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

Vincent van Gerven Oei
vincent@vangervenoei.com

Alexandros Tsakos
atsakos@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/djns

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/djns/vol4/iss1/11
The Etymology of the Toponym “Pourgoundi” (Notes on Medieval Nubian Toponymy 5)

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Alexandros Tsakos

The toponym ṝⲟⲣⲅⲟⲩⲛⲇⲓ 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). 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 (פגלו and אPEndPoint) 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 φιλο as a variant of the Greek name φιλων, since both the shift between o and ω, and the deletion of the final n are well-attested phenomena.

For other attestations of the female name Marianta, see I.QI 35 and 57. As regards the participle [ε]παγωμενος, 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 πούργουντια 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 εξων “having,” it can be conjectured that πούργουντια 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 πούργουντια “Pourgoundi-pred”; DBMNT 1730.23 [πού]ργουντια “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.

πούργουντια follows a morphological pattern that is found frequently Nubian toponyms: X-genitive -n-Y “The Y of X.” 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 Banganarti and Other Sites.”
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.
known are, for example, the islands (ⲩⲣⲓⲧⲩⲣⲓⲧⲓ) Kulubnarti, Meinarti “island of Michael,” and Banganarti “island of the locust.” There are two other attested toponyms in -ⲧⲧⲧ-: dbmnt 1397.6 ṭⲟⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ “Mohondi-gen,” where Gerald Browne suggests there was a church and dbmnt 1044.8-9 ṭⲟⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ “Toundi-gen,” where there was a Michael Church, cf. DBMT 1729.6-7 ṭⲟⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ “Michael (Church) of Toundi.” There are several spelling variants of this name: DBMT 1044.8 ṭⲟⲧⲧⲧ-${\text{n}}$ “Tonde-pred”; and perhaps DBMT 1730.7 ṭⲟⲧⲧⲧ-${\text{n}}$ “Tonda-gen.”

Old Nubian $\Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda$ appears to be related to a noun featuring the same $\epsilon\iota$ alternation that appears as $\Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda$ in a land sale from Qaṣr Ibrīm (DBMT 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 DBMT 584.i.16-17 $\langle\Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Theta\Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Delta\Lambda\Lambda \ \Δ Labour of the West Annex of the Monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola (DBMT 1364).”
It is our suggestion that Old Nubian ⲩⲣ is related to the Meroitic /bakʷara/ or /bakʷora/ “prince,” which can be analyzed as /bakʷ “power, authority” (cf. Old Nubian ⲩⲧⲟ “power, authority”\(^\text{19}\)) + masculine suffix / ara/.\(^\text{20}\) Meroitic q /kʷ/ was probably already pronounced /w/ in Northern Meroitic,\(^\text{21}\) and appears to be a cognate of Nubian /w/, cf. Mer. qore “sovereign”\(^\text{22}\) ~ Old Nubian ⲟⲩⲣⲟⲩ “king.”

Although it is as yet not fully determinable whether ⲩⲣ is also a cognate, like ⲩⲧⲟ, 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 ⲩⲧⲟ, does not appear to follow the currently known sound correspondences between Meroitic and Old Nubian.\(^\text{23}\)

ⲩⲣ is probably also attested in an unpublished inscription from Banganarti, 424 + ⲉⲉⲧⲓⲣⲏⲩ ⲩⲟⲩⲣⲏⲣ “I, the Prince,”\(^\text{24}\) with determiner -ⲏⲣ /-ir/ < -ⲥ /-il/, and has perhaps also and element of the place name ⲩⲟⲣⲇⲓⲡⲁ, attested in two Coptic texts: DBMNT 630.13–14 ⲉⲃⲓⲡⲣⲓⲡⲓⲣⲓⲡⲓⲡ and DBMNT 631.11 ⲉⲃⲓⲡⲣⲓⲡⲓⲣⲓⲡ.\(^\text{25}\) The first part ⲩⲃⲓ may very well be related to ⲩⲟⲩⲣ-, while the second element ⲡⲓⲡⲓ- is a common Old Nubian word meaning “town” or “city.”\(^\text{26}\) ⲉⲉⲧⲓ 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 ⲉⲉⲧⲓ ⲩⲟⲩⲣⲣⲁ ⲑⲟⲛⲛⲁⲥⲁ ⲇⲟ·ⲃⲅ·ⲙⲟ ⲇⲟ·ⲁ·ⲣⲟ ⲉⲧⲣⲟⲥ ⲇⲟⲁ·ⲇ·ⲉ南昌the Queen Sister for the Prince,” and the place name ⲩⲟⲩⲣⲛ ⲩⲃⲓ as “Tribal Section of the Princes,” with ⲩⲧⲣⲟⲩ being the plural of ⲩⲧⲣ. 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 -ⲃⲓ and the predicative -ⲃⲓ: ⲩⲟⲩⲣⲓ Ⲣⲧⲓⲧⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲟⲧⲓⲧⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲟⲧⲓⲧⲓⲧⲟ ⲁⲧⲓ ⲧⲟⲧⲓⲧⲓⲧⲓ ⲧⲟⲧⲓⲧⲟⲩ “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.
26 Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary, p. 45.
The Etymology of the Toponym “Pourgoundi”

**Bibliography**


