

**Coptic Cultural Elements  
In  
Nubian Christian Beliefs**

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## Coptic Cultural Elements in Nubian Christian Beliefs

The main purpose of this research is concerned with an investigation of the Nubian religious and funerary thoughts which were directly influenced by local Coptic cultural traditions.

In the numerous studies which were devoted to the evaluation of the christianization of Nubia,<sup>(1)</sup> the rapid spread of the new faith in these sites is directly affected by the Nubian – Byzantine relations particularly after the final closing of Isis Temple at Philae between A.D. 530 – 543.<sup>(2)</sup> There are, however, sufficient evidences supporting the present suggestion that the conversion of many Nubian congregations into Christianity depends chiefly on a special religious Coptic – Nubian communication.

On the one hand, it is possible to suggest that Pharaonic temples in Lower Nubia (Fig. 1) have been deserted or converted into small churches before<sup>(3)</sup> the middle of the sixth century, when, according to

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(1) M.A. Griffith, Christianity in Nubia, in Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology (University of Liverpool), XIII, 1926, pp. 50-51; L.P. Kirwan, Studies in the Later History of Nubia, op.cit., XXII (Reprinted in 1967), p. 97; C.T. Gardberg, Late Nubian Sites (Churches and Settlements) in "The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia", VII, Helsinki, 1970, pp. 14f.; M. Krause, Zur Kircher und Theologiegeschichte Nubiens (Neue Quellen und Probleme) in E. Dinkler (Hrsg.), Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit, Reclinghausen, 1970, S. 74f.; K. Michalowski, Open Problems of Nubian Art and Culture in the Light of the Discoveries at Faras, op.cit., pp. 13f.; W.Y. Adams, Nubia, Corridor to Africa, London, 1977, p. 440; M. Krause, Nubien und Ägypten in christlichen Zeit, in Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients, XIII, Ägypten und Kush – Berlin, 1977, S. 245; P.M. Gartkiewicz, An Introduction to the History of Nubian Church Architecture, in Nubia Christiana, I, Warszawa, 1982, pp. 43f.; J.M. Plumely, New Evidences on Christian Nubia in the Light of Recent Excavations, op.cit., pp. 15f.

(2) L.P. Kirwan, op.cit., p. 97; K. Michalowski, op.cit., pp. 13f.

(3) Like the temples of Bigh, el-Hesah, Dabod, Tiafe, Bet el-Wali, Augustus, Dendur, Gerf Hussein, Dakka, Ofedunia, Wadi el Sebou'a, Amada, Derr, Abu'wda, Aksha, Hatshepsut, and Buhen, U. Monneret de Villard, La Nubia Medioevale, I, Cairo, 1935, pp. 11-172; W.Y. Adams, Architectural Evolution of the Nubian Church, 500-1400, in The Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, IV, 1965, pp. 126-130.



A progressive Christian activity is often thought to have been expanded in the area of the First Cataract by Coptic bishops or monks. Archaeological evidence shows that these converted temples could hardly answer to the liturgical requirements of the Nubian congregations whose small villages were scattered here and there on the Nile Valley.

The investigation of various historical documents of the conversion of Nubia to Christianity, and different cultural relics, provide a vast source of knowledge concerning the way in which Coptic cultural elements reached many Lower Nubian Christian settlements.

The hypothesis here rejected assumes that the conversion of Nubia to Christianity, which is officially determined by an imperial edict, enabled Byzantine culture with its stylistic traditions to have direct Byzantine influences on Nubian Christian architectural and artistic works.

According to Byzantine Christian documents, the evangelization of Nubia was undertaken in the sixth century by the great Byzantine Emperor Justinian<sup>(5)</sup> who ordered both the final closing of the Temple of Isis at Philae, and the removal of its pagan statues to Constantinople. A short time later, the temple was rededicated as the Church of St. Stephen.<sup>(6)</sup> This Christian missionary activity in Lower Nubia is often suggested to have been accompanied by the adoption of the Byzantine church construction with its artistic traditions.

However, the probability of a Coptic Christian activity in some neighbouring Nubian settlements, often before the official Christianization of Nubia, cannot be excluded for various considerations.

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(5) As stated by the contemporary bishop John of Ephesus, the effort of the Christianization of Nubia was ascribed to Justinian's influential wife Theodora who encouraged her husband to maintain the proposal of the conversion of the inhabitants of the powerful Nubian Kingdom of Nobatia which was originally, suggested by the able priest Julian who had been a companion of Theodosius the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, W.Y. Adams, *Nubia*, p. 441. The building of the churches of St. Victor and of the Blessed Mary at Aswan, and the monastery of St. Simeon on the west bank of the Nile, shows the importance of this site in developing local Coptic rites in Nubian Christian beliefs.

(6) W.Y. Adams, *op.cit.*, p. 440.

Although the Christianization of Nubia was decided by an imperial edict, the actual evangelization was undertaken and blessed by the patriarch of the Copts who had chosen the Monophysite bishop Julian who could persuade the Nubian king of Nobatia and his courtiers to be baptized on the Coptic Monophysite creed. This often justifies the assumption that the Nubians embraced the Monophysite faith of Egypt and not the orthodox faith of Constantinople.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the light of modern studies and archaeological documents, it now seems beyond doubt, that the introduction of Christianity in Nubia took place long before this area adopted the new faith officially.<sup>(8)</sup> Both U. Wilcken and W. Spiegelberg, proved that churches already stood on the Island of Philae in 425-450. According to a monkish tale Christianity had some footing there as early as the fourth century, when one of its followers contrived by stratagem to abolish the cult of the sacred hawk.<sup>(9)</sup>

In his analysis of Nubian cultural stages W.Y. Adams suggested that the civilization of the so called Transitional Stage – i.e. the stage preceding the Christian spread in Nubia-represents a synthesis of Meroitic, Egyptian – Byzantine and Southern Influences. He added that, by the beginning of the Christian period, there was a Homogenous culture and population over the whole Nubia.<sup>(10)</sup> The investigation of the Christian cultural relics of the Lower Nubian settlements of Meinarti and Faras encouraged M. Krause to assume that Christianity came from Egypt to Nubia in the fourth and fifth century.<sup>(11)</sup> Since the beginning of the sixth century some Christian Nubians settled in the monasteries of Cellia and practiced Coptic monastic rites.<sup>(12)</sup>

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(7) M.A. Griffith, *op.cit.*, 51 note (6). On this topic M. Krause referred to the active role played by Theophilus, the Monophysite bishop of Philae who accompanied Julian in this evangelical mission in Lower Nubia. He added that the Nubian church was Monophysite from the beginning to the end, *Zur Kirchen und Theologiegeschichte Nubiens (Nune Quellen und Probleme)* in E. Dinkler, *op.cit.*, S. 73 ff.

(8) K. Michalowski, *Open Problems of Nubian Art and Culture in the Light of the Discoveries at Faras*, in E. Dinkler, *op.cit.*, p. 11f.

(9) M.A. Griffith, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

(10) *Architectural Evolution*, pp. 87ff.; Sudan Antiquities Service Excavations at Meinarti, in *Kush* XIII, 1965, p. 150; C.T. Gardberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 14ff.

(11) In a mention to Macarius the monk who possibly travelled to Nubia in a monastic expedition in 390, *op.cit.*, p. 75f.

(12) M. Krause, *Nubien und Ägypten*, S. 245.

As many architectural studies confirm, Lower Nubian church construction of the period between the middle of the sixth and the middle of the ninth century is directly influenced by a distinguished Coptic church type.<sup>(13)</sup>

On the basis of archaeological evidence W.Y. Adams made a comprehensive analysis of both the different types of Nubian churches with their dates, and the urban settlements with their reciprocal cultural connections.<sup>(14)</sup>

Depending on his results, Adams confirmed the fact that the earliest Nubian churches were indistinguishable from those of Egypt, and were probably built by Egyptian architects.<sup>(15)</sup> However, the information's of how Coptic church construction reached Nubian Christian sites had not been evolutionary investigated.

The present assumption that Nubian church construction derived its basic architectural elements from two distinguished Coptic church designs rather than from a contemporaneous Byzantine church type, depends on the architectural affinity between Lower Nubian churches and those of the area of the First Cataract which is regarded as the circle of communication through which the Copts had transmitted their Monophysite cult to Nubian Christian sites.

In dealing with what could be the earliest church form in Lower Nubia, W.Y. Adams presented two buildings in the Christian towns of Karanog and Abd el Qadir as the oldest churches which might have

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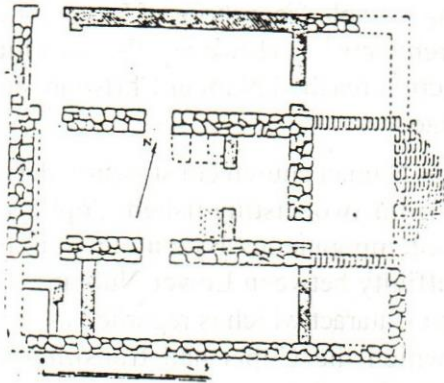
(13) Since the beginning of this century. Nubian churches with their architectural forms and functional designs were successively investigated by a number of scholars like G.S. Mileham, Churches in Lower Nubia, Philadelphia, 1910; S. Clarke, Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley, Oxford, 1912; Monneret, U. de Villard, La Nubia Mediaeval, I-II, Le Caire, 1935; III-IV, le Caire, 1957; and G. Trigger, History and Settlement in Lower Nubia, Yale Univ. Publ. in Anthropology 69. New Haven, 1965. Miscellaneous development were presented by F.L. Griffith (A selection of his major works on this topic was gathered in W. Kammerer, A Coptic Bibliography, Michigan, 1950); K. Michalowski, Faras, Fouilles Polonaises 1961, I, Warszawa, 1962; Faras, Fouilles Polonaises 1961 - 1962, II, Warszawa, 1965; Faras, Die Kathedrale aus dem Wustensand, Zurich, Köln, 1967, and others.

(14) An Introductory Classification of Christian Nubian Pottery' in Kush - Journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service, Khartoum, X, 1962, "The Archaeological Survey on the West Bank of the Nile Third Season 1961 - 62" with Nordström, Hans-Ake, in Kush XI, 1963, "Sudan Antiquities Service Excavations in Nubia Fourth Season, 1962-63, in Kush XII, 1964, Architectural Evolution, note (3); "Sudan Antiquities Service Excavations at Meinarti" in Kush XIII, 1965; "Post-Pharaonic Nubia in the Light of Archaeology" III, in J.E.A., 52, 1966; The Vintage of Nubia, in Kush, XIV, 1966.

(15) Nubia, Corridor to Africa, p. 474.

been built and used by the earliest Nubian Christians who settled in these two sites before the official Christianization of Nubia.<sup>(16)</sup>

In his investigation of the houses of Karanog, C.L. Woolley regarded this building (Fig. 2) as a house whose plan differed very greatly from all the others excavated. He observed also, that this house had a certain resemblance to that of a Coptic church.<sup>(17)</sup> Monneret de Villard presented it as a real church which could be dated to the beginning of the sixth century or somewhat later.<sup>(18)</sup>



The building of Abd el Qadir (near the Second Cataract : Fig. 1) is regarded by Adams as a small church or a Christian chapel which could be dated to the middle of the sixth century.<sup>(19)</sup>

**Fig. 2 :** The Church of Karanog, the beginning of the 6th cen. ?

In examining these two small churches of Karanog and Abd el-Qadir, one can easily realize their simple designs which can be typologically compared with the Coptic monastic<sup>(20)</sup> church form of the late fourth and the beginning of the fifth century. In this Coptic church

(16) *Architectural Evolution*, pp. 101f.

(17) Karanog The Town, Eckley B. Coxe *Junior Expedition to Nubia*, V, The University Museum Philadelphia, 1911; p. 40.

(18) *op.cit.*, Fig. 89.

(19) *op.cit.*, p. 101.

(20) The majority of these churches, which could be dated to the second half of the fourth century, were erected in monasteries or in deserted places, like those of the monastic settlement of Cellia, R. Casser, *Recherches Suisses d'Archéologie Copte*, III, tome 2, *Kellia*, Genève, 1977; and of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna at Western Thebes, U. Monneret de Villard, *les Couvents près de Sohâge- Deyr el-Abiad el Deyr el-Ahmar - II*, Milan, 1926; Fig. 137.



form; the aisled nave leads directly to the three semi-square rooms of the apses. The earliest Coptic church of this type is that of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna which may be dated to the late fourth century (Fig. 3)

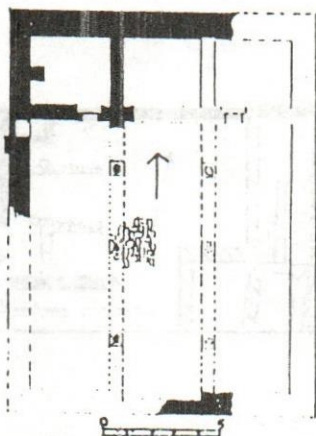


Fig. 3 : The Church of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna : late fourth century.

According to P. Grossmann,<sup>(21)</sup> examples of this church form were built in different site of the area of the First Cataract during the fifth century. He also suggested that the dome, which seems to have been erected over the central hall of the churches of Elephantine and Philae, (Fig. 4-5), characterized various Coptic buildings of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>(22)</sup>

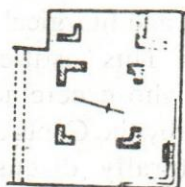
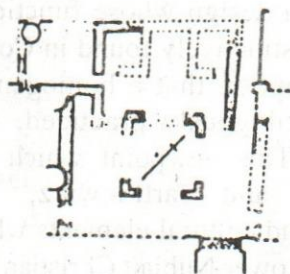


Fig. 4 : The Church of Elephantine Fig. 5 : The Church of Philae



Of the architectural alterations which seem to have been functionally and ornamentally required in Coptic church construction of the fifth century there is the tradition of preparing the central room of the apse to be terminated in a half-circular wall.

(21) Elephantine II, Kirche und spätantike Hausenlagen in Chnumtempelhof, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen, 25, Mainz, 1980, S. 75-85, Abb. 3.

(22) ibid., S. 85.

The simple design of this church type, which distinguished the sixth-century churches of Philae and the Temple of Arsnuphis (Fig. 6-7), characterized many Lower Nubian churches of the seventh century.<sup>(23)</sup>

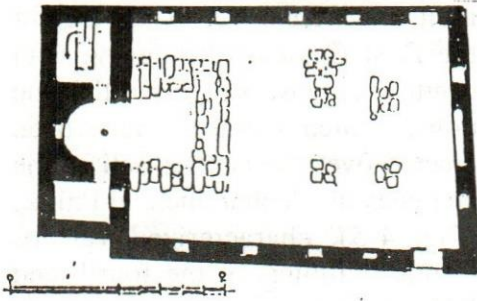


Fig.6 : Church of Philae

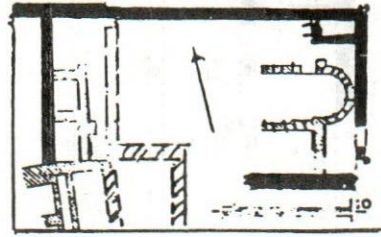


Fig.7 : Church of the Temple of Arsnuphis

In dealing with the internal plan of Lower Nubian churches, one can easily realize that they embody a common design whose functional divisions and liturgical arrangements are distinctively found in Coptic churches. This justifies the present assumption that a homogenous liturgy, whose ceremonial rites were analogously practiced, was followed by the Copts and Lower Nubians. This viewpoint, which was architecturally discussed by Adams<sup>(24)</sup> and Gartkiewicz,<sup>(25)</sup> is investigated here through certain stylistic and cultural elements which were similarly adopted in the Egyptian and Lower Nubian Christian arts and funerary thoughts.

On this topic, however, it is worthy to draw attention to what L. Török considered Lower Nubian elements in the Coptic art of Upper

(23) According to W.Y. Adams, these churches fall into two types, i.e. Type 1b which is distinguished as Philae Type, and Type 2 characterizing the early definitely known churches of Lower Nubia, *Architectural Evolution*, pp. 105ff.

(24) *op.cit.*, 92f.

(25) *op.cit.*, 51f.

Egypt, which fundamentally developed through an independent Nubian culture.<sup>(26)</sup>

In his interpretation of this viewpoint, Török presented distinguished specimens of Coptic sculptures like the reliefs of the Equestrian Horus, Thot, antelopes and palm-trees which were carved on window lattices, and the figures of lions – which were frequently represented as gate guarding lions –, in addition to certain capitals which were ornamented with Egyptian uraeus.

The present argument is not basically concerned with the discussion of the Pharaonic and local Coptic origins of these Lower Nubian sculptures which were confirmed in a number of general studies. However, it is necessary to take notice of Török's weak evidences which did not enable him to avoid the repetition of certain stylistic terms like "Coptic and Nubian Parallels – or relations" which are fundamental in evaluating the reciprocal affinities between Egypt and Lower Nubia.

The practical style, which characterizes Coptic human images, is obviously shown in Lower Nubian drawings representing apostles (Fig. 8). In both arts, the unconsciousness of the beauty grace of iconographical proportions is clearly observed in individual forms which look to be more stereotyped than as hand depicted.

In his comment on a small painting on wood which was found in the rubbish filling of the tribune of the Southern Church of Buhen (Fig. 9) G.S. Mileham referred to the influence of Coptic art through which Lower Nubian seated figures were stylistically produced. He added that the seats in the tribune of Coptic churches attest the orthodoxy of the seated posture in church dignitaries, as in this example.<sup>(27)</sup>

From the iconographic point of view, Coptic and Lower Nubian phenomena of art with their Christian data are suggested to have been influenced by similar Byzantine representation. Nevertheless, Coptic

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(26) Instead of using the familiar term "Nubian" which determines the Christian culture of the late Meroitic period in Lower Nubia, L Török presented his study with the title (Late Meroitic Elements in the Coptic art of Upper Egypt, in *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica*, XXIII, 1971; 167ff), to avoid the opinions of scholars regarding the Coptic iconographical origins of these Lower Nubian sculptures.

(27) *Churches in Lower Nubia*, p. 50.

artistic traditions characteristically enriched or theoretically inspired – Lower Nubian artistic subjects among which the representations of St. Mercurius descending from heaven and killing Julian the Apostate attracted the attention of many Coptic and Nubian art historians.



**Fig. 8 :** Six apostles stand on one side of Christ : The Citadel Church of Faras.

Two wall paintings representing St. Mercurius were discovered at Faras by G.S. Mileham (Fig. 10), and K. Michalowski (Fig. 11).

Depending on the investigation of other Lower Nubian representations of St. Mercurius, E. Lucchesi-Palli<sup>(28)</sup> suggested the eighth century as the date of the depiction of these two wall paintings of Faras which also show distinctive iconographic Parallels to the Coptic pen drawing figure of St. Mercurius which is now among the Vatican codex (Fig. 12).



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

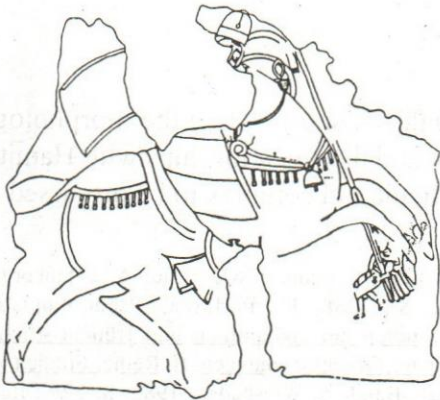


Fig. 11.



Fig. 12

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(28) Some Parallels to the Figure of St. Mercurius at Faras, in J.M. Plumeley, Nubian Studies – Proceedings of the Symposium for Nubian Studies Cambridge 1978 – Warminster, 1982; pp. 162ff.

However Lucchesi-Palli's treatment of the iconographic similarity characterizing these representations of St. Mercurius depended on the classification of several figures of warrior on horseback which were discovered in Egypt and Lower Nubia.

As many scholars have stated,<sup>(29)</sup> representations of the "Cavalier Saint", which were familiar in Coptic art since the late fifth century, must have been iconographically influenced by the popular figures of the Egyptian – Roman and Nubian divine and military cavaliers which were depicted on the walls of many Pharaonic temples in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia. This justifies the present assumption that their adoption in Lower Nubian Christian art is not new.

Coptic artistic traditions of presenting round human faces and geometrical outlines for individual forms, which are plainly shown in the Coptic figure of St. Mercurius of the Vatican codex, can be easily recognized in the two representations of St. Mercurius of Faras. In addition to amulets which are fastened on the trapping, the movements of the Saints and their horses are similar in the Coptic and Lower Nubian figures.

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In dealing with Old Nubian dialects, subject, like the morphology and vocalization of their vocabulary and their relationships with Hamitic and Semitic languages, are still difficult and complex to be discussed in detailed and final studies.<sup>(30)</sup>

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(29) J. Beckwith, Coptic Sculpture 300 – 1300, London, 1963, p. 50; A. Effenberger, Koptische Kunst, Leipzig, 1974, S. 208f, K. Parlasca, Pseudokoptische "Reiterheilige", in G. Koch, (Hrsg.) Studien zur spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst und Kultur des Orients, in Göttinger Orientforschungen, II, Reihe, Studien zur spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst, Band 6, Wiesbaden, 1982, S. 22f Tafeln, XI f.

(30) Amongst the few works which discussed meanings and etymologies of the principal dialects of Old Nubian, i.e. the Dongolese Kenzi and Mahas, may be mentioned : H. Schäfer, Nubische Texte im Dialekte der Kunzi, Berlin 1917; U. Junker und H. Schäfer, Nubische Texte in Kenzi-Dialekt, II, Wien 1921; G. Von Massenbach, Nubische Texte im Dialekt der Kunzi und der Dongolawi, Wiesbaden 1962; C.H. Armbruster, Dongolese Nubian, A lexicon, Cambridge 1965; and M. Khalil, Wörterbuch der nubischen Sprache (mahas – Dialekt), 1997; In addition, the general dictionaries of G.M. Murray, An English-Nubian Comparative Dictionary, Oxford, 1932, and M. Badr, Sprichwörter der Nubier, kairo, 1978. Since the 2nd half of the last century, a group of works treated the various problems of the Old Nubian =

As an Arabic speaking Egyptologist who is acquainted with the modern Nubian Mahas dialect, the Late Dr. Mokhtal Khalil treated in his doctoral dissertation<sup>(31)</sup> the morphological and philological affinity between the Old Nubian<sup>(32)</sup> with its distinctive spread in many Lower Nubian Christian sites, and the ancient Egyptian language in its Coptic form.

An important aspect of this homogenous culture, namely the existence of educated Nubian classes<sup>(33)</sup> who were acquainted with the Coptic language in its Sa'idic dialect,<sup>(34)</sup> is discussed here in the light of various Coptic Sa'idic writings which were found in many Lower Nubian sites.<sup>(35)</sup>

The north wall of the chamber of the Northern Church at Faras is covered with Coptic texts. Of which ten lines over the door head and a lengthy inscription of about fifteen lines at a Lower level commemorating visitors to the church.<sup>(36)</sup> In his investigation of these Coptic texts W.E. Crum was able to decipher little beyond the fact that they begin with the formula  $\Lambda\text{N}\text{O}\text{K} \text{P}\text{E}\text{T}\text{P}$  ..... which could mean

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= syntax and employment, like, L. Reinische, Die Nubia-Sprache, Wien 1879; R. Lepsius, Nubische Grammatik, Berlin 1880; L. Reinisch, Die sprachliche Stellung des Nuba, Wien 1911; H. Abel, Die Verbalformen des abhängigen Satzes (Subjunktiv und Infinitive) im Nubischen, Heidelberg 1921; E. Zyhlarz, Grundzüge der nubischen Grammatik im christlichen Frühmittelalter (Altnubisch), Leipzig, 1928; M.M. Badr, Nubische Sprache, Kairo, 1955, C.H. Armbruster, Dongolische Nubian, A Grammar, Cambridge, 1960, F. Hintze, "Beobachtungen zur altnubischen Grammatik" I-V, Berlin und Warsaw 1971-1977.

(31) Studien zum Altnubischen, Nubische-Ägyptische Beziehungen, in Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXVII, Vol. 19, Frankfurt am Main, 1988.

(32) The Meroitic alphabets are derived from Egyptian demotic and hieroglyphic respectively, F. Hintze, The Meristic Period, in Africa in Antiquity, "The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan, The Brooklyn Museum, 1979, p. 93; F.W. Hinkel, Exodus from Nubia, Berlin, 1978, p. 28. However, Old Nubian was written in Coptic alphabet, and was used as the everyday language of Lower Nubia in the Medieval Period. J.H. Taylor, Egypt and Nubia, London, 1990, p. 67.

(33) Many Nubian tribes like the Irtjet Medja, Yam, Wawat and Kaau, were recognized by the Egyptian since the Old Kingdom, Urk, I, 101, 13-16. Meanwhile, the rulers of the Egyptian First Nome carried a significant title which often shows that they supervised certain officials who were concerned with the translation of the languages of these Nubian tribes, ibid, 123, 12; 131, 16.

(34) This assumption has in support the modern Arabic Nubians who could talk both Arabic and Nubian.

(35) Like Karanog, Faras, Kasr el-Wizz, Abdallah Nirqi, Abd el-Qader, Kasr Ibrim, etc.

(36) G.S. Mileham, op.cit., 29.

"I am who makes ..... and that the last three lines finish with the following words **ΜΗΝΑ ; ΨΕΝΟΥΘΟΣ ΑΡ ΜΑΝ ; ΥΕΙΣΟΥ ΜΟΝΑΧΩΣ ΒΦΩ**

Reference is here made to **ΨΕΝΟΥΘΟΣ** the archimandrite, the son (often the spiritual son) of **ΙΣΟΥ** the monk, and a date follows which appears to read 597 of the Martyrs (881 A.D.).<sup>(37)</sup>

Amongst the archaeological remains which were discovered in the Central Church of Abdallah Nirqi, there are a number of postherds and fragments of parchment with Coptic texts in the Sa<sup>c</sup>idic dialect.<sup>(38)</sup>

However, the most important among these remains is a rectangular stela with Coptic Sa<sup>c</sup>idic text (Fig. 13) showing a funerary formula typically engraved on similar Coptic tombstones which were found in Upper and Lower Egypt.<sup>(39)</sup>

The text on the stela contains the following : (1) **ΖΙΤῆ (ΤΕΠΡΟ)Ν** (2) **ΙΑΜ (Π)ΝΟΥΤΕ**  
 (3) **ΜΗΝΑῆΤΑϞΗ** (4) **ΤΟΝῆ(ΜΟ)Ϟῆ**  
 (5) **ΒΙΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ** (6) **Θ(ΒΟ)ΛΩΡΑΚΗ**  
 (7) **ΠΠΙΡΣ.....ΑΖῆ**  
 (8) **ΣΟΥϞΣΟ ΟΥ ΝΘ** (9) **ΟΟΥΤΙΝΑΤΕ**

It could be translated as "Through the Providence of God of the spirit he had entered into his rest, the blessed Theodoraka, the Presbyter {in the year ?} on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the month Thot, 15<sup>th</sup> Indication".

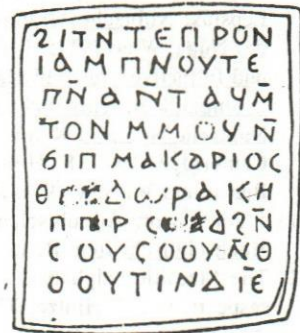


Fig. 13

(37) W.E. Crum had once suggested that the famous archimandrite Shenoute of the White Monastery was intended, and the writer could be the spiritual son of the bishop Jesu, *Ibid.*, 29. Another sixth or seventh-century text was found in the Southern Church of Faras, *ibid.*, 34.  
 (38) P. Van Moorsel, J. Jecquet and H. Schneider, *The Central Church of Abdallah Nirqi*, Leiden, 1975, pp. 20ff.  
 (39) These funerary stelae, which I hope I will investigate in a separate study, are preserved now in the National Museum of Nubia at Aswan, and the National Museum of al-Sharkiya.



Assuming that a typical Nubian opening formula on tombstones found from Kasr Ibrim to Ghazali,<sup>(40)</sup> one can realize to what extent Coptic funerary customs influenced these Lower Nubian sites whose graves also show other similar traditions which were familiar in Coptic cemeteries like the location of the village cemetery, the main forms of grave superstructures, and the analogous burial customs.



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(40) P. Van Moorsel, J. Jacquet and H. Schneider, op.cit., p. 25.

