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Some More Remarks on Old Bedauye

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It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of the editor of these Studies to contribute to a volume to the honour of Gerald Browne, renowned coptologist and most successful editor of Old Nubian texts and researcher in the Old Nubian language. The problem was the topic of my prospective contribution: No Old Nubian or Coptic subjects happened to be available. In this situation I thought it fit to surprise our friend with a short study in a field that is historically related to the early speakers of Old Nubian, *viz.* the Blemmyes, believed to be the adversaries of the Ballâna culture, or X Group people. Not that I could offer great insights in this area, but I would present some afterthoughts to my linguistic analysis of the onomastic material preserved in documents of Greek and Coptic language, as displayed in the Studies in honour of my teacher in African languages Hans G. Mukarovsky.[1] Nevertheless, I had my doubts whether this topic would really be of interest to him…. But then it was Gerald Browne himself who anticipated my plans: his marvelous *libellus*, *Textus Blemmyicus aetatis christianae*,[2] not only presents a first (and indeed very convincing) attempt to analyse and understand the Saqqâra ostracon (with a text surmised to be in the language of the Blemmyes) but also an analysis of the Blemmyan onomasticon. Now I can feel sure that a study in this field will

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[1] Satzinger, Helmut. "Die Personennamen von Blemmyern in koptischen und griechischen Texten: orthographische und phonetische Analyse." In: E. Ebermann, E. R. Sommerauer and K. É. Thomanek (eds.), *Komparative Afrikanistik.* Sprach-, geschichts- und literaturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten zu Ehren von Hans G. Mukarovsky anläßlich seines 70. Geburtstags. Wien, 1992, 313–324. – Browne was kind enough to mention the page lost (probably omitted in the print by my own fault), *Textus* (see next footnote), p. VIII. I grasp this long-aspired occasion to give a brief account of its contents. On p. 315*bis* I argued that the ⟨b⟩ of the Blemmyan names was probably not a fricative [β] but rather a plosive [b]; even in intervocalic position it seems to vary with ⟨p⟩. ⟨d⟩ and ⟨g⟩ may also have been plosives. ⟨z⟩ was probably a voiced fricative [z]. /f/ is rendered by ɸ in the Greek texts from Nubia and by ϥ in the Greek and Coptic Gebelên documents. /x/ ist generally rendered by χ and Χ, respectively. /k-h/ appears in the Gebelên documents as ΚϨ in the name *sentekhajnis*, but /p-h/ appears as ɸ in the Egyptian name *Phant*. The vocalisation of the latter is that of the Upper Egyptian local dialects (in particular, Akhmimic), whereas Meroitic ⟨ant⟩, phonetically *anata*, goes back to the New Kingdom form of *ḥm-nṯr*, transmitted in cuneiform script as *ḥanata*, it is to be reconstructed as *hámnatə > háatə > hántə > hánt*, Sahidic ϨΟΝΤ.

[2] Browne, Gerald M. *Textus Blemmyicus aetatis christianae.* Champaign Illinois, 2003.

find his interest. But – what is left, after this magisterial account of the evidence? Well, here is some.

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A few years ago, Chantal Heurtel published a number of Coptic receipts from Edfu which are preserved in the collections of the Louvre Museum and the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo.[3] Following a regular pattern, these receipts contain the names of all persons involved. Even when the text is fragmentary its structure can usually be discerned. This is the case of ostracon AF 12322, published on p. 144. It goes, [ϩΙΤΟΟΤΚ ΝΤΟΚ *NN.* ΕΙϹ *numbers in word and figure, matter,* ⲀⲨΕΙ ΕΤΟΟⲦ ΝⲦⲀΙⲦⲀⲀⲨ Ν...]ⲀⲔⲚⲀ ΠⲂⲀϨⲘΟⲨ ... "[From you, NN., verily, ... have come to me, (and) it is to [...]akna (?),[4] the Blemmy, [that I gave them.] ...

This name of a Blemmy seems to be new, although its termination in *-kna* reminds of three other names of Blemmyes: ΠⲣΕⲔⲚⲀ *Textus* 20; ⲦΙΟⲨⲦΙⲔⲚⲀ and perhaps ⲦΟⲨϹΙⲔⲚⲀ *Textus* 22. In all three cases, *kna* seems to be preceded by a noun in the genitive: *pre-* (= **pira-y-* ?), *tiut-i-*, *tus-i*. Of these, *tiut-* and *tus-* may be feminine nouns, ending in either *-t* or *-s* (*Textus* 25). Zyhlarz, *Beitrag* 13–14, ventured to understand ⲦΙΟⲨⲦΙⲔⲚⲀ as "Herr des Jagdwildes," based upon modern Bedauye *tiu* (fem.) "game" and *kena* "owner."[5] No matter what the first element really means, the second is quite likely to be expected in the onomasticon: cf. elements like Arabic *ḏū*, Old Nubian *-kol* (verbid of *kon-* "to have"; I have assembled some of these names in my paper read at the Congress of Coptic Studies at Leiden[6]). The names in question may mean, "owner of *p(i)ra-*, of *tiyu-t-*, and of *tus-*," respectively. Note that vowels seem to be elided in the spelling of several Blemmyan names: Βρεειτεκ has been compared with Bedauye *bire-y tak* "man of rain" (see *Textus* 15); ΚρορⲁϨε was conjectured by Browne (*Textus* 17) for ΚρουⲁϨε, in view of the Meroitic element –καρουρ in another name; the component *-mne* of some names was compared by Browne (*Textus* 16) with ⲘΗⲚ in ll. 5 and 6 of the Old Bedauye ostracon mentioned; also consider the names beginning with *pl-* and *pr-* (*Textus* 20) which are perhaps to be interpreted as containing a vowel after *p*.

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[3] Heurtel, Chantal "Reçus coptes d'Edfou (Musée du Louvre et I.F.A.O.)." In: *Études coptes* V (Cahiers de la 'Bibliothèque copte' 10). 1998, 137-153.

[4] For reasons explained in the following, a reading *[...]ikna* would be welcome. No photo is given, but in the facsimile drawing the letters]ⲀⲔ- seem to be entirely clear.

[5] Cf. Vycichl, Werner. "The Beja Language Tu Bedawiye. Its Relationship with Old Egyptian." *Kush* 8, 1960, 252-261, in particular p. 258: *mēk-i kena* "donkey owner"; *mēk-t-i kena* "owner of a female donkey."

[6] "Some peculiarities of Greek and Coptic epigraphy from Nubia," to appear in the Acts of the congress (cf. http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl./tcno/coptic/coptic_congress.htm#S).

Browne's analysis of the Saqqâra ostracon has produced strong arguments that the language of the Blemmyes was, in agreement with Zyhlarz's opinion,[7] some kind of Old Bedauye. In Bedauye, the genitival noun precedes its referent, showing the ending *-i* (after consonants) or *-y* (after vowels), whereas feminine nouns end in *-t* plus *-i*. The virtually identical situation in the language of the Blemmyan names is one of the strongest arguments for regarding the latter as an early form of Bedauye. In modern Bedauye, feminine nouns show the ending *-t* in the genitive only (apart from lexicalised items, like *takat* "woman" *vs. tak* "man"; cf. Vycichl *Beja language*[8]). In Old Bedauye, however, there is obviously a feminine ending in the "nominative" case too. It has two forms: *-t* and *-s*. This can be judged from the names of females. Names in *-t* are: *apehsēt, mahanat*; names in *-s*: *amnas, sentekhaịnis, tōdetes* (for references see Browne, *Textus* 14–22, s.vv.). *Amnas* may be identified with Bedauye *amna f.* "lying in woman" (for which see Blažek *Beja kinship and social terminology*[9]; but cf. also *amna c.* "guest," ibid.). In either case, this feminine word seems to have had an ending *-s* about fourteen centuries ago, but has obviously lost it by now.

Another instance of the feminine ending is *-ti* (rarely *-te*) or *-si* of the first elements of obviously composite Blemmyan names, thought to be feminine nouns in the genitive (*Textus* 15 s.v. Γαματιφαντ; Satzinger, *Personennamen*, 321). In this case, also modern Bedauye has preserved an ending *-ti* (thought not *-si*). Of course we cannot always be sure that the noun in question (in the Blemmyan names) is feminine, as also masculine nouns may end in *t* or *s*, though this is then part of the stem and not an ending. Here are the pertinent cases.

With *-ti-*: *amati-* (var. *amate-*), *gamati-, pōkati-, tiuti-, ụanakti-*; with *-si-*: *ōsi-, tusi-*; *ise-* may, however, be interpreted as **isa-y-*, hence as a masculine noun (for references see Browne, *Textus* s.vv.).

A feminine ending *-t* can be found in Semitic, in Egyptian and in Berber. In none of these Afroasiatic sub-families is it a very stable feature. As for Semitic, it is found in Akkadian; in West Semitic until the end of the 2nd millennium B.C., in Arabic and in South Semitic until the 1st millennium A.D.. If, however, a genitival noun or a suffix pronoun is attached, the *-t* is preserved in Hebrew, Aramaic and Neo-Arabic.

In Egyptian, syllable-final *t* generally became a glottal stop already by the end of the 3rd millennium, a phonetic development that put an end to the feminine *-t* in most types of occurrences, whether in absolute or

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[7] Zyhlarz, Ernst. "Die Sprache der Blemmyer." *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenens-Sprachen* 31, 1940/1941, 1–21.

[8] See above, note 5.

[9] Blažek, Václav. "Beja Kinship and Social Terminology." In: *Das Alte Ägypten und seine Nachbarn*. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Helmut Satzinger, Wien 2003, 307-340, in particular p. 209.

construct state (exceptions are the divine names *ḥawat-ḥárVw* "the house of Horus" > Αθυρ, ϩⲁⲑⲱⲢ; *nibat-ḥáwat* "the lady of the house" > Νεφθυς, ⲚⲈⲂⲐⲰ); it persisted, though, before a suffix pronoun (e.g., *ḏártVk* > ⲦⲞⲞⲦK̄ "your (*m.*) hand").

In Berber, *-t* is, in principle, preserved after a consonant (*ta-mγar-t* "(old) woman") or a vowel other than *a* or *i* (*ta-meṭṭu-t* "woman"), though not after these vowels (*ta-γawsa* "thing" [from Late Latin *causa*]; *ta-duli* "roof"). But *-t* is not always physically preserved. It will in several idioms assimilate to a final stop and merge with it (*ta-bṛap < *ta-brap-t* "letter" [from Late Latin *brevis* "short letter," cf. German *Brief*]). Furthermore, *t* generally becomes fricative (*θ, s*) in many idioms, or even *h* or zero.[10]

In Chadic, only a few remnants of the feminine ending *-t* are extant, at best. In Cushitic (including Omotic), only Bedauye has probably preserved remnants of it. Apart from lexicalised items, there is the *-t-* in the genitival ending of feminine nouns. It seems plausible that these instances are not innovations, but rather residuous features of a general Cushitic feminine ending **-t*. This assumption is now corroborated by the Blemmyan onomastic material. This has, though, only in some cases the *-t* ending, in others obviously *-s*. Phonetic conditions are, strictly speaking, not discernible for this alternation: spirantisation usually occurs in intervocalic or postvocalic position (cf. the *begatkaphat* phenomenon in Aramaic and Hebrew). But after vowels we can find either ending. In the only instance of a consonant before the ending, viz. *γanakti-*, there is, however, *-t-*, not *-s-*. A possible interpretation would be that in this particular idiom—which is obviously not a direct precursor or ancestor of modern Bedauye—final *t* tended to become fricative: either *s* or *θ*. In this case it was either rendered as *s* or as *t*. In Bedauye this process *-at > -as/-aθ* continued to > *-ah* and eventual disappearance of the consonant altogether, more or less in the way of what happened in most Semitic idioms.

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[10] Basset, André. *La langue berbère*. (Handbook of African languages 1), London – New York 1952, 23.

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