Two Coptic Epitaphs in the Kom Aushim Storage Magazine

On a recent visit to Egypt in February of 2014 I was shown some inscriptions in the storage magazine at Kom Aushim (Karanis) by the curator Mustafa F. Hemeida. Two of the inscriptions particularly caught my attention because they were epitaphs and were written in Coptic. The catalogue entries at the Kom Aushim magazine regarding each epitaph are very sparse. Nevertheless, as the Kom Aushim magazine serves as the wider storage facility for artefacts from the Fayoum it is highly likely that both epitaphs originated somewhere in this region (1). Moreover the texts show some features of the Fayoumic dialect. With the permission of the magazine curator I offer here for the first time an edition of these two epitaphs with accompanying translation and commentary.

I. EPITAPH FOR A THEOKLES

The first stele bears the Kom Aushim inv. no. 323 (2). The stele is rectangular, made of limestone, and lacks any ornamentation or decoration. As noted in the introduction, this epitaph is written in the Fayoumic dialect as is evidenced by the opening formula (ll. 1–2) and the body of the epitaph (ll. 4–5). While the top is broken off so that much of the first line of text is lost, because the extant text begins with a well-attested Coptic funerary formula from the Fayoum the

(*) I would like to thank Mustafa F. Hemeida, curator of the Kom Aushim Magazine, for showing me these two inscriptions and for permission to take photos of them. I also want to thank John Gee for his many helpful insights as I worked on these two pieces as well as Anne Boud’hors for her generous help and direction.


(2) In the catalogue records at the Kom Aushim magazine no date of acquisition is recorded and all that is stated for the catalogue entry is that the artefact was acquired through an individual named Yusef Mishrefy, for which no additional information is provided. Elsewhere in the catalogue this individual is mentioned in connection with the acquisition of other artefacts and the dates of acquisition range from the late 1970s through the 1980s.

In the case of SB/Kopt. I 757 (Fayoum) two lines of text precede \( \Phi(\text{N\(\nu\)Y}) \\overset{\Dagger}{\lambda\lambdai\ \sigma\nu\gamma\epsilon\iota\ N\ N.} \) (see n. 1–2 below). Since this formula typically appears at the very start of an epitaph it seems likely that the first extant line is also the first line of text in the inscription \(^{(3)}\). Thus, the entire inscription consists of nine lines and can be completely restored \(^{(4)}\). After the final line there is a gap of 5.0 cm before the bottom edge of the stele.

The hand of the inscription is deliberate and clear with average line spacing at 2.5 cm per line. The letter forms may be described as an upright script with few noteworthy features and no decorative ornamentations or embellishments. The alpha is written in an upright form with a square shaped crossbar, the omega is inscribed with two distinct cuts, and the crossbar on the lone theta at the end of l. 3 only extends to the middle of the letter from the right side. There is a supralinear stroke above \( \Phi \) at the beginning of the first line signaling the abbreviation \( \Phi(\text{N\(\nu\)Y}) \\overset{\Dagger}{\lambda\lambdai\ \sigma\nu\gamma\epsilon\iota\ N\ N.} \) and supralinear strokes also appear over the day of the month and year signifying that they are to be read as numbers.

The paleographic features of the inscription are difficult to date and the reference to the month and (indiction) year provides little help in establishing a specific date for the inscription, but as Fayoumic inscriptions are known to date between the seventh and tenth centuries the inscription probably falls somewhere in this chronological frame \(^{(5)}\).

In a number of respects the inscription is typical of many Coptic Christian epitaphs; structurally it is similar to the following Fayoumic inscriptions: SB Kopt. I 461, 757; II 1146; III 1591; IV 1965 (cf. SB Kopt. III 1616). It begins by invoking God and asks that he might show mercy, after which the name of the deceased is inscribed followed by the very common formula \( \nu\tau\alpha\mu\tau\alpha\nu \ \mu\alpha\theta \) ("he rested"; Sahidic \( \mu\tau\alpha\nu\nu\mu\alpha\theta \)) followed by the day of the month and the indiction year that the person died. The inscription then ends with "in peace" and "amen," which is a common closing formula in many epitaphs. The name of the deceased (ll. 2–3) is spelled \( \varphi\iota\eta\kappa\lambda\kappa \) on the inscription and is likely a phonetic spelling of Theokles (\( \Theta\omicron\omicron\kappa\omicron\alpha\kappa \); see n. 2–3 below).

\(^{(3)}\) In the case of SB Kopt. I 757 (Fayoum) two lines of text precede \( \Phi(\text{N\(\nu\)Y}) \\overset{\Dagger}{\lambda\lambdai\ \sigma\nu\gamma\epsilon\iota\ N\ N.} \) but in the present inscription these lines follow this formula in ll. 3–5.

\(^{(4)}\) If something was inscribed above the first line then it was probably only a monogram like the staurogram (\( \Upsilon \)), chi-rho monogram (\( \chi\rho \)), or the cross (+) since such symbols periodically precede the first line of text in Coptic epitaphs of the kind we are dealing with here; i.e. SB Kopt. II 1146 (Fayoum) the staurogram (\( \Upsilon \)) precedes the opening formula; IV 1965 (Fayoum) a cross (+) precedes this opening formula.

\(^{(5)}\) B. TUDOR, Christian Funerary Stelae [n. 2], p. 228.

406
TWO COPTIC EPITAPHS IN THE KOM AUSHIM STORAGE MAGAZINE

Kom Aushim inv. no. 323
Fig. 1
VII–X c.
28.5 (H) × 18.0 (W) × 8.5 cm (D)
Fayoum

 Moines + [λαὶ οὖν-]

 $('<\rangle\text{M}')

λε! με θ-

ιωγάι η-

ΛἈΜΤΑΝ

5

$$\text{ⲓⲧⲇⲛⲧⲇⲥⲫⲛⲧⲃ}$$

ⲕⲱ ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉⲓ

[ι ν]ⲗⲃ ⲗ ⲥ-

[ⲃ]ⲧⲣⲃⲓⲥ

5 l. ⲛⲟⲩ

“God, have mercy on Thiogli who rested on the 28th of Tybi in the 5th year. In peace, amen.”


2–3 όιογκι In Coptic epitaphs that employ the δλα ογγεὶ formula the name of the deceased typically follows. This letter combination must surely therefore represent the name of the individual commemorated on the stele. Though the spelling is surely original the name Theokles (Θεοκλῆς) lends itself as a definite possibility based on the phonetic spelling. At least in Greek there are late attestations of the prefix θεο- being rendered θιω-: e.g. **O.Bodl.** II 2098.3 (IV–V): Θιωδώρου for Θεοδώρου; **P.Rain.Unterricht kort.** 81.16 (V): Θιωνος for Θεωνος. The kappa and gamma interchange is well attested both in Greek and Coptic as is the eta and iota interchange. See F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri. Vol. I, Phonology* (Milan, 1976), pp. 235–237. According to the *Trismegistos People database* the name Theokles and its derivations occurs just under 100 times and occurs mostly in texts from the Nile Delta followed by the Oxyrhynchite and Fayoum. Though I have been unable to locate an example of the name Theokles in Coptic I have found a couple attestations of the feminine counterpart Theoklia (Θεοκλία): G. Heuser, *Die Personennamen der Kopten* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 80; **P.Lond.Copt.** I 338; cf. Grk. Θεοκλεία and Θεοκλία: **BGU** XIV 2441.4.85 (II BC); XIV 2449 + 2450.3.55 (99–70 BC); **P.Lond.** VI 1926.22 (mid IV).

4–5 ΛἈΜΤΑΝ | ΜΑΧ This is the Fayoumic form of the Sahidic Λ glGet ΜΜΟΧ, which is quite common in Sahidic epitaphs. For a Fayoumic example, cf. **SB Kopt.** I 757.1–2: MINΑ ΛἈΜΤΑΝ ΜΑΧ.

407
The correct spelling is ⲯⲧⲟⲩ and this seems to be a case of metathesis due to a scribal error. One should note that in SB Kopt. IV 2098, which is also from the Fayoum, the spelling in l. 7 is ⲯⲧⲟⲩ for ⲯⲧⲟⲩ.

The common spelling of the month Tybi in Fayoumic is ⲧⲟⲓⲥ. The use of cn-, which is an attested form in both Sahidic and Fayoum, is not very common in dating formula of the kind we have here although it is attested: SB Kopt. IV 2096.5–6 (Fayoum) as well as Epitaph II presented hereafter l. 8. Far more common is the use of “indiction” (year), which is almost certainly being implied here with reference to “year 5” [of the indiction].

Given the amount of space in the lacuna the reading ⲏⲱⲡⲧⲡⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ seems better than ⲏⲱⲟⲩⲧⲡⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ (ⲏⲱ ⲑⲟⲩⲡⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ) even though the latter is far more common. ⲏⲱⲡⲧⲷⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ without the indefinite article is attested in SB Kopt. I 765.6–7; IV 1904.2; 1970.13.

The spelling is either ⲱⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ or simply ⲱⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ; both spellings are widely attested. I have opted for ⲱⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧⲧ in order to fill the lacuna at the beginning of the line.

II. EPICTAPH FOR A PAPA PAUL

This second epitaph bears the Kom Aushim inv. no. 503 (6). The stele is made of limestone. The top of the epitaph is broken off leaving only seven lines of text. The stele lacks any decoration and the extant lines are mostly bilinear and contain anywhere from four to seven letters per line with an average line height of 3.1 cm. Some of the inscribed letters still contain traces of black paint. The letter forms are mostly upright and regular and lack much ornamentation although the cross bar on the tau contains decorative roundels and the upper stoke of the lambda contains a loop. Probably the most unusually formed letter in the whole inscription is the alpha that is almost written on its side (e.g. Ⲡ but rotated more to the right) instead of the more upright form (e.g. A) (7). Despite the appearance of the alpha this form of alpha is attested in other Coptic epitaphs from the Fayoum even if the rotation in these epitaphs is not as pronounced (8).

The top of the inscription is broken off but unlike the preceding inscription, in the present case the reconstruction is more tentative; furthermore, it cannot be determined how much text is lost before the first extant line. On the first line of legible text there is an epsilon followed by the bottom half of a vertical stoke followed by a lacuna that could accommodate two, or maybe three letters, then

(6) The catalogue records at the Kom Aushim magazine for this artefact are very terse but do report that it was acquired in 1974.


a horizontal leg of a letter at the end of the line. Probably the best solution is to take the final horizontal stroke at the end of the first extant line of text as a chi and the eta that follows as belonging to the same word; an obvious reading that emerges is υγχη. The epsilon at the beginning of the line should then be taken as the preposition. The well-attested Coptic epitaph formula that then emerges for the opening lines is … † ΜΤΑΝ (Sahidic ΜΤΩΝ) ἑτεγυχη . . . (see n. 1–3 below).

The text of the inscription is fairly straightforward even if the name “Paul” that appears in ll. 3–4 is spelled παογχε (see n. 2–4) and is a rather uncommon form, which is found in Fayoumic documents, and the spelling of the month Pharmouthi in ll. 5–6 as παογγη (see n. 5–6) is otherwise unattested. In ll. 5–6 there is an error on the inscription as the inscriber spelled out the number “ten” and then wrote the number nineteen (ἰο̣).

The inscription concludes with a reference to “year 9” and as with the previous inscription should probably be taken to refer to the indiction year even if it is not explicitly stated.

Kom Aushim inv. no. 503
24.5 (H) × 21.5 × (W) × 7.0 cm (D)
Fayoum

[† ΜΤΑΝ]
ἐτ[εγυχη]

5 ἐν παογγη

“… give rest to the soul of papa Paoule, on day ten (sic), 19th of Pamouti (Pharmouthi) of year 9.”

1–3 [† ΜΤΑΝ] ἑτεγυχη This reconstruction best fits the extant text at the beginning of the inscription and is a well-attested funerary formula: SB Kopt. I 430.3–4; 484.1–3; 603.5–6; 608.9–10, etc. (see also B. TUDOR, Christian Funerary Stelae [n. 2], pp. 181–185). Often when this phrase occurs it is preceded by additional text wherein “God,” “The Lord,” “The Lord God,” Jesus Christ,” or “The Holy Spirit,” is invoked. Therefore, it seems most likely that there was text that preceded this phrase on the inscription.

2–4 ΜΠΑΝΙΑ ΠΑΟΓΧΕ The name here is Paul, although it is unusually spelled. The most common form in Coptic is παγχος followed by παγχε. As the name is presently
spelled it is attested in *BKU* III 352; *CPR* IV 67; *P.Lond.Copt.* I 1235; *SB Kopt.* III 1268.6, all documents written in Fayoumic dialect. On the use of the title papa(s) see T. DERDA and E. WIPSZYCKA, “L’emploi des titres abba, apa et papas dans l’Égypte byzantine,” *JJP* 24 (1994), pp. 23–27.

5–6 ⲙⲧⲡⲧⲡ ⲡⲡⲧⲧ It appears that the inscriber initially intended to spell out the date in full but after writing the first element realized that there would maybe not be enough room and so gave the standard numeric abbreviation with the supralinear stroke but did not attempt to correct the inscription by crossing out or effacing the reference to “ten” (ll. 5–6, ⲡⲡⲧⲧ).

6–7 ⲙⲡⲧⲡⲧⲧ† The month of Pharmouthi (ⲡⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ) is clearly being referenced notwithstanding the unusual spelling for which I could not find a parallel; the loss of the ṓ is perhaps just a mistake.

7–8 ⲟⲧⲧⲡ ⲡⲧⲧⲡ The reference to “year 9” should be taken to refer to the indiction year. See n. 6–7 of previous inscription.

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410
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Fig. 1. — Kom Aushim magazine, inv. no. 323 (40 %)

Fig. 2. — Kom Aushim magazine, inv. no. 503 (50 %)