⲛⲛⲁ
ⲁⲣⲣⲓⲥⲕⲁⲇⲉ · ⲇⲙ̅ⲙⲓ
ϭⲉⲥⲟ · ⲧⲓ · ⲁⲛⲛⲓⲧⲟⲛ
ⲧⲟⲧⲓⲗⲟ · ⲡⲉⲗⲏ ⲧⲓϭϭⲉ
ⲥⲟ

First, we may observe that the interpunction seems to separate distinct phrases. We may also notice that the text contains two verbs, both in the imperative and with a plural direct or indirect object (ll. 3–4 *dimmijeso*; ll. 5–6 *tijjeso*). It seems logical that the object of the first imperative *dimmijeso*, "hand over," is *ein karteka*, "this letter," in which case the indirect object must be plural. Indeed we find two accusative marked constituents coordinated in l. 3 with the suffix -*de*. The first term of the coordinated couple would be *kako,* whose meaning is unknown (perhaps a personal name?), the second term would be *tanna,* "his," *arris,* which also may or may not be a personal name and seems to have been attested as such elsewhere. The meaning of the constituent *ti* remains mysterious, as it is neither a morpheme nor an attested word. Moreover it is repeated in the second

56 Qasr Ibrim, unknown find number. Stored in the British Museum Qasr Ibrim Archive in the same glass frame as the forthcoming *P.QI* 4 74.

sentence without any clear relation to the surrounding material. *Anniton totilo* should mean "and my son," and is probably marked by a focus morpheme *-lo*. But this leaves the morpheme *-(i)t-*. unexplained. The imperative *tijjeso,* whose plural object marker probably has the same referent as the first imperative *dimmijeso,* is preceded
182 by the adjunctive verb *peli.* According to Bechhaus-Gerst,[57] this adjunctive verb developed into a prefix for the future tense in modern Nubian languages, but the distribution or development of similar prefixes such as the habitual remains to be studied.

Even this short letter, with its minimal content, offers us the entire range of lexical, morphological, and syntactical issues that remain to be solved. So fellow nubiologists, *encore un effort*!

57 Bechhaus-Gerst, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin,* p. 158.

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