

# Abstract:

This paper presents republishing of four Coptic texts as three ostraca and papyrus. One of these ostraca was published by me in 2019 but I present it here with new reading for few words as well as another ostracon was translated by Hall in 1905, while the two other texts (ostracon and papyrus) are mentioned by Crum in his book "Short Texts from Coptic Ostraca and Papyri" in 1921 where he presented only the Coptic transcription without any translation or commentary. However this ostracon has been published in 1915 by Worrell while I didn't find any translation of the papyrus here. The source of ostraca here is from: the Worrell's collection (U.S.A.), the Coptic Museum (Egypt) and the British Museum (UK) while the papyrus is kept in John Ryland's Library, (UK). And all these texts mention the date fruit which was very important at that time for using it as food, sweetening and medicine from Dynastic period to Late Antiquity.

Keywords: Coptic, dates, measure, ostraca, papyri.

ملخص:

تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية إعادة نشر لأربعة نصوص قبطية تذكر ثمار البلح، وتتكون من بردية واحدة وثلاث شقافات، ولقد قمت بنشر واحدة من تلك الشقافات في عام 2019، ولكني أقدمها هنا مع إعادة قراءة لبعض الكلمات ، وكذلك الشقفة التي ترجمها "هول" عام 2015، بالاضافة الى نصين عبارة عن بردية وشقفة قد استشهد بهما "كرم" في كتابه "نصوص قصيرة من الشقافة والبرديات القبطية" الذي صدر عام 1921، حيث قدم النصوص القبطية فقط دون أي ترجمة أو تعليق على الرغم من ترجمة النص على الشـقفة بواسـطة "ورل" عام 1915 لكني لم أجد ترجمة البردية موضع البحث، ومكان حقظ تلك النصوص بالنسبة للشقافة هو واحدة من مجموعة ورل بأمريكا والثانية من المتحف البريطاني بإنجلترا والثالثة من المتحف القبطي بمصـر أما البردية فهي من مكتبة جون ريلاندز بإنجلترا، وتلك النصوص تتعلق بفاكهة البلح، والتي كانت ذات أهمية كبيرة في ذلك الوقت حيث كانت تستخدم كطعام ولتحلية المشروبات مثل الجعة والنبيذ ولحشو بعض أنواع الكحك فضـلا عن اسـتخدامها في الطب منذ عصـر الاسـرات القرعونية وتوارث الأقباط تلك الاستخدامات في الحشور القديمة المشروبات مثل الجعة والنبيذ ولحشو بعض أنواع

## Introduction

The Coptic word for "dates" is  $B\bar{h}N\epsilon$  (S) or BeNI (B) and it is usually written as plural (sometimes as singular masculine)<sup>(1)</sup>, it was written once reversed as  $eNNBN^{(2)}$ , the Coptic term is derived from Ancient Egyptian origin as *bnr* which means "sweet"<sup>(3)</sup>. Rarely it was used the Greek loan word  $\phiOINIK/$  for meaning "dates" in Coptic<sup>(4)</sup>. Also there was the word aneNTI from Nubian for "dates" which is cited in a glossary<sup>(5)</sup>. Sometimes they referred to dates by the word means fruit as  $OTTARO TKAPHOC \bar{N}B\bar{N}NE$  "fruits of palm"<sup>(6)</sup>. The dates were described in Coptic texts as: "selected dates" BNNE  $\bar{n}COTTI<sup>(7)</sup>$ , "virgin date" BNPAYNE, "dried date" BNQOOYE, or "fresh date" BNNE EQAHKwhile the unripe/ green date means BEPRODA. The desert/ oasis dates was called KACJOYAI. And the date stone is BAA.<sup>(8)</sup> The crushed dates (now: Agwah) is mentioned in the Greek texts as  $\phiOIVI\xi$   $KEKOHPEVO\zeta$  (cutting date).<sup>(9)</sup> But I suggest the special term for it in Coptic is TAX  $\bar{N}BNNE$  "cake/circular of dates". The branch of palm mentioned including 10.000 dates and known in Coptic as  $\lambdaOOY$ , KAAAOC, 200TQ, Xe and CTAOI, and rarely as  $\lambdaIAOZE$  or CMAR.<sup>(10)</sup>

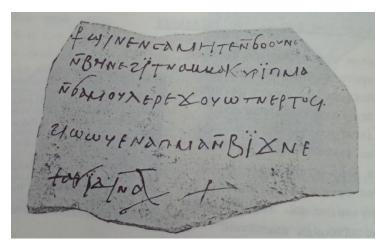
The palm-dresser in Coptic is called CAKBHT while the gardener of date palms mentioned sometimes as GME, and the date -seller called CA  $\bar{N}BNNE$ . <sup>(11)</sup> The harvester of dates is represented on limestone ostracon kept in the Coptic Museum shown wearing short kilt and falling from the palm tree during the harvest.<sup>(12)</sup>

Dates were eaten as fresh or dried among the Egyptians since Dynastic period.<sup>(13)</sup> Hermits in the desert, survived on dates and bread brought from settled communities. Dates played an important role in the diet of the monks and hermits; the solitary monk Onuphrios lived for most of his adult life on dates. This Egyptian hermit was living in solitude in the desert, and surviving solely on the dates that grew on the palm tree under whose shade he was accustomed to rest. The palm tree provided all his wants: each month a fresh bunch, sufficient for a daily supply, fell into his lap. And the date wine which is mentioned in the ninth-century monastic Rule of Theodore as a drink made from the fermented juice of dates. It would have taken some effort to produce this, but Onuphrios might have been able to fashion a machine of some basic type to help him.<sup>(14)</sup> In addition to wine, other types of liquids were made

from dates as a sweetener like MOOY  $\bar{N}BNNE$  (dates water) probably as a syrup or drink, and EBICD  $\bar{N}BNNE$  (honey of dates/ *debs eltamr*). Both CTAFMA and EMPIC referred to a kind of wine and beer sweetened with dates.

The date fruits usually appear as red and rarely as yellow in Coptic art.<sup>(15)</sup> The Coptic texts show low price for date-fruits and it seems to be reachable for all categories of Coptic society and it was considered as cheap alternative for the honey bee which was consumed by the rich people.<sup>(16)</sup>

Text no. 1 (O. Crum ST, no. 319 -Potsherd)<sup>(17)</sup> - Middle Egypt (?)



(After Worrell 1915, p.315 & Kosack 1974, p.310)

#### Text

- 1. F give nea mite  $\bar{n}$  sooyne
- 3.  $\bar{n}$  samogg ere<sup>(18)</sup> cogut nertog
- 4. γίωως ενλημα νθιχνε
- 5.  $+\alpha\theta/i \exists i \forall \exists i \forall \exists i \forall \forall f$

## Translation

- 1. P Inquire after ten sacks
- 2. of dates by Abbakeri<sup>(19)</sup> the driver
- 3. of camel, twenty artabai are
- 4. in it, to those of the place ( or monastery) of Bijne<sup>(20)</sup>
- 5. + Hathor 14<sup>th</sup>, Indiction 10  $^{(21)}$ P

# Comment

GOOYNE means "sack" and replaced sometimes with the Greek equivalent Θaλλις, Sacks were weaved or made from leather and both of them were used for keeping wheat, dates, bread, cakes, salt, and onions.<sup>(22)</sup> This text mentions that 10 sacks containing 20 artabai of dates and I don't know exactly whether it was a standard measure as the one sack of dates contains two artabai or not. The cardinal number MHTE written as feminine because of GOOYNE which is feminine word too.<sup>(23)</sup>

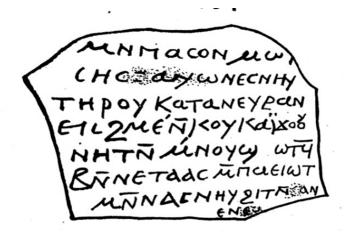
ертоц: artaba is dry –measure, written mainly as aртов, it equals about 30 Kg (of grain) or 40 liters.<sup>(24)</sup> It was written in many forms some of them associated with Thebes<sup>(25)</sup>but this form seems to be from Middle Egypt.

π-μανισαμογλ: The camel-driver mentioned also as π-καμιλιτμc from Greek origin, he worked mainly in the monastery and loaded heavy weight goods such as: fruits, grains, stones, and amphorae. He also delivered the letters from a monastery to another. <sup>(26)</sup>It seems to be large quantity and heavy for one camel here because the camel- load average is 6 artabai of grain or about 180 kilograms, some camels occasionally bearing up to 550 kilograms for very short distances. Concerning feeding the camels in Roman Egypt, beside the fodder, there was a paste made from crushed date stones. <sup>(27)</sup>

віхмє: perhaps a name of certain place or a monastery.<sup>(28)</sup>

Sending the dates in sacks and in the month of Hathor makes me believe that it was dried dates (tamr).

Text no. 2 (O. Brit. Mus. I, p.115) - from Thebes



[O. BM no. 12491, After Hall (in: O. Brit. Mus. I, pl. no. 79)]

#### Text

I

- **1.** [форп мен фонке срок]
- 2. мипасон мау-
- 3. CHC and necney
- 4. тнроу ката неуран
- 5. εις εμε νκογκ αιχοογ
- 6. Nhtā mnogadatā
- 7. būng taac  $\bar{\mathsf{m}}\mathsf{fagint}$
- 8. мппаснну гітн ай
- 9. єне́э[с]

#### Translation

- 1. [At first, I greet you]
- 2. and my brother Mo-
- 3. ses and all the brothers

- 4. according to their names
- 5. Behold, forty doum-fruits, I sent (them)
- 6. to you (pl.) with a handful
- 7. of dates, give it to my father
- 8. and my brothers, from An-
- 9. enias.

#### Comment

The word  $\kappa \circ \gamma \kappa$  in the 5<sup>th</sup> line was translated (wrongly) by Hall as "mustard plants" but I translate it here as doum-fruits (Gr:  $\kappa \circ \circ \kappa \iota$ ) and it is one of the fruits like pomegranate and dried figs that was counted in numbers and not measured according to the Greek texts <sup>(29)</sup>, another Coptic text mentions 30 doum fruits with something measured by *mation* perhaps as dates also.<sup>(30)</sup>

# Text no.3 (O. Cop. Mus. Cairo no. 3596- Limestone chip)<sup>(31)</sup> - from Thebes





(Photos from www.gorgiaspress.com)

#### Text

Recto

1.....

- 2. [ $\chi \varepsilon$ ] htildh aytamon  $\chi \varepsilon$  a-
- 3. тетнагапндооу анент
- 4. маюшмас де чі очкочі [й]
- вийє нанесних норо[рп?]
- 6. [ачхо] хе н<п>еюй еш йтахоо[ү-]
- 7. [соү] арі тагапн оун [вйнє ]
- 8. [мфоүн? дооусоу нан]

#### Verso

- 9. Le texpiate te $[t\bar{n}]$
- 10. cooγn ññgλλοï ñgo[ï ει]
- 11. [an] eron  $\mathfrak{X}[\mathfrak{E} \mathsf{B}]$ nne  $\overline{\mathfrak{n}}[\mathfrak{tenog}^{?(32)}]$
- 12. [Cooy b] inc eqlek C[e  $\pi$ -]
- 13. [9] Φτε νκακε [0γ χαι ]

#### Translation

1.....

- 2. Seeing [that] they informed us that
- 3. your (pl.) kindness sent northward
- 4. to Thomas for carrying/ taking some
- 5. dates to the brothers at da[wn (i.e. morning/ early)]

6. [He said] that: I didn't find ass to send /deliver

- 7. [them]. Do charity, there are
- 8. [dates inside(?) Send it to us]
- 9. for this need, you (pl.)
- 10. know (that) the monks of field
- 11. [don't come] to us for the dates. [Now?]
- 12. [send] fresh dates for [the ]
- 13. [do-] ugh of cakes [ farewell].

#### Comment

κακε is Theban form but generally as  $6 \alpha \delta \epsilon$ .<sup>(33)</sup> The bread/cake of dates is mentioned in Greek as αρτοφοινιξ.<sup>(34)</sup> Compare also a text from Thebes cited "some cakes"<sup>(35)</sup> (εενκακε) with some wheat grain and dates (βννε).<sup>(36)</sup>

 $g\bar{\lambda}\lambda oi$  (pl. for  $g\bar{\lambda}\lambda o$ ) mainly means "old person" but sometimes means big/great as NO6, it refers sometimes to priests / abbot. <sup>(37)</sup> I suggest that it refers here to either big farmers or to monks who worked in the fields.

BNNE EQNHK means according to the context the fresh ripe date either in *rotab*-stage (black/dark dates) or as half-dried *tamr* (yellow/ brown dates) and both are crushing and kneading after removing their stones to make the *agwah* -cakes which is used for stuffing the bread dough.



## Text no. 4 (P. Crum ST, no. 329, papyrus<sup>(38)</sup>)

'Image provided by The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester (on 28 August 2024)'

#### Text

- 1. ппапа акоуї петсраі йдаусід папма исан
- 2. βένε τε μας ογνος νκατούς μπούκουϊ
- 3. ΝΚΑΤΟΥC ΝΒΕΝΕ ΝΤΝΧΟΟΥCOY ΕΝΙΡΗ ΕΝΑ-
- 4. noyoy alla mpp amele+ er[p] factor ka ind H

#### Translation<sup>(39)</sup>

**1.** Apa Akoui, the one who writes to David who belongs to the place of the sellers of

- 2. dates that: Fill one big kados and one small
- 3. *kados* of dates and we (will) send them in  $good^{(40)}$  ways
- 4. But don't neglect + written in Paopi 21, Indiction year 8.

### Comment

I think he refers to the market when he wrote "the place of the sellers of dates" perhaps as a special market for dates only.

κατογc or καλοc : Jar or pitcher used for wine as liquid measure, and it was used also as measure or container for dates.  $^{(41)}$ 

Generally, the other measures of dates are: artaba (aptob), aipe (oitte), and mation (maaxe). Also the camel load (e.g. kamoya nbnne). And the sacks which are weaving from palm leaf or cloth or made from leather.<sup>(42)</sup>

In this text, they will send the date fruits in good ways and that may mean; the two kados- jars will be ornamented before sending as a gift (sending the baskets/ boxes of fruits like fig, pomegranate, and grape as gift was well known in that time).<sup>(43)</sup> Or the sender may mean he will be careful to send the dates in good condition especially the date fruits in this month (Paopi) became ripe (*rotab*).

μπp ΔΜέλε written also as μπp σω in Coptic texts.<sup>(44)</sup> The date is usually written in Greek and abbreviated at the end of text as: the day of month plus the year of Indiction.

# Summary and conclusion

- The first text is an order of transportation from the type of "shene-nca texts" which including usually transportation of grains and wine, it is written on potsherd and it mentions request of 20 artabai (measure) of dates kept in 10 sacks to be delivered by the camel driver to certain place. And this is so heavy weight for one camel only but it may be for very short distance or it may be deleivered in more than one load (φορ<sub>A</sub>).
- The second text is letter addressed to some monks and a priest about sending 40 fruits of doum with a handful of dates. The doum was mention in numbers not in measures like the pomegranate and dried figs.
- The third text is a letter written on potsherd sent from bakers and addressed to a monastic superior concerning sending to them some fresh /soft dates for making the cakes of dates, they asks the dates after failing to receive it because the one who was requested for that didn't find an ass in order to deliver the dates to them moreover the elders/ monk reapers didn't come to them with dates too. Using of the ass for sending a small amount ( $\kappa o\gamma t$ ) of dates (the capacity of donkey load was up to 90 kg).
- The Fourth text is business letter or an order written on papyrus and addressed to a seller of dates to order him sending quickly two kadosmeasure of dates; one is large and the other is small for sending them in good way to somebody may be as a gift. And sending fruits as gift was known in Coptic and Greek texts among relatives, friends and monks.
- I suggest the third text from Thebes (for the word kake) while the 1st text is not Theban perhaps from Middle Egypt according to its dialect.
- The color of dates is not mentioned in Coptic texts but it is represented in the Coptic art as red or yellow.
- Date fruit was eaten dried or fresh and eaten by many categories of society and eaten also by monks and hermits.
- Dates were important because of using its syrup/ honey as sweetener for drinks (i.e. wine and beer), or for stuffing a type of cakes. I suggest the special word for crushed dates (*Agwah*) in Coptic may be TAX NBNNE "date-cake" or BNNE EQAHK "soft date/ fresh ripe date".

The measures of dates were artaba, mation, oipe, pitchers (*kados & kelwl*), and sacks. Sometimes the dates were mentioned as unidentified small quantity like "handful" αραφτ or "some" εεν or "little" κογι (now as "*hefna*" or "*shwayet*" or "*habbet*"). Also mentioned in large quantity as a camel -load of dates (equals about 180 kg).

# Footnots:

- <sup>(1)</sup> CD,40 a
- (2) O. Frangé, no. 654
- <sup>(3)</sup> CED, 24
- <sup>(4)</sup> WB,853
- <sup>(5)</sup> Hasitzka1990, no.258
- <sup>(6)</sup> CD, 40b.
- (7) P. Sarga, no.141
- <sup>(8)</sup> CD, 48a, 131a, 40a-b, 45a.
- <sup>(9)</sup> KAB, 42.
- <sup>(10)</sup> Coptic Dictionary .org, CD, 696b , BACS II, p. 14, 25, 29,55,56 , O. Crum VC, no.52, , BACS IV, p. 22.
- <sup>(11)</sup> Ahmed 2011, p.191, 192, O. Crum VC, no.52, CD, 40b. O. Crum ST, no.329
- <sup>(12)</sup> BACS IV, p.82
- <sup>(13)</sup> Ibid, p.21,22
- (14) Jotischky 2011, p.36,58,59
- (15) BACS IV, p.81
- (16) Ibid , p.22, 24
- <sup>(17)</sup> Published in Worrell 1915: 313-314, then copied the same transcription /reading by Kosack 1974, p.311 without translation or comment.
- <sup>(18)</sup> Verbal perfix , from Hieroglyphic *iw* , before nominal subject and nominal clause (CD, 52a-b)

- <sup>(19)</sup> Read as Ammakouri (Worrell 1915, p.313) and as авва (title) Keri by Crum (O. Crum ST, no.319) but this name аввакурї occurs in Hasitzka 2007, p.13, as a variation of the proper name Apakeri.
- (20) The lines 3-4 translated by Worrell as "He has twenty artabs being those of the place of Bij" (Worrell 1915, p. 313) but I think it is written 20 artabai as detailed description of the measures inside the sacks and for confirmation too.
- <sup>(21)</sup> According to Worrell , he suggested it as "the current Indiction" (see: Worrell 1915, p.313,314).
- <sup>(22)</sup> CD,836 a, 213b, Coptic Dictionary.org.
- <sup>(23)</sup> Coptic dictionary.org
- <sup>(24)</sup> Wilfong 2003, p.163-164, Coptic Dictionary.org.
- <sup>(25)</sup> CD, 305b
- <sup>(26)</sup> P. Mon. Epiph. I, p.165, BACS V, p.9
- (27) Paprocki 2019, p.70, 75
- <sup>(28)</sup> Read as Bij or Paemanbij as a place name in Syria in: Worrell 1915, p.314, but Crum read it as BïxNe (O. Crum ST, no.319), I couldn't find this word.
- <sup>(29)</sup> Compare asking μαλβ πκογκ are mentioned with μαλχε-measure perhaps for dates like this text here (see: Ahmed 2023, p. 5).
- <sup>(30)</sup> CF. KAB, p.41, 43, BACS IV, p.32.
- <sup>(31)</sup> First publishing in: Ahmed 2019, pp.16-18.
- <sup>(32)</sup> CD, 485a
- <sup>(33)</sup> CD, 843b , BACS II, p.22
- (34) artflsrv03.uchicago.edu
- <sup>(35)</sup> Translated wrongley by Hall as "dark grain".
- <sup>(36)</sup> O. Brit. Mus. Copt. I, p.42.

<sup>(37)</sup> CD, 669b-670a.

- <sup>(38)</sup> I am thankful to John Ryland Library for sending me the image of papyrus.
- <sup>(39)</sup> I took the Coptic transcription from Crum but I make all translations here.
- <sup>(40)</sup> Written in two lines.
- <sup>(41)</sup> BACS IV, p.26, Coptic Dictionary.org, CD, 40 b. Bell & Crum 1925, L.
  195
- (42) BACS IV, p.25
- <sup>(43)</sup> Ibid, p.32.
- <sup>(44)</sup> BACS V, p. 56.

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