Some More Remarks on Old Bedaaye

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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 Ballānī 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. 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, not only presents a first (and indeed very convincing) attempt to analyse and understand the Saqqāra 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

1 Sätzinger, Helmut. "Die Personennamen von Blemmyern in koptischen und griechischen Texten: orthographische und phonetische Analyse." In: E. Ebermann, E. R. Sommerauer and K. E. Thomann (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. 313c1 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 [ζ]. [v] is rendered by φ in the Greek texts from Nubia and by γ in the Greek and Coptic Gebelān documents. [v] is generally rendered by χ and Χ, respectively. [h] appears in the Gebelān documents as ηε the name senebkhuajis, but [p] h' appears as φ in the Egyptian name Phaen. The vocalisation of the latter is that of the Upper Egyptian local dialects (in particular, Akhmimic), whereas Merotic (ant), phonetically anata, goes back to the New Kingdom form of hm-ntr, transmitted in cuneiform script as hanata, it is to be reconstructed as hanmata > hanata > hanu > ḫnm, Sahidic 兴旺.

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. 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 ostracoon AF 12322, published on p. 144. It goes, [ἢ]ΤΟΟΤΚ ΝΝΟΚ ΝΝ. ΕἸC numbers in word and figure, matter, ΑΥΕΙ ΕΤΟΟΤ ΝΤΑΙΔΑΥ Ν...[ἈΚΝΑ ΠΑΡΜΟΥ ... “[From you, NN., verily, ... have come to me, (and) it is to [...]παν (β),“ 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: ΠΡΕΚΝΑ Textus 20; ΤΙΟΥΤΙΚΝΑ and perhaps ΤΟΥΚΙΚΑ Textus 22. In all three cases, kna seems to be preceded by a noun in the genitive: πρ(α) (= *pīra-γ-?), τιουτ-ι, τισ-ι. Of these, tiīt- and tius- may be feminine nouns, ending in either -t or -s (Textus 25). Zylhars, Beitrag 13–14, ventured to understand ΤΙΟΥΤΙΚΝΑ as “Herr des Jagdwildes,” based upon modern Bedauye tiīt (fem.) “game” and kena “owner.” No matter what the first element really means, the second is quite likely to be expected in the onomasticon: cf. elements like Arabic qā, Old Nubian -kol (verb of kōn- “to have”; I have assembled some of these names in my paper read at the Congress of Coptic Studies at Leiden). The names in question may mean, “owner of pīr(a), of tiīt- and of tus-,” respectively. Note that vowels seem to be elided in the spelling of several Blemmyan names: Brētetek has been compared with Bedauye bi-re-y tak “man of rain” (see Textus 15); Κpovdōc was conjectured by Browne (Textus 17) for Κpovdōc, in view of the Meroitic element -kawup in another name; the component -mne of some names was compared by Browne (Textus 16) with NH in ll. 5 and 6 of the Old Bedauye ostracoon mentioned; also consider the names beginning with pl- and pr- (Textus 70) which are perhaps to be interpreted as containing a vowel after p.


For reasons explained in the following, a reading “[...]παν would be welcome. No photo is given, but in the facsimile drawing the letters [ἈΚ... seem to be entirely clear.


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Browne's analysis of the Saqqara ostraca has produced strong
testimony that the language of the Blemyes was, in agreement with
Zydziak's opinion,7 some kind of Old Bedauye. In Bedauye, the genitive
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 Blemyan 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. Vysetch
Baja language8). 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: ahebsat, mahawat;
names in -s: annas, sentekhabnis, todetes (for references see Browne, Textus
14–22, s.vv.). Anmas may be identified with Bedauye anna f. “lying in
woman” (for which see Blažek. Beja kinship and social terminology9; but cf.
also anna 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 Blemyan names, thought to be
feminine nouns in the genitive (Textus 15 s.v. Teqamarovt. 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 Blemyan 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: amat- (var. amat-), gamati-, pökati-, tiuti-, yanakti-; with
-si: òsi-, 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 genitive 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

31, 1940/1941, 1–21.
8 See above, note 5.
9 Blažek, Václav. “Beja Kinship and Social Terminology.” In: Das Alte Ägypten und seine
particular p. 209.
construct state (exceptions are the divine names hawat-hārVw “the house of Horus” > Aḥḫr p, 2ḥ3ḥnt; nihat-hāwat “the lady of the house” > Nḫntu, Nḫntu); it persisted, though, before a suffix pronoun (e.g., ḏrVk > TOOTK “your (m.) hand”).

In Berber, -t is, in principle, preserved after a consonant (ta-nyar-t “(old) woman”) or a vowel other than a or i (ta-mioso-t “woman”), though not after these vowels (ta-yawo “thing” [from Late Latin causa]; ta-dui “roof”). But -t is not always physically preserved. It will in several idioms assimilate to a final stop and merge with it (ta-brap < *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 Bedawye 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 begatkaph phenomenon in Aramaic and Hebrew). But after vowels we can find either ending. In the only instance of a consonant before the ending, viz. yanakit-, 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 Bedawye—final s tended to become fricative: either s or θ. In this case it was either rendered as s or as t. In Bedawye this process -at > -ast-ath continued to > -ath and eventual disappearance of the consonant altogether, more or less in the way of what happened in most Semitic idioms.

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien

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