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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 ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙ 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).¹

- 1 [†εΓ]Ϡ ΦΙΛΟ ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΥ Υ̅Ϟ
[†]ΑΡΙΑΝΤΑ ΕΧΩΝ ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙ
[ε]ΠΑΓΩΜΕΝΟΣ ΕΟΡΘΗΝ ΡΑΦΑΗΛ
[ε]ΓΡΑΨΕΝ

1 ΦΙΛΟ] Łajtar & Van der Vliet ΦΙΛΟ(ΘΕΟΣ). 2 [†]ΑΡΙΑΝΤΑ.] Donadoni, Łajtar & Van der Vliet []ΑΡΙΑΝΤΑ. 4 [ε]ΓΡΑΨΕΝ Donadoni [ε]ΓΡΑΨΑ; Łajtar & Van der Vliet εΓΡΑΨΑ.

“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)*.² 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 (ΦΙΛΟ and ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΥ) 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 φίλο as a variant of the Greek name φίλων, since both the shift between ο and ω, and the deletion of the final η are well-attested phenomena.

For other attestations of the female name Marianta, see I.QI 35 and 57.³ As regards the participle [ε]παγωμενος, there are six attestations of the verb in the ΔΒΜΝΤ, 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."⁴

Finally, it should be stressed that it is di cult to estimate whether the owner of the church at Pourgoundi was Philon or Marianta, due to the degradation of the language.⁵

Donadoni identifies ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙ as the modern village Furgundi on the eastern bank of the Nile, about 5 kilometers north of Abu Simbel, across from Tamit.⁶ Łajtar and Van der Vliet suggest that on the basis of the presence of the verb ΕΧΩΝ "having," it can be conjectured that ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙ 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."⁷

Two inventories of churches with payment from Qasr Ibrim published by Giovanni Ruffini confirm that indeed we are dealing with a church: ΔΒΜΝΤ 1729.17 ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙΔ "Pourgoundi-PRED"; ΔΒΜΝΤ 1730.23 [ΠΟΥ]ΡΓΟΥΝΔΙΔ "Pourgoundi-PRED." Both inventories mention three churches: Peter, John, and Mary,⁸ although it remains unclear which of these three is the church of Pourgoundi referred to in Tamit graffito.

ΠΟΥΡΓΟΥΝΔΙ follows a morphological pattern that is found frequently Nubian toponyms: X-genitive -η-Y "The Y of X."⁹ Well-

3 ŁAJTAR & VAN DER VLIET, *The Greek and Coptic Inscriptions Published on Behalf of the Egypt Exploration Society*.

4 For a more accurate identification of the time of that feast, see OCHALA, *Chronological Systems of Christian Nubia*, p. 322, n. 4. It should be noted that the verb can also mean other things, such as "brought forward," or even "contributed," but the interpretation as "the epagomenal month" is preferable.

5 For the general degradation of the Greek language in Nubia, as witnessed also by this inscription, see ŁAJTAR, "The Greek of Late Christian Inscriptions from Nubia - The Evidence from Baganarti and Other Sites."

6 DONADONI, "Tamit (1964). Missione archeologica in Egitto dell'Università di Roma," p. 67.

7 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'," p. 46.

8 RUFFINI, *The Bishop, The Eparch, and the King: Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim (P. QI IV)*, pp. 144, 150.

9 BELL, *Place Names in The Belly of Stones*, p. 6.

It is our suggestion that Old Nubian $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho$ is related to the Meroitic pqr /bak^wara/ or /bak^wora/ “prince,” which can be analyzed as /bak^w/ “power, authority” (cf. Old Nubian $\pi\alpha\gamma\omicron\gamma$ “power, authority”¹⁹) + masculine suffix /ara/.²⁰ Meroitic q /k^w/ was probably already pronounced /w/ in Northern Meroitic,²¹ and appears to be a cognate of Nubian /w/, cf. Mer. *qore* “sovereign”²² ~ Old Nubian $\omicron\gamma\rho\gamma$ “king.”

Although it is as yet not fully determinable whether $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho$ is also a cognate, like $\pi\alpha\gamma\omicron\gamma$, 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 $\pi\alpha\gamma\omicron\gamma$, does not appear to follow the currently known sound correspondences between Meroitic and Old Nubian.²³

$\pi\omicron\gamma\rho$ is probably also attested in an unpublished inscription from Banganarti, 424 + $\epsilon<\Gamma>\omega$ $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho\eta\rho$ “I, the Prince,”²⁴ with determiner - $\eta\rho$ /-ir/ < - $\iota\lambda$ /-il/, and has perhaps also an element of the place name $\rho\omicron\rho\Delta\iota\pi\pi\alpha$, attested in two Coptic texts: DBMNT 630.13–14 $\epsilon\iota\rho\eta\pi\omicron\rho\Delta\iota\pi\pi\alpha$ and DBMNT 631.11 $\epsilon\iota\rho\eta\pi\omicron\rho\Delta\iota\pi\pi\alpha$.²⁵ The first part $\rho\omicron\rho$ may very well be related to $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho$ -, while the second element $\Delta\iota\pi\pi\iota$ - is a common Old Nubian word meaning “town” or “city.”²⁶ $\Delta\iota/\Delta\epsilon$ may have originally formed the first element in a form that in later stages of the language was no longer interpreted analytically. A similar element may in that case also be found in word *deffufa*, referring to the ancient mud-brick constructions found in Nubia.

DBMNT 1364.d.2–4 $[\epsilon\iota]\lambda\lambda\omicron$ $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho\rho\alpha$ $\epsilon\omicron\eta\eta\alpha\alpha\alpha$ should therefore be translated as “You are the Queen Sister for the Prince,” and the place name $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho\gamma\omicron\eta\eta\Delta\iota$ as “Tribal Section of the Princes,” with $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho\gamma\omicron\gamma$ being the plural of $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho$. That this place name was still experienced by Nubian speakers as analytical, i.e., consisting of two words connected by a genitive, is shown by church inventory DBMNT 1728.4–5, which, features the place name without $-\Delta\iota$ and the predicative $-\alpha$: $\pi\omicron\gamma\rho\gamma\omicron\eta\eta$ $\iota\overline{\omega}\Delta\alpha\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$ $\Delta\omicron\overline{\omega}\overline{\beta}\overline{\lambda}\overline{\omicron}$ $\eta\alpha\rho\iota\overline{\alpha}$ $\Delta\omicron\overline{\omega}\overline{\alpha}\overline{\lambda}\overline{\omicron}$ $\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\omicron\varsigma$ $\Delta\omicron\overline{\omega}\overline{\alpha}\overline{\lambda}\overline{\omicron}$ “John of (the tribal section of) the Princes: 2; Mary: 1; Peter: 1(?)”

19 BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, p. 144.

20 RILLY, *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*, p. 115.

21 RILLY, *La langue du royaume de Méroé: Un panorama de la plus ancienne culture écrite d'Afrique subsaharienne*, pp. 39–42.

22 RILLY, *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*, p. 136.

23 Claude Rilly, p.c.

24 Adam Łajtar, p.c.

25 CRUM, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, pp. 212–15. Robin Seignobos first suggested this connection.

26 BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, p. 45.

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