

Coptic stelae from El-Salam School Museum

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Abstract

This article republishes two stelae from the El-Salam School museum collection at Asyut (Tiggart Library collection). Although the museum remains relatively unknown to scholars, it houses objects of considerable scholarly significance. While no documentation exists to confirm the exact provenance of these stelae, stylistic and epigraphic analysis suggests they likely originated from the Wadi Sarga and Bawit regions of Asyut, as evidenced by their distinctive artistic and textual features.

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1. Introduction

These two stelae are part of the collection of Tiggart Library in El-Salam school, formerly known as Asyut Mission College of the United Presbyterian Church of North America at Asyut. While previously published with translations, that publication did not include museum inventory numbers (Wagner & Coquin, 1971, pp. 170-172). The republication of these stelae represents a part of a series of publications devoted to the comprehensive documentation and critical reassessment of the museum's Coptic objects, both published and unpublished (Bayoumi, 2023, pp.19-32). Regrettably, findspot and circumstances of discovery are not recorded, and the museum register does not include any information about the provenance of these stelae. It is important to clarify that these collections housed in the museum derive from multiple sources. Some of them were discovered in the excavation by Blackman at Meir (Blackman, 1914, pp. 268-274), and another part of these by Sir Flinders Petrie (1907) at Deir Rifeh. Moreover, the well-known collectors in Asyut, Sami Gabra, and Sayed Pasha Khashaba donated additional items to the library before the revolution of 1952 A.D (Kamal, 1911 - 1915). After the revolution, the library provided its collection to the Antiquities Service. This library conserves amongst its collection a small group of Coptic objects, most of which have not been published yet; two of which will be republished here are classified as epitaphs in the register of the museum, namely: TL 366 and TL 367. The stelae have two register numerals: the older number written in English numerals within black ink, which could be the excavation number or its number on an old register, and the modern register number, which was added after 1991 A.D, with Arabic numerals in blue ink on the top of the stela. The collection's current register follows the latter numbering system.

2. Stela TL 366

The present stela is generally well-preserved. It has a conventional square form, made of marble, and its dimensions are 30 × 33 × 2.5 cm. The surface has been smoothed, and the back has been left uneven. The writing is very regular; the text is engraved. The first line of the texts has an engraved line under the cross and $\alpha\pi\alpha\alpha$, and it is interesting that this line extended into the first letter of $\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\pi$. The text is written in 8 lines in the Sahidic dialect with a single appearance of the Lycopolitan feature in l. 2 $\epsilon\kappa\alpha\rho\epsilon\iota\varsigma$. The first five lines are written in regular incised uncials, approximately 3.5 cm high, while the last three lines appear in reduced-size, inconsistent script. It mentions a group of four people (Papa Apollo, his brother Victor, and David) and their mother, but her name was not preserved.

The text started with an acclamation to Apa Anoup followed by the petition formula $\rho\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ (watch over), which demonstrates usage within supplicatory inscriptions pertaining to commemorate living persons rather than commemorative funerary contexts. These inscriptions, often placed on door lintels and other architectural elements, refer to residents of the monastery or the respective buildings. Such examples have been attested on architectural lintels from Bawit and Saqqara (Wietheger 1992, pp.157-159). Epigraphic evidence from Wadi Sarga documented a clear reference to a contemporary monastery inmate (P. Sarga 67).

The known documented texts containing the petition formula $\rho\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ on stelae from Wadi Sarga (P. Sarga 67, 68, 69, 70, 73), or which were attested on a cloth fragment from a burial site at Akhmim (Mallon 1948, p. 2872), likewise lack both date and mortuary formulae. Therefore, the absence of these essential funerary elements renders their identification as grave inscriptions problematic and uncertain.

Text

Limestone

Asyut (Wadi Sarga?)

TL 366 (Fig. 1)

6th-8th centuries A.D?

ⲫ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲁⲛⲟ-

Ϯⲡ: ⲉⲕⲁⲣⲟ-

ⲉⲓⲥ ⲉ ⲡⲡⲁⲡⲁ

ⲁⲡⲓⲘ ⲙⲎ

5. ⲡⲉϩϩⲟⲛ

ⲃⲓⲕⲧⲟⲣ ⲙⲎ

ⲁⲁϮⲉⲓⲁ ⲙⲎ ⲧⲉϮ

ⲫ ⲙⲁⲁϮ : ⲁⲙⲎⲛ

3.παπάς

Translation

ⲫ Ara Anup, may you watch over Papa Apollo and his brother Victor and David, and their

ⲫ mother Ameen.

Commentary

l. 2 ⲉⲕⲁⲣⲟⲉⲓⲥ the verbal prefix ⲉϩ ⲁ for the 3rd future written in Lycopolitan dialect (Kahle & Till 1961, p. 54; Chaine, 1934, p. 72). A parallel for this formula preceded by an invocation to Apa Apollo, recorded in a letter from the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (P. Mon.Apollo 17).

l. 3 ⲡⲡⲁⲡⲁ is a clerical title widely attested ⲡⲁⲡⲁ preceded by the definite article ⲡ (Derda & Wipszycka, 1994, pp. 23-27) as an equivalent to the Greek noun *Papas παπάς* (Tudor, 2011, p.193). This title, held by bishops and priests, denotes a genuine ecclesiastical role rather than a merely honorary. This title, prevalent across Middle Egypt, the Fayyum, and Nitria, does not appear in the south (Crum, 1922, p.85).

l. 4 ⲁⲡⲓⲘ constitutes as an abbreviated form of ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲗⲟ (P. Mon.Apollo 25, KSB I 419, KSB I 792, KSB I 358). Other attestations demonstrate variant forms: include ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟ (I. Sarga 66, KSB I 355), missing one λ and ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟ (KSB I 790) with different vowel arrangements.

l. 5 ⲡⲉϩϩⲟⲛ the overline appears on the ⲛ of ⲟⲛ was corrected by the scribe in the letter ⲛ instead of ⲡ.

l. 8 Three vertical dots as a punctuation appeared after ⲫ ⲙⲁⲁϮ followed by Amen (c.f Wagner & Coquin, 1971, p. 172).

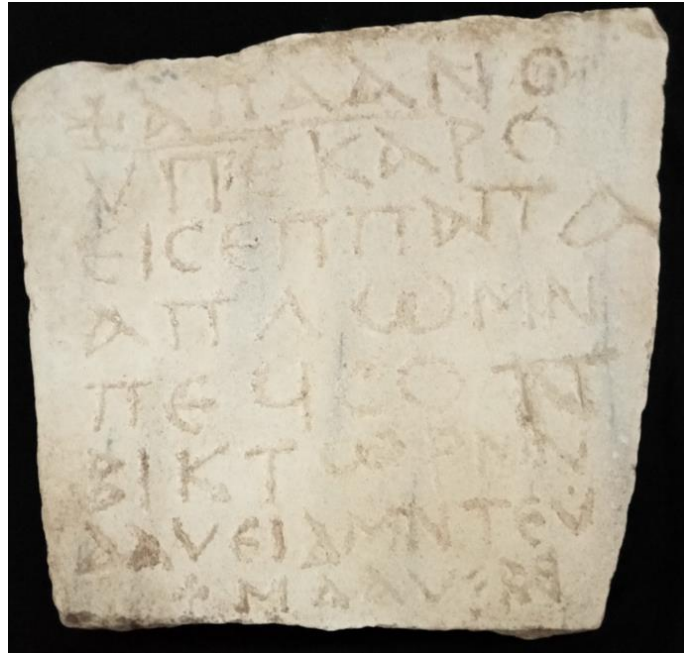


Figure 1 Stela (TL.366). © R. Bayoumi, July 2021.

3. Stela TL 367

This stela represents the middle-left-hand part of an epitaph, carved in limestone and measuring roughly $30.2 \times 17.2 \times 7$ cm. It is inscribed with eight lines written in the Sahidic dialect. The script is a rather carefully incised and well-ruled upright uncial, clearly legible. Unfortunately, the inscriptions are in a very poor condition, more than half of the stela is missing, and only the first words of the middle lines are partly preserved. It seems that the missing part on the right side was cut straight with a sharp tool (fig. 3), indicating that the stela was reused for another purpose (Pirelli, 2014, pp. 441-454). The engraved letters preserve traces of the original red inlaid colour. It is noted here that the scribe used punctuation after titles and saints' names; he graved three vertical dots; there is an identical model of epitaphs with the same formula and punctuation from Bawit with three dots (Hall, 1905, pp. 143-144), and other examples used punctuation of two dots (colon) (Bell & Crum, 1922, 82). Through following a hypothetical reconstruction, it seems that the text belongs to the type of litanies (Benigni, 1899). It is a particular formula that could be a common invocation of liturgical origin (Cabrol, 1930, p. 1540). The model of this invocation is (The trinity, heavenly (angels), biblical (Adam, Eve, Mary, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles), martyrs (occasionally with confessors), founders of monasteries, lesser-known monastic figures, and ultimately the name of the monk for whom the text was written for him as follows:

+ ΠΩΤ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΠΕΠΝΑ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΦ ΠΕΝΙΩΤ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΜΗ ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ ΤΕΜΜΑΥ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΠΧΟΥΤΑΦΤΕ
 ΜΠΡΕΣΒΗΤΕΡΟΣ ΠΕΝΙΩΤ ΑΔΑΜ ΤΕΜΜΑΥ ΖΩΗ ΜΕ ΝΕΥΩΗΡΕ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΝΤΙΚΕΟΣ ΝΕΝΙΟΤΕ ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ
 ΝΕΝΙΟΤΕ ΜΜΑΡΤΕΡΟΣ (SB Kopt. I 793).

This litany is usually used to commemorate a deceased, and it was widely spread in middle Egypt (from Saqqara to Esna), especially in epitaphs of the monastic centres at Asyut (Bawit, Manqabad, Dayr al-Bala'iza, Dayr al-Ganadla, and Wadi Sarga). These litanies were also attested in Abydos stelae (Van der Vliet, 2020, pp. 205-228). It is followed by an invocation to a long list of holy monastic figures and a typical group of local saints. (Tudor, 2011, pp.188-193) It seems that the formula is not entirely obligatory, so there are variations in the presence

and absence of its elements and their sequence, and it's due to the wish of the dedicators and the accuracy of the sculptors (Bell & Crum, 1922, p. 58)

Text

TL 367

Asyut (Bawit?)

Marble (fig. 2,3)

7th-8th centuries A.D?

ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲡⲟⲩⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ

ⲙⲛ ⲛⲓⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓⲛⲥ . . .

ⲛ . . . ⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲗⲭⲟⲣⲓⲧⲛⲥ

. . . ⲁⲓⲡⲁ ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟⲩⲛ . . .

5. . . . ⲓⲁⲡⲁ ⲩⲓⲃ ⲛⲓⲥ ⲛⲓⲥ

. . . ⲓⲁⲡⲁ ⲗⲉⲣⲙⲓⲛ . . .

. . . ⲁⲓⲡⲁ ⲡⲟⲩⲙⲓⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲓⲥ ⲁⲓⲥ . . .

. . . ⲓⲙⲁⲣⲧⲓⲗⲣⲟⲥ . . .

1. ἀπόστολος 2. προφήτης 3. ἀναχωρητής 6. Wagner & Coquin Ζερμινε 8. Μάρτυρας

Translation

..... our fath]ers the ap[ostles, and the] prophe[ts,] the ana[chorites, Ap]a Apollo [.....] Apa Phib [..... A]pa Herm [..... Apa Pshm]noute, A[pa.....]martyrs[.....

Commentary

1. 1-3 According to what was shown previously, ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲡⲟ could be interpreted as ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲡⲟⲩⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ. Then ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ is a part of the word ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲩⲧⲛⲥ, and this word was attested in this form more than once in the texts from Bawit (Forster, 2002, p.701). This form remains unique to this location, with only one comparable example found on a Theban ostrakon (O. frange 16). Concerning the sequence of elements, it varies between texts; here in the present text, the Father's apostles took precedence over the prophets, and there is documentation (possibly from Bawit or Abydos?) showing that prophets were placed after both the apostles and martyrs (O.Brit.Mus.Copt. 1 142, No. 14).

The letter c at the beginning of l. 3 is presumably the last letter of one of these Greek words, which are attested in the parallel texts, such as ⲛⲉⲕⲟⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ (O.Brit.Mus.Copt. I 143, 144, 15,16), ⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲛⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ, ⲡⲁⲧⲣⲓⲁⲣⲕⲛⲥ (SB Kopt. I 1130, 1142), ⲛⲉⲙⲁⲣⲧⲛⲣⲟⲥ, ⲛⲗⲟⲙⲟⲗⲟⲩⲧⲛⲥ (SB Kopt. I 792), ⲛⲉⲕⲣⲓⲧⲛⲥ (Clédat, 1908, p.220) or ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲉⲟⲥ (Bell & Crum 1922, p.60), as well as for ⲛⲁⲛⲁ based on comparable formulae, it can reasonably be proposed that it is part of ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲗⲭⲟⲣⲓⲧⲛⲥ (Mustafa, 2014, pp. 87-88, 145).

1. 4-5 The name of Apa Anup is expected to follow the standard sequence after Apa Apollo and Apa Phib, which constitute the traditional Bawit triad. This established ordering of Apollo, Phib, and Anoup reflects the conventional hierarchical arrangement found in comparable texts from this monastic center. Additionally, another distinct group of saints would typically be positioned subsequent to this foundational triad (SB Kopt. I 793, 473). It is noteworthy that the

local saints venerated at Bawit are arranged subsequent to the local saints recorded in Saqqara epitaphs (SB Kopt. I 790), and it is due to the connections between the monastery of Apa Apollo and Apa Jeremias (Clackson, 1996, pp.48-49).

l. 6-7 $\zeta\epsilon\rho\mu$ and $\nu\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$. There is an epitaph containing the same invocation from Bawit, in which the names of two saints are mentioned among a group of saints' names, they are $\zeta\epsilon\rho\mu$ and $\pi\omega\mu\nu\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$, and it may be the same here as well. (B.M. EA1494) It could be suggested that $\zeta\epsilon\rho\mu$ is part of $\zeta\epsilon\rho\mu\alpha\omicron\upsilon\gamma$ / $\zeta\epsilon\rho\mu\alpha\gamma\omega$, which refers to a local saint, who is mentioned in the epigraphic instances from Dayr al-Gabrawi, Bawit (together with Victor from Asyut, Phoibammon, Menas, Cyriacus) (Tudor, 2011, p.189; Van der Vliet, 2004, p. 123). However, the first suggestion represents the most accurate interpretation.

l. 8 $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ Considering similar texts, it imposes three possibilities, (1) the invocation formula might end here with $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma \nu\epsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\gamma\alpha\beta \tau\eta\rho\omicron\upsilon$ (Hall, 1905, p. 132), (2) $\nu\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$ / $\pi\mu\alpha\rho\tau\eta\rho\omicron\varsigma \nu$ + (geonym) + martyr name; (3) $\nu\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$ / $\pi\mu\alpha\rho\tau\eta\rho\omicron\varsigma \nu$ + (geonym) + martyr name + list of local saints (SB Kopt. I 473). But it should be highlighted that the first option is more contemporary and widely attested. In any case, according to the complete evidence, it is assumed that after this litany in the missing part, there is a commemorative formula that mentions the deceased's name, whose text was written for him (Capozzo, 2013, pp.56-57; Murray, 1914), his town, the death formula, and finally the date (Delattre, 2013, p. 205).

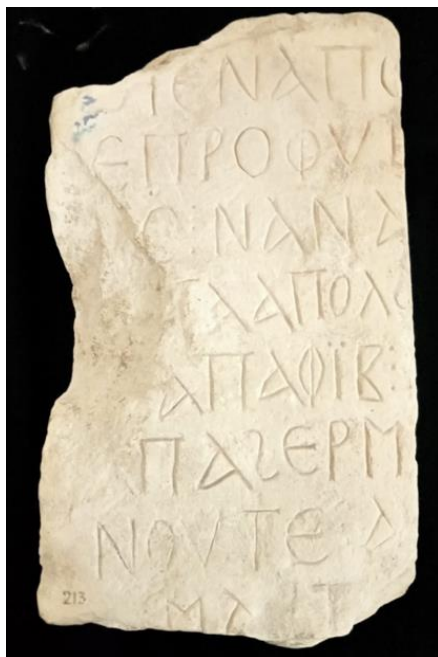


Figure 2 Stela (TL.367). © R. Bayoumi, July 2021.

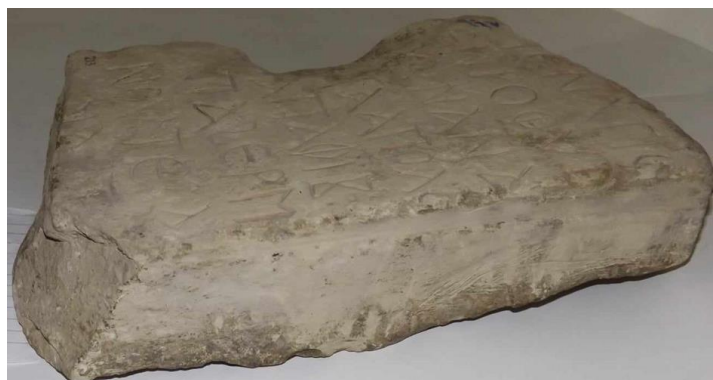


Figure 3 Stela (TL.367). © R. Bayoumi, July 2021.

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