

THREE SAHIDIC COPTIC FUNERARY STELAE FROM UPPER EGYPT

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Abstract

This article aims to publish three Coptic funerary stelae, they are now kept in Abou El-Goud storage magazine in Luxor. Although their provenance is unknown, this study suggested that they were inscribed in the south of Egypt.

Key words

Coptic funerary stelae - Luxor - Death - Armant - Eudaimon - Esna - Edfu

Introduction

The Three Coptic tombstones which will be published below are part of a collection presented to the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation by the heirs of antiquities dealer Mahmoud Mansour in 1985. Accordingly, there was no information on their provenance. They are now kept in Abou El-Goud storage magazine and hold the registration numbers: 124 (inventory no. 134), 177 (inventory no. 193), 300 (inventory no. 324) and 189 (inventory no. 205).

I have noticed that these epitaphs are undated and differ in their composed formulae; this may indicate that they might have been written in different places. Their owners, moreover, were an anchorite, a woman and two nuns.

1. Tombstone of John, a hermit (Figs. 1, 2)

Rectangular limestone stela was broken into two pieces. Although each piece has a private registration and inventory number, I have noticed that they complement each other. The biggest one holds the registration no. 124 and inventory no. 134 but the smallest holds the registration no. 177 and inventory no. 193. Their total measurements h. 42.5 × w. 18.3 × th. 6.7 cm. Undecorated, but three crosses are inscribed above the text: a large monogram of Christ between two small Greek crosses.¹ Margins are irregular. The text consists of four lines written in Sahidic Coptic. Letters were painted in red, irregular, rough and uneven. Superliner strokes and trema used regularly. The colon (:) is used in l. 2.



Figure 1– Tombstone of John, a hermit.
Reg. no.124 and inv. no. 134, reg. no. 177 and inv. no.193 (photo by Author)

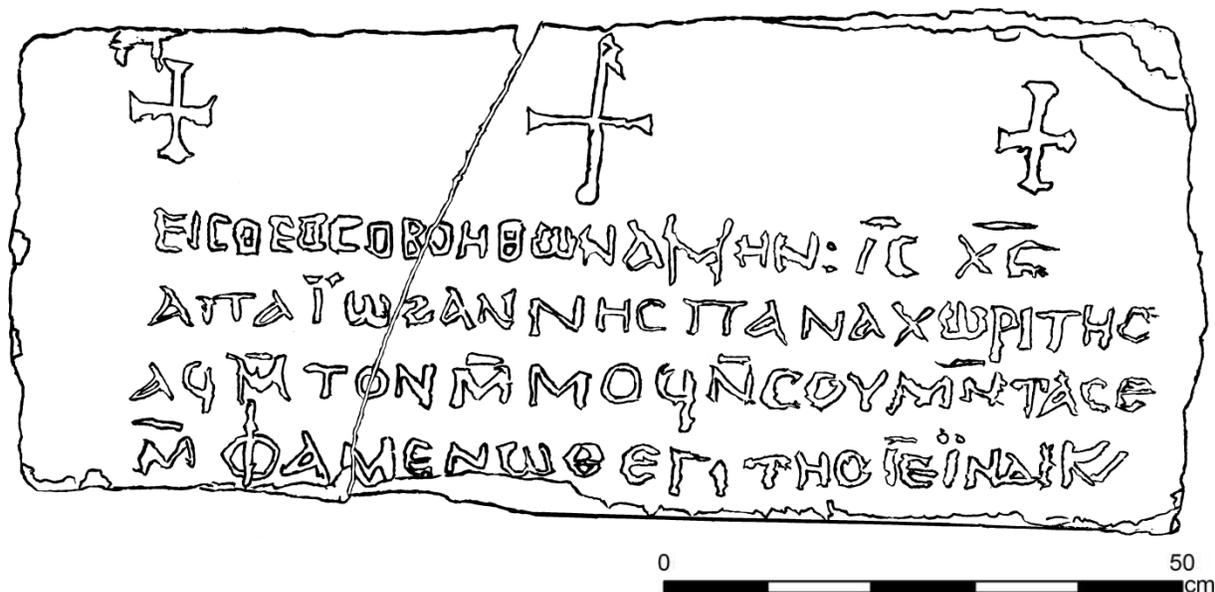


Figure 2– Tombstone of John, a hermit.
Reg. no.124 and inv. no. 134, reg. no. 177 and inv. no.193 (tracing by Author)

EA 54352, British Museum) which dated between the 6th and the 7th century,⁹ I think this epitaph belongs to this territory and goes back to the same date.

2. Tombstone of Ioulitta, a woman (Figs. 3, 4)

Rectangular marble stela holds the registration number 300 and inventory number 324. Dimensions: h. 28.5 × w. 21 × th. 5 cm. Broken off on upper right and lower right corners, but the last one is bigger than the first. A Protrusion in middle bottom might have been used to fix the gravestone. The surface has some damages and big black splatters. There are no decorative elements. The inscription consists of ten lines written in Sahidic Coptic between two crosses: the remaining lower part of the first cross appears at the beginning of the text while the latter appears entire completely at the end of the last line. Since guidelines were not used, most lines seem slightly sloping. Letters are big, clear and irregular. Ligature between some letters appears in ll. 4, 5, 8, 9. Superlinear stroke was put at the top left of the letters in ll. 1, 4, 6, 7, 8 but neglected completely in l. 3. Superlinear dots are utilized a few times in ll. 6-7. Trema is used in ll. 3, 5.

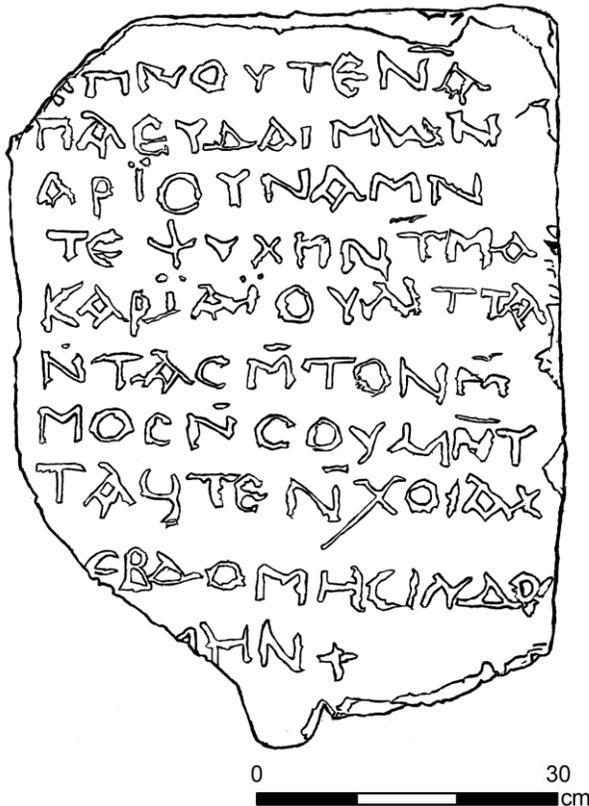


Figure 4– Tombstone of Ioulitta, a woman. Reg. no. 300 and inv. no. 324 (tracing by Author)



Figure 3– Tombstone of Ioulitta, a woman. Reg. no. 300 and inv. no. 324 (photo by Author)

Text

- 1 † ΠΝΟΥΓΤΕ Ν̄ Α
 2 ΠΑ ΕΥΔΑΙΜΟΥΝ
 3 ΑΡΙΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ
 4 ΤΕ ΨΥΧΗ Ν̄ ΤΜΑ
 5 ΚΑΡΙΑ ΙΟΥΛΙΤΤΑ
 6 ΝΤΑΣ Μ̄ΤΟΝ Μ̄
 7 ΜΟΣ Ν̄ ΣΟΥ Μ̄ΝΤ
 8 ΤΑΦΤΕ Ν̄ ΧΟΙΑΧ
 9 [Ϛ]ΕΒΔΟΜΗΣ ΙΝΔΟ/
 10 [ϚΑ]ΜΗΝ †

Translation

God of Apa Eudaimon have mercy on the soul of the blessed Ioulitta, who went to rest on day fourteenth of Khoiakh, seventh indiction. Amen.

Commentary

ll. 1-2. ΠΝΟΥΓΤΕ Ν̄ ΑΠΑ ΕΥΔΑΙΜΟΥΝ: The intercession addressed to Apa Eudaimon was known in Bawit. Furthermore, it was used as the opening formulae of three Coptic funerary stelae where the saint's name appeared in different forms (ΕΥΔΕΜ[ΩΝ], ΕΥΤΕΜΩΝ and ΕΥΔΕΜΟΥΝ) at the end of a long list of intercessions,¹⁰ while the under discussion intercession formula addressed to this saint only as an opening formula. I assume it is a rare case on Coptic epitaphs in general. Apa Eudaemon was from Armant and he believed in Christ. When he heard concerning the coming of the holy family to Ashmunayn, he went to them. Because of his hatred of idolatry, he martyred in his home town in 18th of Mesore.¹¹

ll. 3-4. The prayer formula ΑΡΙΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ ΤΕ ΨΥΧΗ was commonly used among the tombstones writers in many places in Egypt. The first appearance of this formula was between the 6th and the 7th centuries in Saqqara, Fayoum and Antinoupolis but continued to be used on tombstones until the 10th century. In Upper Egypt in particular, this formula has emerged in these districts: from Panopolis to Abydos, Latopolis and Dayr Anba Hadra.¹² Nonetheless, it was not used much in the milieu of Nubia writers.¹³ Despite the word ΨΥΧΗ was an essential part in the context of this formula, in rare cases it was never mentioned by the writer; only the name of the deceased was mentioned.¹⁴ The scribe may have desired to make mercy include the owner of the epitaph in whole and not partially, namely not the soul only.

In the current formula, trema is utilized above ι in ἀπ̄- but the superlinear stroke is not placed above ΜΝ.

ll. 4-5. $\tau\mu\alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\iota\alpha\ \iota\omicron\gamma\lambda\iota\tau\tau\alpha$: It seems that the epitaph owner was a secular woman because her name is not preceded or followed by a title or religious function. As for $\iota\omicron\gamma\lambda\iota\tau\tau\alpha$, it is a Greek feminine name (Ἰούλιττα).¹⁵ Trema was placed regularly over ι through the phrase.

ll. 6-7. Death formula $\dot{\eta}\tau\alpha\varsigma\ \bar{\eta}\tau\omicron\eta\ \bar{\eta}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ is one of the most commonly used death formula if compared to other formulae.¹⁶ It is noticeable that the relative past tense was utilized in the syntax of this formula while the past tense was used in the previous one (epitaph no.1).¹⁷ The writer used superlinear dot over consonant ($\dot{\eta}$) then superlinear stroke over consonant ($\bar{\eta}$). The use of the superlinear dot over the initial consonant letter of the word was known in late Sahidic.¹⁸ Remarkably, this irregular utilization of the superlinear dot alongside the superlinear strokes appeared in other Coptic epitaphs dated between the 8th and 11th centuries.¹⁹

ll. 7-9. Date of her death is $\dot{\eta}\ \varsigma\omicron\gamma\ \mu\bar{\eta}\tau\tau\alpha\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \bar{\eta}\ \chi\omicron\iota\alpha\chi\ [\xi]\epsilon\beta\lambda\omicron\mu\eta\varsigma\ \iota\eta\lambda\omicron$: This formula composed of the ordinal number of the day followed in turn by the name of the month and the ordinal number of the year of indiction. The writer, as I mentioned above, was not regular in using the superlineation over the consonant η . As for the duplication of τ in $\mu\bar{\eta}\tau\tau$ -, it was widespread used among Thebes' writers.²⁰

l. 10. The inscription has been concluded by $[\xi\alpha]\mu\bar{\eta}\eta\eta$ "Amen", then the Greek cross.²¹

The intercession of the writer by Apa Eudaimon only may indicate that this tombstone was written in Armant or its surroundings. Despite the request for the mercy to the soul of the dead was certainly in use in different places of Egypt, it was used in the milieu of Esna (Latopolis)²² which is the closest district to Armant. Therefore, this epitaph might have been written in one of both regions or in an area between them. On the other hand, the beginning of using this prayer formula was between the 6th and 7th centuries while its disappeared was in the 11th century.²³ Furthermore, the current superlineation system occurred on other funerary stelae dated between the 8th and 11th centuries.²⁴ So, I assume that it might have been written between the 8th and 10th centuries.

3. Tombstone of Theotora and Temeti, nuns (Figs. 5-8)

Uncompleted crown column holds the registration no. 189 and inventory no. 205. Its upper flat part re-used as a gravestone (H. 25 × w. 24.5 cm.). Small piece on both upper left and right corners is missing, but no loss of text. The script composed of seven lines written in Sahidic Coptic. Letters deeply cut, large and clear. The redactor placed superlinear strokes over letters irregularly in ll. 3, 5, 6. Three Greek crosses²⁵ at the end of the text. Trema is placed over letter γ in l. 1.

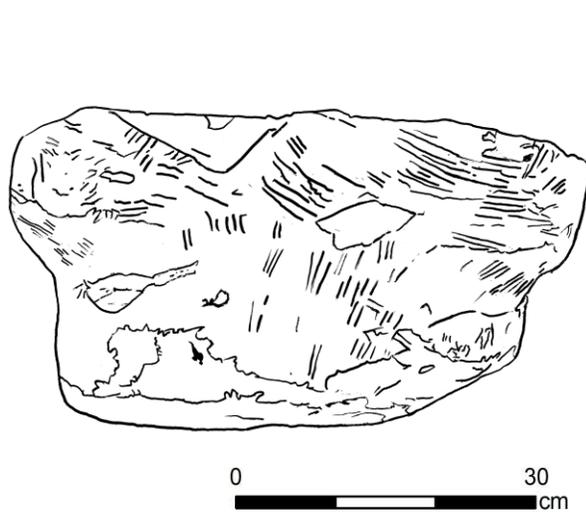


Figure 6– tombstone of Theotora and Temeti, nuns. Reg. no. 189 and inv. no. 205 (tracing by Author)

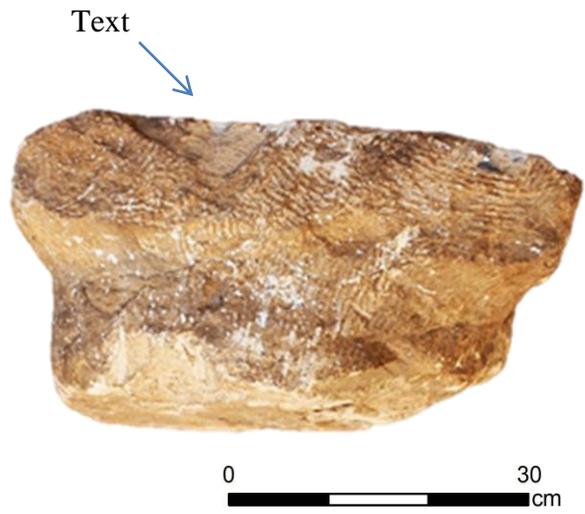


Figure 5– tombstone of Theotora and Temeti, nuns. Reg. no. 189 and inv. no. 205 (photo by Author)

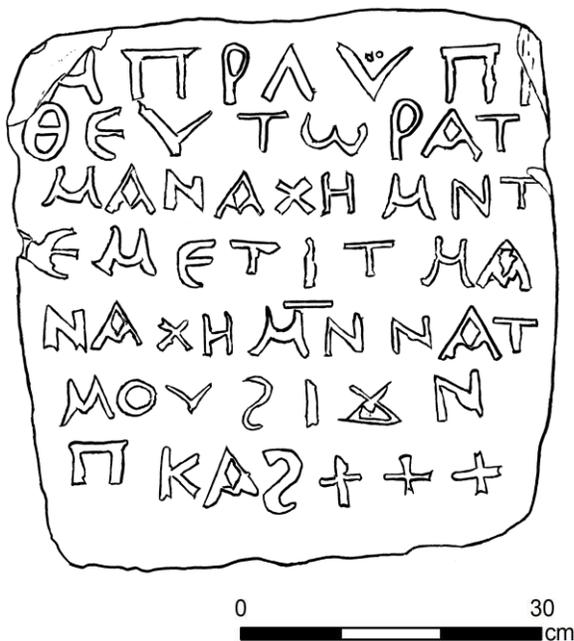


Figure 8– tombstone of Theotora and Temeti, nuns. Reg. no. 189 and inv. no. 205 (tracing by Author)



Figure 7– tombstone of Theotora and Temeti, nuns. Reg. no. 189 and inv. no. 205 (photo by Author)

Text

- 1 μ̄πρλ̄γ̄τι
 2 θε̄γτω̄ρα τ
 3 μᾱναχη̄ μη̄ τ
 4 ε̄με̄τι τμᾱ
 5 νᾱχη̄ ḿ̄νη̄ ᾱτ
 6 μο̄γ ρ̄ιχ̄η̄
 7 πκᾱρ †††

Translation

Do not grieve Theotora, the nun, and Temeti, the nun, no one is immortal on the earth!.

Commentary

ll. 1-7. μ̄πρλ̄γ̄τι NN μη̄ NN ḿ̄νη̄ ᾱτμο̄γ ρ̄ιχ̄η̄ πκᾱρ: This Greek appeal formula was borrowed into Coptic, and was diffused widely from the 8th to the 10th century in the town of Edfu.²⁶ In general, the writers desired to make consolation to the family of the deceased, they resorted to use this formula, which made the deceased as addresser and whoever stands in front of the epitaph as a reader.²⁷ This form of the Greek verb λγ̄τι (λυπέω) is familiar in Coptic²⁸ but without trema (¨) which was placed over γ for an unclear purpose.²⁹

Moreover, in the existential sentence, the writer utilized ḿ̄νη̄ for ḿ̄η̄,³⁰ this duplication of the consonant η was a familiar feature in the district of Thebes.³¹ The use of the Superlinear strokes was neglected in many positions, nevertheless it appeared over ḿ̄νη̄.

Although, the preposition ρ̄ιχ̄η̄ preceded the definite article π in ll. 6-7, the writer did not assimilate it to ρ̄ιχ̄η̄. This phenomenon sometimes has emerged both in literary and non-literary texts.³² Therefore, it, perhaps, was a familiar feature of the people of the area where this epitaph was written.

ll. 2-5. θε̄γτω̄ρα τμᾱναχη̄ μη̄ τε̄με̄τι τμᾱναχη̄: This epitaph was erected for two women: θε̄γτω̄ρα “Theotora” which her name is from Greek origin (θευτώρα)³³ and τε̄με̄τι “Temeti” whose name is undoubtedly derived from this uncommon one (τεμετε) which Hasitzka referred to its appearance three times in the texts.³⁴ Moreover, the writer mentioned that its owners were nuns (μοναχή).³⁵

l. 7. The text concluded with three Greek crosses.³⁶ This feature has sometimes appeared on Upper Egypt epitaphs: Esna,³⁷ Aswan (Dayr Anba Hadra)³⁸ and Nubia (Qasr Ibrim³⁹ and Sakinya⁴⁰) either close in the space at the end of the last line like the current case⁴¹ or separated in an independent line.⁴² Regrettably, the writer disregarded the date of death formula.

Because this epitaph is very close to its counterparts of Apollonopolis Magna (the 8th-10th centuries) in both the current orthographical form (μ̄πρλ̄γ̄τι) of the formula and the two formulae which composed this epitaph (the appeal formula “do not grieve” and the name formula),⁴³ I think it might have been written there during the same period.

Conclusion

The three Coptic tombstones published above are undated and there is no information on their provenance. This article suggested that the funerary stela of John was written in Esna between the 6th and the 7th century, while the funerary stela of Ioulitta was inscribed either in Esna or Armant, or perhaps in the area between them during the period from the 8th to 10th centuries. As for the funerary stela of Theotora and Temeti, it was incised in Edfu between the 8th and 10th centuries.

¹ For more details about the types of crosses, see Ibrahim Kamel and Girgis Daoud Girgis, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*. Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée copte Nos. 1-253 (Cairo, 1987), 23-24.

² Adam Łajtar, *Catalogue of the Greek Inscriptions in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum (I. Khartoum Greek) [=OLA 122]* (Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA, 2003), 64.

³ Bianca Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae of the Byzantine and Arab periods from Egypt* (Marburg, 2011), 173, 209.

⁴ The colon is used to separate between the names which the writers intercede with them in the invocation formula, between formulae and epitaphs texts' dedicated for more than one deceased and to determine name of the month and the day in the date of death formula, see Monika R. M. Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch IV* (Berlin-Boston, 2012), 126-27 no. 1977, 127 no. 1978, 160 no. 2081; and see Jacques van der Vliet, *Catalogue of the Coptic inscriptions in the Sudan national museum at Khartoum (I. Khartoum Copt.) [=OLA 121]* (Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA, 2003), 21-23 no. 3 footnote 107, 30-32 no. 4.

⁵ Hans Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Berlin, 2002), 54.

⁶ For more details about this formula, see Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 196.

⁷ Förster did not mention this variant, see Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen*, 240.

⁸ W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 269 a.

⁹ See Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 173, 426, tables III. 4.1.1, III. 4.2.9;

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=124422&partId=1&searchText=Byzantine&page=49

¹⁰ Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, table III. 4.2.5, footnote. 1585; Monika R. M. Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch I* (Wien, 1993), 266-67 no. 792 l.17, 267 no. 793 l.12; H. R. Hall, *Coptic and Greek texts of the Christian period from ostraca, stelae, etc. in the British Museum* (London, 1905), 143-44 no. 16 l.10 (EA 676); see https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=376581&objectId=124209&partId=1

¹¹ De Lacy O'Leary, *The saints of Egypt* (London, 1937; reprint, Amsterdam, 1974), 133.

¹² For more details about this formula, see Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 178-81, 195.

¹³ Adam Łajtar, Jacques van der Vliet, *Qasr Ibrim the Greek and Coptic Inscriptions* (Warsaw, 2010), 134.

¹⁴ Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch IV*, 117 no. 1954; and see Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 178.

¹⁵ Monika Hasitzka, *Namen in koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (electronic document, 2007), 42 a, https://www.onb.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF_Download/1_PAP_kopt_namen.pdf; Friedrich Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg, 1922), 150.

¹⁶ Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 196.

¹⁷ See Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar with Chrestomathy and Glossary, Sahidic Dialect* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 259-60, 324.

¹⁸ For more details about the use of the superlinear strokes and dots over consonants, see Ugo Zanetti, "Le roman de Bakhéos sur les trois jeunes saints de Babylone. Fragments coptes sahidiques," in *Philomathestatos. Studies in Greek and Byzantine Texts Presented to Jacques Noret for his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. B. Janssens et al., [=OLA 137], Leuven, 2004, 724.

¹⁹ Łajtar, Van der Vliet, *Qasr Ibrim*, 137-38 no. 37 l.6, 183-85 no. 51 ll.2, 4, 9, 13.

²⁰ H. E. Winlock, W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes I* (New York, 1926), 246.

²¹ Kamel and Girgis, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 23.

²² See Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 178-81, 195.

²³ For more details about this formula, see Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 178-81, 195.

²⁴ Łajtar, Van der Vliet, *Qasr Ibrim*, 137-38 no. 37 l.6, 183-85 no. 51 ll. 2, 4, 9, 13.

²⁵ Kamel and Girgis, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 23.

²⁶ Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 175-76, 209-10; See Alexander Badawy, "La persistance de l'idéologie et du formulaire païens dans les epitaphs coptes," *BSAC* 10 (1944): 2.

²⁷ Jacques van der Vliet, "What is man?": The Nubian tradition of Coptic funerary inscriptions," in *Nubian Voices: Studies in Christian Nubian Culture*, eds. Adam Łajtar, Jacques van der Vliet, (Warsaw, 2011), 184.

²⁸ Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen*, 484.

²⁹ See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, 16.

³⁰ See Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, 248, 381-83.

³¹ Winlock, Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius*, 246.

³² For more details about this type of assimilation, see Paul. E. Kahle, *Bala'izah. Coptic Texts from Deir El-Bala'izah in Upper Egypt I* (London, 1954), 98-100.

³³ Hasitzka, *Namen in koptischen*, 38 a; Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, 137.

³⁴ Hasitzka, *Namen in koptischen*, 99 b.

³⁵ Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen*, 530.

³⁶ Kamel and Girgis, *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, 23; the three crosses which concluded the text were commonly used among the Christian inscriptions writers who lived in the Nile Valley, for more details see Van der Vliet, *Catalogue of the Coptic inscriptions*, 18.

³⁷ Serge Sauneron and Jean Jacquet, *Les ermitages chrétiens du désert d'Esna I: Archéologie et Inscriptions* (FIFAO 29) (Cairo, 1972), 114-15 no. 96.

³⁸ Henri Munier, "Les stèles coptes du Monastère de Saint-Siméon à Assouan," *Aegyptus* 11 (1930-31): 264 no. 1, 288 no. 54.

³⁹ Jacques van der Vliet, "Two Coptic epitaphs from Qasr Ibrim," *JEA* 92 (2006): 217 no. 1.

⁴⁰ Togo Mina, *Inscriptions coptes et grecques de Nubie* (Cairo, 1942), 126 no. 292.

⁴¹ See also Munier, "Les stèles coptes," 288 no. 54; Mina, *Inscriptions coptes et grecques*, 126 no.292; Van der Vliet, "Two Coptic epitaphs," 217 no. 1.

⁴² See Munier, "Les stèles coptes," 264 no. 1.

⁴³ See Tudor, *Christian funerary stelae*, 175-76, 209-10, table III. 4.1.3; Gérard Roquet, "Épitaphes Coptes D'Edfou: Compléments," *ASAE* 68 (1982): 121 no. 5, pl. IV.