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Dated Coptic Papyri from the Pre-Conquest Period

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A FORGOTTEN COPTIC INSCRIPTION FROM THE MONASTERY OF
EPIPHANIUS: SOME REMARKS ON DATED COPTIC DOCUMENTS
FROM THE PRE-CONQUEST PERIOD

In the excavation report of the monastery of Epiphanius¹ there is an interesting inscription² which runs as follows:

1	ΖΗΡΑΝ ΝΤΙΔΡΙΑΣ ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ ΠΡΕΤ-	In the name of the holy, uncreated ^a Trinity,
2	ΤΑΜΚΟΣ ΔΗ ΠΕΩΤ ΜΗΠΩΗΡΕ Π-	the Father and the Son and
3	ΠΕΠΝΑΥ ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ ΠΗΤΕΝΧΛΕΙΣ	the Holy Ghost and Our Lady
4	ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΙΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ ΤΗΝΕΤΟΥ-	the holy Mary, the Virgin. In the reign ^b
5	ΤΕΡΟ ΠΗΘΕΙΠΑΔΙΑ ΝΠΕ ΠΧΛΕΙΣ	and the consulate ^c of our lord the
6	ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ ΦΟΥΚΑ ΠΙΣΗ-	most sacred Phocas, the
7	ΠΕΙΩΝ ΕΤΣΩΤΗ ΛΥΩ	eternal ^d Augustus and
8	ΕΤΑΜΑΣΤΕ ΖΗΤΕΜΕΣ-	emperor ^e in the eighth
9	ΩΜΟΥΝΕ ΝΡΑΜΠΕ Ν-	year and in the
10	ΤΜΕΣΜΗΤΣΝΑΥΟΥΣ	twelfth
11	ΠΡΑΜΠΕ ΝΠΚΥΚΛΟΣ ΔΝΟΚ	year of the cycle ^f . I (am)
12	ΚΑΜΕ ΠΩΝΠΑΥΛΟΣ ΠΡΩΜΗ-	Kame, the son of Paul, the man of
13	ΧΗΜΕ ΖΗΠΝΟΜΟΣ ΝΕΡΜΑΝΤ	Jeme, in the nome of Ermont.

(a) An unusual locution: cf. **ΡΕΥΤΑΜΙΟ** and **ΝΤΑΥΤΑΜΙΟΝ ΔΗ** (i.e. οὐ ποιηθείς) in the Creed (e.g. Rossi I ii 62) (b) read ? **ΤΜΗΤΕΡΟ** (c) the Copt must have intended **ΝΝ** either for **Ν-**, τῆς ὑπατείας, or for **ΜΝ-** και ὑπατείας [in view of Greek regnal formulas, the latter solution seems more likely] (d) lit. "who is in the αἰών" (e) lit. "who heareth and ruleth," the first being due to confusion of sound between αὐγουστος and some form of ἀκούειν, perhaps ἀκουστός; the other being comparable with **ΝΕΝΧΙΣΟΟΥΣ ΕΤΑΜΑΣΤΕ** KRU 93.38; P. Lond. IV 1565.27 (f) taking κύκλος as equivalent to "indiction"; cf. CPR IV 50.2 [it is remarkable that in Greek papyri κύκλος = ἰνδικτιῶν is not listed in PrWB, KAW].

¹ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition. The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, I: The archaeological material*, by H.E. WINLOCK; *The literary material*, by W.E. CRUM, New York 1926 (Repr. Milano 1977).

² At p. 11-12.

The editors note that this text is interesting for various reasons: it is dated (in the last year of Phocas' eight years' reign, 609/610, corresponding to the 12th year of the indiction [on this "correspondence" see below]), and it shows an attempt to translate into Coptic the Greek terms of the imperial titulature. This attempt is called by them: "unique and very incompetent", but the latter qualification seems too strong. An attempt to imitate the style into Greek yields the following formula: Βασιλείας καὶ (?) ὑπατείας τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου ἡμῶν δεσπότη (Φλ.) Φωκᾶ τοῦ αἰωνίου αὐγούστου καὶ αὐτοκράτορος ἔτους η, ἔτους τοῦ κύκλου ιβ. It is noted that εὐσεβεστάτος seems more likely than θεϊότατος to have been the original of ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲗⲁⲃ for Phocas' epithet.

Unfortunately, this inscription has been overlooked in recent work on invocations and regnal titulatures found in Greek and Coptic documents from late Byzantine Egypt. The invocation formula may be compared with the formulas found in Greek documents from the reign of the emperor Phocas, in which the Holy Trinity is invoked. Cf. for these R.S. BAGNALL-K.A. WORP, *Christian Invocations in the Papyri*, Cde 56 (1981) 112-131; 362-65, esp. pp. 118-9. We have no documents from the Theban region dating from the reign of Phocas, but in general it may be remarked that the Holy Trinity is always called ὁμοούσιος, ζωοποιός, ἄχραντος; an epithet οὐ ποιηθεῖσα is not -- yet -- found in Greek invocations. Furthermore, it is remarkable that in the invocation in the Theban inscription the Virgin Mary is invoked; in Greek inscriptions from the reign of Phocas an invocation of Mary, along with an invocation of the Holy Ghost, is found thus far only in documents coming from the Fayum and from Herakleopolis (cf. also the invocation found in *Sphinx* 10 [1906] 2 and the remarks on this papyrus in *CdE* 56 [1981] 364 n. 2 [I am not aware of the publication of the re-edition of *P.Alex. inv. 647* announced over there; cfr. L.S.B. MACCOULL, *Coptic Documentary Papyri in the Greco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, Aegyptus* 66 [1986] 187-195, esp. 193]).

The regnal formula may be compared with R.S. BAGNALL-K.A. WORP, *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt*, Chico 1979, Chapt. VII (pp. 66-67), form. 3. This formula, however, lacks the element καὶ ὑπατείας and is attested until now only in papyri from the Arsinoite Nome (in *BGU* I 3 [A.D. 605] one finds after the regnal formula a reference to the second year of Phocas' postconsulate).

It should be noted that the editors of the inscription are wrong in sug-

gesting that there is a correspondence between the regnal and the consular year of Phocas, year 8, and the indiction, year 12. Phocas' regnal year 8 ran from 27.xi.609 until 5.x.610 (when Heraclius took over) and his 8th consular year fell in A.D. 610; these elements point to a date for the inscription in A.D. 610. Indiction 12, however, would have run in Upper Egypt from 1.v.608 until 30.iv.609 (cf. R.S. BAGNALL-K.A. Worp, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, 25-26, 68, 92). Consequently, there is no correspondence of the indiction date and the date indicated by the regnal and the consular year (cf. for similar conflicts under Phocas the remarks in *BASP* 17 [1980] 24).

It should also be noted that this inscription apparently escaped to the attention of W.C. TILL, *Zur Datierung und Prosopographie der koptischen Urkunden aus Theben*, Wien 1962 (= Sb. Akad. Wien, 240, 1), who lists (p. 118) a Kame, son of Paul, occurring in *OMH* 37.8; it does not seem excluded that this is in fact the same man as the person mentioned in this inscription.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, this Coptic inscription is indeed unique in its being dated after the reign of a Byzantine emperor. In general I am aware of only relatively few Coptic documents which are exactly datable to the period before A.D. 641, because they refer -- sometimes in an indirect way -- to Rulers of Egypt. I have collected the following texts (all written on papyrus):

- P. Alex. inv. 698, edited by L.S.B. MACCOULL, *A Coptic Cession of Land by Dioscorus of Aphrodito: Alexandria meets Cairo*, in *Acts of the 2nd Internat. Congr. of Coptic Studies*, Roma 22-26 September 1980, ed. by T. ORLANDI & F. WISSE, Roma 1985, 159-166. The text dates from A.D. 4.xi.569; it seems to be our earliest Coptic documentary papyrus.
- CPR II 6 = IV 90: A.D. 596. The text mentions an oath formula mentioning the emperor Mauricius and a date by the indiction, cf. E. SEIDL, *Der Eid im römisch-ägyptischen Provinzialrecht*, II (München 1935), 11 n. 6 (= *MBPAR* 24).
- CPR IV 23: A.D. 608 (cf. *RFBE* 68, form. 2; the Greek dating part was also printed in *SB* I 5287).

- CPR IV 48 = II 5: A.D. 625 (cf. E. SEIDL, *op. cit.*, 12 n. 3)
 KRU 77 : A.D. 634 (Greek dating part also in SB I 4319; on this text see M. KRAUSE, *MDAIK* 25 [1969] 57, 60ff.).
 ST 436 : A.D. 619 or 634 (cf. W.C. TILL, *op. cit.*, 46; the regnal formula mentioning the emperor Heraclius does not mention his regnal year; a date to A.D. 619 may seem less likely in view of the start of the Persian rule over Egypt [cf. the remarks in *CdE* 56(1981) 120 n. 4]).

I have not been able to find a publication of 2 Coptic (?) texts apparently also dated after Heraclius; for these cf. *The Monastery of Epiphanius*, I 100 n. 3.

Of course, the number of datable texts can be augmented considerably by adding those texts whose date rests upon considerations of prosopography³; even so, it is remarkable how few exactly dated Coptic legal documents written before the Arabs conquered Egypt ca. 640 have come down to us, especially if one compares the much greater number of such exactly dated legal texts in Greek, which date from the last decades of Byzantine rule over Egypt. It may be, of course, that accidental factors are at work and that future publications of Coptic documents will draw the balance more even⁴. For the moment, however, one cannot escape the

³ For texts dated before A.D. 641 on the basis of prosopographical considerations cf., e.g., TILL, *op. cit.*, 46 on ST 48; p. 52 on the bishop Abraham (cf. also *Rd'E* 24 [1972] 101 ff.); p. 85 on the anachorete Epiphanius; p. 168 on the bishop Pesynthios. For bibliography on Epiphanius and Pesynthios cf. *Mon. Epiphanius* I 209 ff. and cf. A. BUTLER, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the last thirty years of the Roman dominion*, 2nd ed. rev. by P.M. Fraser [Oxford 1978], xlviii-xlix; cf. also *ZPE* 49 (1982), 94 on BM 445 and ST 48. For a Coptic letter apparently dating from the period A.D. 619-629 (the coming of the Persians is referred to) cf. VC 67 (cf. also *Mon. Epiphanius* I 98-103). For an ostrakon from Torino exactly datable by a solar eclipse mentioned in it see W.E. CRUM, *CO*, p. xvi n. 3. It is regrettable that no exactly dated documentary papyri in Coptic from before A.D. 641 are mentioned by E.B. ALLEN, *Available Coptic Texts involving Dates*, in: *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum*, Boston 1950 (= *Bulletin of the Byzantine Institute*, II), 2-33.

⁴ For a recent survey of Coptic studies cf. M. KRAUSE, *Koptologie und Papyrologie*, in: *Atti del XVII Congresso internazionale di Papirologia*, II (Napoli 1984), 735-754.

conclusion that the average Egyptian in the period before the Arab Conquest of Egypt preferred to have a legal transaction recorded in Greek rather than in Coptic, notwithstanding the fact that most inhabitants of Egypt were Copts and that at this period most notaries will have been more or less fluent in either language⁵.

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⁵ Cf. A. STEINWENTER, *Das Recht der koptischen Urkunden*, München 1955 (= HAW X.4.2), 10-11.