
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE COPTIC TEXTS FOUND DURING SEASONS 2003 AND 2004

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The Coptic texts discovered in 2003 and 2004 inside Building G in the monastery at Naqlun, about 20 items, are primarily documentary texts. Although none of them can be exactly dated, they can be assigned to approximately the 10th-11th century on the basis of their characteristic late handwriting. Together with numerous other documents of the same nature and age that have been found during earlier seasons, they may therefore be able to shed light upon the life and affairs of the monastery during its last flourishing period prior to its modern revival. The 11th century was the time when the church of the monastery was splendidly refurbished and redecorated under the Archimandrite Papnoute. This same general period also saw the decline of Coptic as a living written language and its gradual replacement with Arabic. Therefore, the Naqlun documents are also interesting for the information they provide about the language and vocabulary of the late documentary Coptic as it was used in the Fayum. The following observations are merely meant to give a general impression of the texts, which are still under study (a number of similar late documents from Hermitage 25 were published by our late colleague K. Urbaniak-Walczak;¹ others are being prepared for publication by the present author).

Most of the texts are of modest size and written on paper. Certainly in their present, rather damaged condition, they convey an informal, everyday impression. Only a few are palimpsests on parchment, reused scraps of earlier (around 9th century) Coptic literary texts (e.g. Nd.04.187). Other documents were re-used at some stage for letters or notes in Arabic, a phenomenon that occurs quite frequently. The language of the Coptic documents is always "Fayumi-Sahidic", the local form of Sahidic that was normally employed in the Fayum around the turn of the first millennium. In spite of the usually very clear handwriting, the many rare words and the frequent loans from Arabic sometimes obscure their interpretation. In fact, the Arabic loan words bear witness to a high degree of language contact, and include both juridical terms and profession names. In addition, Arabic proper names are not uncommon.

Some of the texts are private letters. One of these, unfortunately very incomplete, is addressed to a bishop whose name is lost (Nd.04.175). This raises the interesting question of whether bishops may have counted, temporarily or permanently, among the residents of the monastery. Richer in information are the documents that relate to the current administrative

1 K. Urbaniak-Walczak, "Deir el-Naqlun: Die koptischen Texte aus der Ermitage Nr. 25", *JJP* 39, 1999, 93-136

and economic activities of the monastery in this period. Amongst these documents, is a brief note in which an Archimandrite Diakonos (if that really is his name) states the terms of employment of a laborer named Jacob (Nd.04.142) [Fig. 1]. Other documents that bear witness to the relations of the monastery with the outside world are registers of payments made to or received from named individuals in exchange for goods or services (compare similar documents from the Fayum in P.Fay.Copt., no. 45 ff.). Examples are an "account (or, list: *logos*) of the water-wheel" that specifies for each day of an unknown week, the names of the men who had been working (Nd.03.021), or a list of "the *tiari* (an obscure word, plural) of the gardeners (or, winegrowers) of Neklôni

(Naqlun)" (Nd.04.143) [Fig. 2]. One list occupies several pages of what appears to have been a small account book (Nd.03.049)². It is invaluable for our knowledge of local onomastics and for the professions that are occasionally mentioned (among which relatively rare professions appear, like "forager" and "canvas dealer").

In this latter document, the names are still exclusively from the standard Egyptian Christian repertoire and include, e.g., several Thôtters, a very popular name in the Fayum (from Theodore), and the relatively rare Latin Kelestinos (Celestine, after the 5th-century Pope of Rome). In another long and apparently complete list of expenses (?), Arabic proper names and titles or epithets are already quite frequent and while Coptic script and grammar are retained,

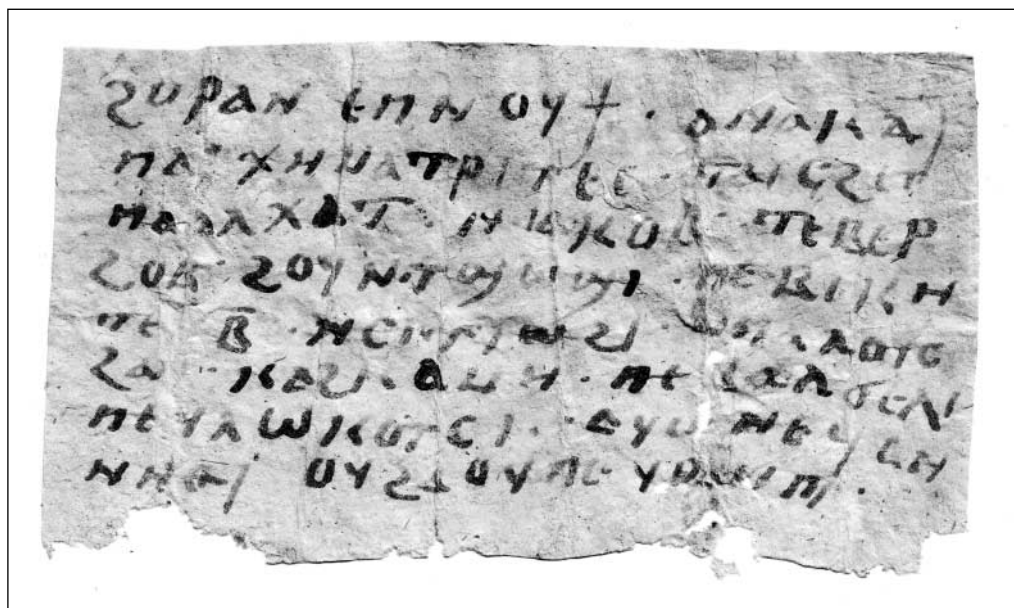


Fig. 1. Nd.04.142. Document on paper concerning the work of a laborer named Jacob, written by the Archimandrite Diakonos (Photo W. Godlewski)

2 See PAM XV, Reports 2003 (2004), 149, Fig. 9.

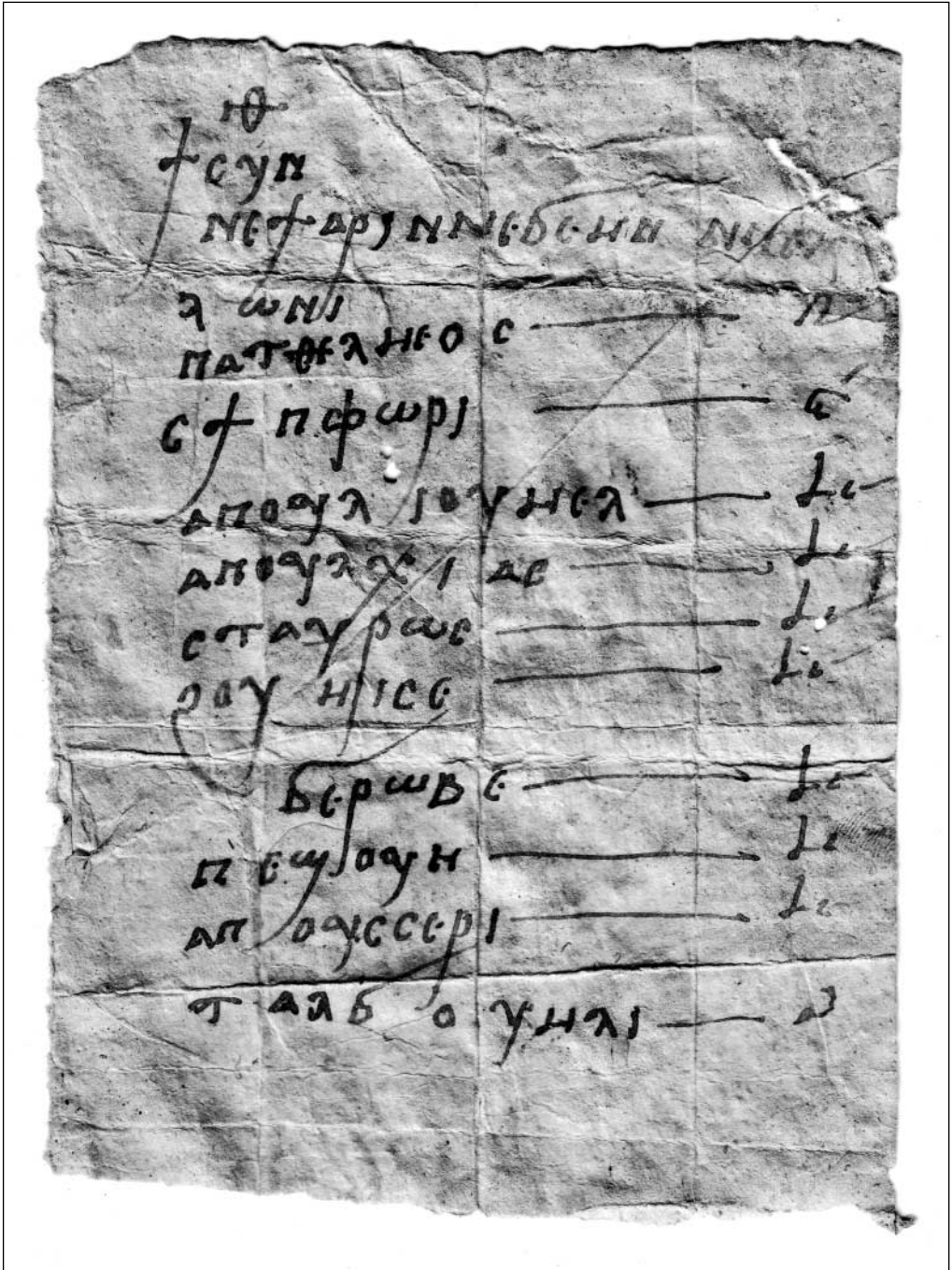


Fig. 2. Nd.04.143. List of payments made to or received from "the gardeners of Naqlun"
 (Photo W. Godlewski)

the degree of code-mixing is remarkably high (Nd.04.168). The nature of the entries in this particular document is rather elusive. Some appear to be connected with festivals, e.g. that for "the *pashpars* (obscure word, plural) for the lambs for the feast of (the month) Parmouti (March-April; Easter must be meant)" or that for "David and the men who came for the feast of Gabriel (date not specified)", but in most cases only names and numbers are mentioned. Where identifiable place names occur (e.g. Lehôni, i.e. al-Lahun), the interest of these lists

appears to be local. Given the nature of the documents this is, of course, hardly surprising. The texts show the monastery engaged in its daily dealings with individuals of various professions, including shepherds, carpenters, potters, gardeners, etc., many of whom were amongst its clientele. Together with the contemporary epigraphic sources and the many other late Coptic and Arabic documents from the Fayum that still await publication or full study, the new finds can help to recreate a landscape that around the year 1000 was still largely Christian.