



**Study of Four Coptic Texts
Relating to Date Fruits**

by

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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 ostrakon was translated by Hall in 1905, while the two other texts (ostrakon 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 ostrakon 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 important at that time.

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

ملخص:

تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية إعادة نشر لأربعة نصوص قبطية، بردية واحدة وثلاث شقافات، ولقد قمت بنشر إحدى الشقافات في عام ٢٠١٩، ولكني أقدمها هنا مع إعادة قراءة لبعض الكلمات القليلة، وكذلك نص على شقفة ترجمها هول عام ١٩٠٥، وهناك نسان عبارة عن بردية وشقفة قد استشهد بهما "كرم" في كتابه "نصوص قصيرة من الشقافة والبرديات القبطية" الذي صدر عام ١٩٢١، حيث قدم النصوص القبطية فقط دون أي ترجمة أو تعليق على الرغم من ترجمة احد النصين على الاوستراكون بواسطة "ورل" عام ١٩١٥ لكني لم أجد ترجمة للبردية موضع البحث، ومصدر تلك النصوص للشقافة هو واحدة من مجموعة ورل بأمريكا والثانية من المتحف البريطاني والثالثة من المتحف القبطي بمصر أما البردية فهي من مكتبة جون ريلاندز بإنجلترا، وهذه النصوص الثلاثة تذكر ثمار البلح، والتي كانت ذات أهمية في ذلك الوقت حيث كانت تستخدم لتحلية المشروبات مثل الجعة والنبيد ولحشو بعض أنواع الكعك منذ عصر الاسرات القرعونية وتوارث الأقباط هذا الاستخدام.

Introduction

The Coptic word for date-fruits is βΝΝΕ (S) or βΕΝΙ (B) and it is usually written as plural (sometimes as singular masculine)⁽¹⁾, it was written once reversed as ΕΝΝΒΝ⁽²⁾, the Coptic term is derived from Ancient Egyptian origin as *bnr* which means “sweet”⁽³⁾. Rarely it was used the Greek word φοινικ/ for meaning “dates” in Coptic⁽⁴⁾. Also there was the word ΔΠΕΝΤΙ from Nubian for “dates” and cited in a glossary⁽⁵⁾. Sometimes they referred to dates by the word means fruit as ΟΥΤΑΞ or ΚΑΡΠΟΣ ΝΒΝΝΕ “fruits of palm”⁽⁶⁾. The dates were described in Coptic texts as: selected dates βΝΝΕ ΝΩΤΠ⁽⁷⁾, the virgin date ΒΝΡΑΥΝΕ, dried date as ΒΝΩΟΟΥΕ, or fresh date as ΒΝΝΕ ΕΦΛΗΚ. The unripe/ green date is called ΒΕΡΞΩΛ. The desert/ oasis dates was called ΚΑΩΟΥΛΙ. And the date stone called ΒΑΛ.⁽⁸⁾ The crushed dates (now: *Agwah*) is mentioned in the Greek texts as φοινιξ κεκομμενος (cutting date).⁽⁹⁾ But there is no certain term for it in Coptic. The branch of palm mentioned including 10.000 dates and known in Coptic as ΛΟΥΥ, ΚΛΑΔΟΣ, ΖΩΠΩ, ΧΕ and ΣΠΑΘΙ, and rarely as ΛΙΛΩΞΕ or ΣΜΑΞ.⁽¹⁰⁾

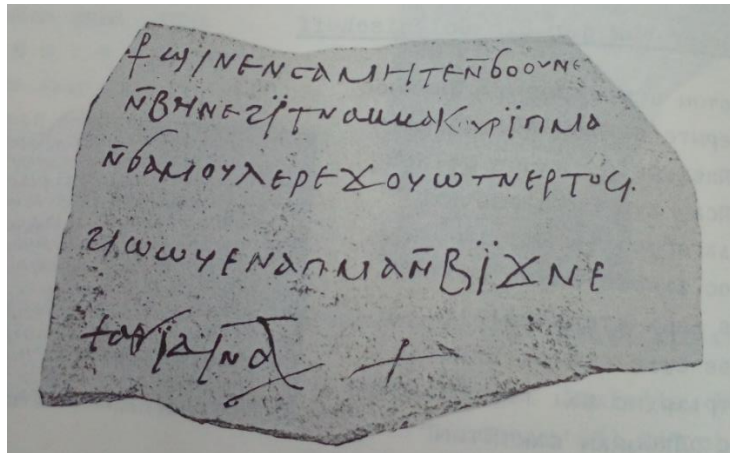
The palm-dresser in Coptic is called ΣΑΚΒΗΤ while the gardener of date palms mentioned sometimes as ΣΜΕ, and the date -seller called ΣΑ ΝΒΝΝΕ.⁽¹¹⁾ The harvester of dates shown falling from the palm during harvest, he is represented with short kilt on an ostrakon kept in the Coptic Museum.⁽¹²⁾

Dates were eaten as fresh or dried among the Egyptians since Dynastic period.⁽¹³⁾ 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 nothing but dates. The Egyptian hermit called Onuphrios 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 the fruit. 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. The bole or kernel of the palm tree can also be crushed to produce a sap or syrup.⁽¹⁴⁾ Other types of liquids made from dates as sweetener are: ΜΟΥ ΝΒΗΝΕ (date water) probably as syrup or as drink, ΕΒΙΩ ΝΒΗΝΕ (honey of dates). Both ΣΤΑΓΜΑ and ΕΜΡΙC referred to the wine or beer sweetened with dates.

In Coptic art, the date fruits usually appear as red however appeared rarely as yellow.⁽¹⁵⁾ 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 which was consumed by the rich people only.⁽¹⁶⁾

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



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

Text

1. Ⲣⲱⲛⲉ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲃⲟⲟⲩⲛⲉ
2. ⲛ̅ⲃⲏⲛⲉ ϣ̅ⲓⲧⲛⲁⲃⲃⲁⲕⲣ̅ⲓ ⲛⲙⲁ-
3. ⲛ̅ⲃⲁⲙⲟⲩⲗ ⲉⲣⲉ⁽¹⁸⁾ ϣⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲛⲉⲣⲧⲟⲩ
4. ϣ̅ⲓⲱⲩⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲙⲁ ⲛ̅ⲃⲓⲗⲛⲉ
5. +ⲁⲑ/ ⲓⲗ ⲛ̅ⲛⲗ ⲓ Ⲣ

Translation

1. Ⲣ Inquire after ten sacks
2. of dates by Abbakeri⁽¹⁹⁾ the driver
3. of camel, twenty artabai are
4. in it, to those of the place (or monastery) of Bijne⁽²⁰⁾
5. + Hathor 14th, Indiction 10⁽²¹⁾Ⲣ

Comment:

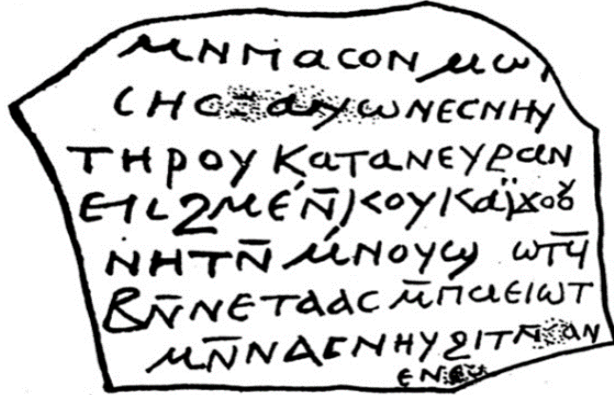
ϢΟΟΥΝΕ: Means sack and replaced sometimes with the Greek equivalent θάλλισ, it is feminine noun so the cardinal number μῆτε written as feminine too.⁽²²⁾ Sacks were weaved or made from leather and both of them were used for keeping wheat, dates, bread, cakes, salt, and onions.⁽²³⁾ This text mentions that 10 sack containing 20 artabai of dates and I don't know exactly if it was a standard measure as the one sack of dates contains two artabai or not.

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

π-ΜΑΝΒΑΜΟΥΛ: The camel-driver mentioned also as π-καμιλιτης from Greek origin and he worked mainly in the monastery and loaded heavy weight goods such as: fruits, grains, stones, and jars of wine, water or oil. He also delivered the letters from a monastery to another.⁽²⁶⁾ 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 they feed them a paste made from crushing the date stones.⁽²⁷⁾

βῖχνε: perhaps place name or monastery.⁽²⁸⁾ Sending the sacks of dates in 14th Hathor , I suggest it as 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

1. [ϩορπ μεν †ϩινε εροκ]
2. ΜΝΠΑΣΟΝ ΜΩΥ
3. ΣΗΣ ΑΥΩ ΝΕΣΝΗΥ
4. ΤΗΡΟΥ ΚΑΤΑ ΝΕΥΡΑΝ
5. ΕΙΣ ΖΜΕ ΝΚΟΥΚ ΔΙΧΟΟΥ
6. ΝΗΤῆ ΜΝΟΥΩΩΤῆ
7. ΒῆΝΕ ΤΑΔΣ ᾤΠΑΕΙΩΤ
8. ΜῆΝΑΣΝΗΥ ΖΙΤΝ Δᾤ
9. ΕΝΕΔ[Σ]

Translation

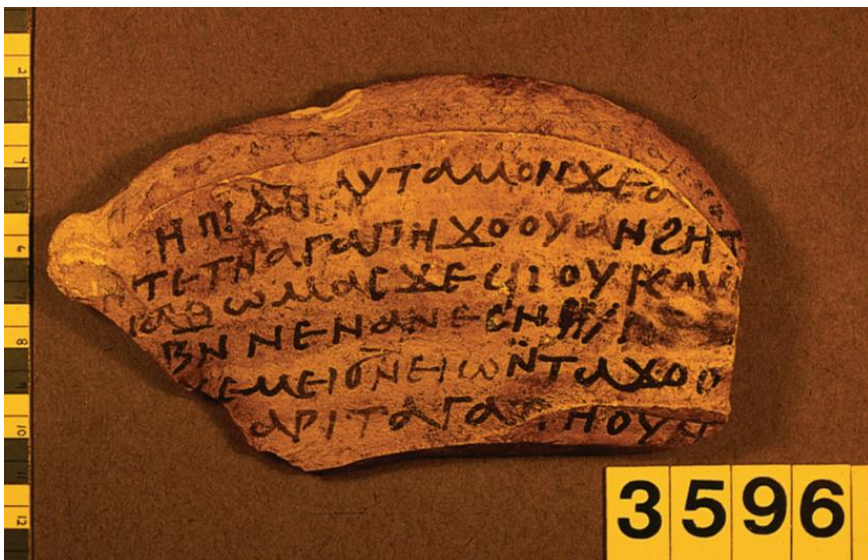
1. [at first, I greet you]
2. and my brother Mo-
3. ses and all the brothers

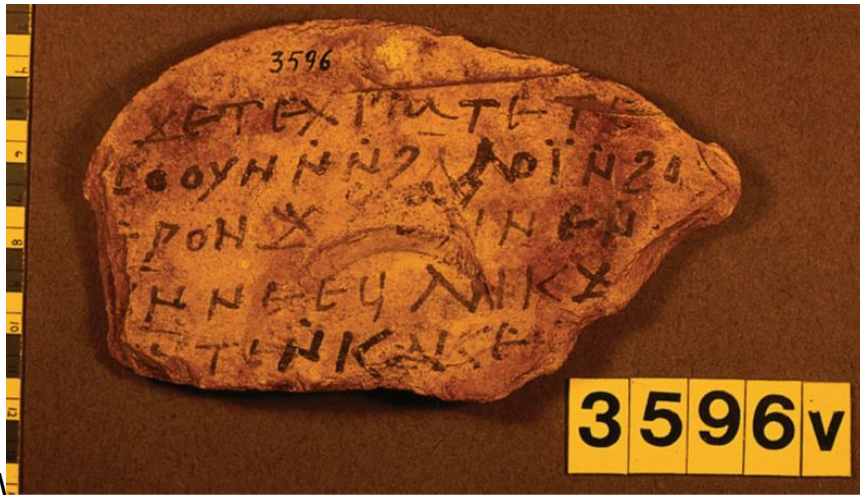
4. according to their names
5. Behold, forty doum-fruits , I sent (them)
6. to you (pl,) with a handful
7. of dates, give it to my father
8. and my brothers , from An-
9. enias.

Comment

The word κορυκ in the 5th line was translated by Hall as “mustard plants” but I translate it here as doum-fruits (Gr: κουκι) and it is the fruit which mentioned in Coptic texts by numbers ⁽²⁹⁾not by measures as well as the pomegranate and dried figs (according to the Greek texts)⁽³⁰⁾. The doum fruits planted widely in Aswan and collected in the summer then left to be dried.

Text no.3 (O. Cop. Mus. Cairo no. 3596- Limestone chip)⁽³¹⁾ - from Thebes





(Photos from www.gorgiaspress.com)

Text

Recto

- 1.....
2. [χε] ηπιδη αγμαμον χε α-
3. τετναγαπηχοου ανητη [η]
4. να θωμας χε τι ογκογι [η]
5. βηηε νανεσνη [αφχο]
6. χε κ<π>ειση ειω ηταχοο[γχογ]
7. αρι ταγαπη ογν [βηηε]
8. [ηφογν χοογχογ ναη]

Verso

9. χε τεχρια τε τε[τη]
10. σοογν ηηηλλοι ηρο[ι ει]
11. [αν?] ερον χ[ε β]ηηε η[τενογ⁽³²⁾?]
12. [χοογ β]ηηε εφληκ χ[ε π-]
13. [ω]φτε ηκακε [ογχαη]

Translation

- 1.....
2. Seeing [that] they informed us that
3. your kindness sent northward
4. to Thomas for carrying/taking some (little)
5. dates to the brothers [he said?]
6. that I didn't find ass to send /deliver [them]
7. Do charity, there are
8. [dates inside, send them 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:

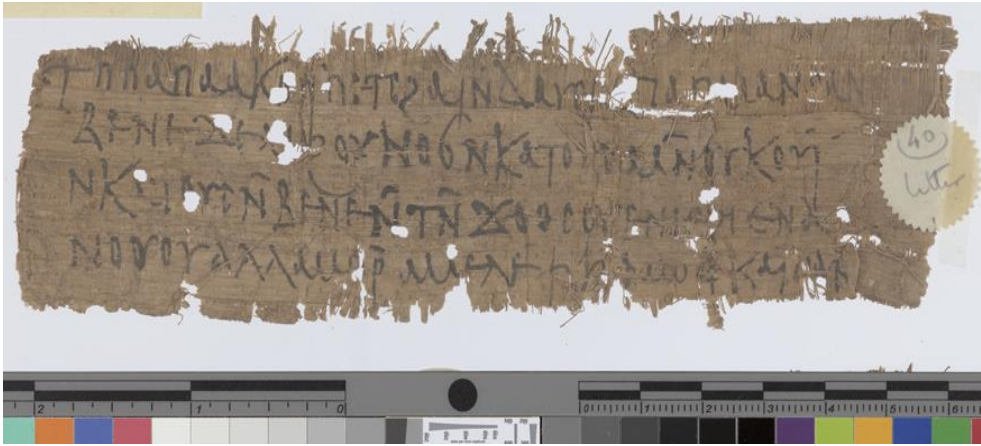
κακε is Theban, usually as γαακε.⁽³³⁾

Compare αρτοφοινηξ "cake/ bread of dates" in Greek.⁽³⁴⁾

Compare also a text from Thebes mentions "some cakes"⁽³⁵⁾ (γενκακε) with some wheat grain and dates (βννε).⁽³⁶⁾

βννε εφληκ 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⁽³⁷⁾)



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

Text

1. ππαπα ακογι πετρσαι ἡδαγειδ παπμα νσα
2. νβενε δε μαρ ογνος κκατογς μῆογκογι
3. κκατογς ἡβενε ἡτῆχσοογσογ ενιζιη ενα-
4. νογογ αλλα μπῆ αμελε+ εγρ φαωφ κα ινα η

Translation⁽³⁸⁾

1. Apa Akoui, the one who writes to David who belongs to the place of the sellers
2. of dates that: Fill one big kados (jar) and one small
3. Kados (jar) of dates and we (will) send them in good⁽³⁹⁾ manners
4. But don't neglect + written in Paope 21, Indiction year 8.

Comment

I think he means by the place of the sellers of dates “the market” perhaps special market for dates only.

κατοϋς or καδος : jar or pitcher for wine as liquid measure, and it was used also as measure or container for dates. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Generally, the other measures of dates are: artaba (αρτοβ), aipe (οιπε), and mation (μααχε). Also the camel load (e.g. καμογλ νβννε). Also the sacks which are weaving from palm leaf or cloth or made from leather. ⁽⁴¹⁾

In this text, they will send the date fruits in good manners and that may mean; the two kados- jars will be ornamented before sending as a gift, and sending the baskets / boxes of fruits like fig, pomegranate, and grape as gift was well known in that time. ⁽⁴²⁾ Or the sender may mean he will be careful to send the dates in good condition especially the date fruits in this month (Paope) became ripe (*rotab*).

ⲙⲡⲓⲃ ⲁⲙⲉⲗⲉ written also as ⲙⲡⲓⲃ ⲟⲩ in Coptic texts. ⁽⁴³⁾ 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 written on potsherd and it mentions request of 20 artabai (measure) of dates placed on 10 sacks to be delivered by the camel driver to certain place. And this is heavy weight for one camel only but it may be for very short distance.
- The second text is letter addressed to brothers (monks and a priest) about sending 40 doum fruits with some date fruits to them.
- The third text is a letter written on potsherd sent from bakers (monks) and addressed to ecclesiastical father(s) 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 ass in order to deliver the dates to them moreover the reaper monks didn't come to them with the date-fruits too.
- The Fourth text is written on papyrus and addressed to a seller of dates to ask him sending quickly two kados- measure of dates; one is large and the other is small for sending them in good manner to somebody may be as a gift.
- Sending fruits as gift was known in Coptic and Greek texts among relatives and friends and also monks.
- I suggest the third text from Thebes (for the word κακε) while the 1st text is not Theban perhaps from Middle Egypt according to its dialect.
- Dates were red or yellow and eaten dried or fresh and it was eaten by many categories of society and eaten also by monks and hermits.
- Date-fruits were important since Dynastic period because of using its syrup/ honey as sweetener for drinks (i.e. wine and beer), also the crushed dates used for a type of loaves/ cakes.
- I suggest the special word for crushed dates (*Agwah*) in Coptic may be ταχ νβννε “date-cake/circular” or βννε εφληκ “soft date/ fresh ripe date”.
- Using the ass for sending a little amount of the date fruits.
- The doum fruits were mention in Coptic/Greek texts in numbers not in measures also the pomegranate and dried figs as well.

Footnots:

- (1) CD,40 a
- (2) O. Frangé, no. 654
- (3) CED, 24
- (4) WB,853
- (5) Hasitzka1990, no.258
- (6) CD, 40b.
- (7) P. Sarga, no.141
- (8) CD, 48a, 131a, 40a-b, 45a.
- (9) KAB, 42.
- (10) Coptic Dictionary .org, CD, 696b , BACS II, p. 14, 25, 29,55,56 , O. Crum VC, no.52, ,Ahmed 2023, p. 22.
- (11) Ahmed 2011, p.191, 192, O. Crum VC, no.52, CD, 40b. O. Crum ST, no.329
- (12) Ahmed 2023, p.82
- (13) Ibid, p.21,22
- (14) Jotischky 2011 , p.36,58,59
- (15) Ahmed 2023, p.81
- (16) Ahmed 2023, p.22, 24
- (17) Published in: Worrell 1915, pp. 313-314, then copied the same transcription /reading by Kosack 1974, p.311 without translation or comment.
- (18) Verbal prefix , from Hieroglyphic iw , before nomnal subject and in nominal clause (CD, 52a-b)
- (19) Read as Ammakouri (Worrell 1915, p.313) and as ⲁⲃⲃⲁ (title) Keri by Crum (O. Crum ST, no.319) but this name ⲁⲃⲃⲁⲕⲅⲣⲓ 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.
- (21) According to Worrell also he suggested it as “the current Indiction” (see: Worrell 1915, p.313,314).
- (22) See: Coptic dictionary.org
- (23) CD,836 a, 213b, Coptic Dictionary.org.
- (24) Wilfong 2003, p.163-164, Coptic Dictionary.org.
- (25) CD, 305b
- (26) P. Mon. Epiph. I, p.165, BACS V , p.9
- (27) Paprocki 2019, p.70, 75
- (28) Read as Bij or Paemanbij as a place name in Syria in: Worrell 1915, p.314, but Crum read it as ⲃⲓⲭⲛⲉ (O. Crum ST, no.319), I couldn’t find this word.
- (29) Compare: thirty doum fruits ⲕⲟⲩⲕ are mentioned with ⲙⲁⲁⲗⲉ-measure perhaps for dates like this text here (see: Ahmed 2023, AC 3, p. 5).
- (30) CF. KAB, p.41, 43, Ahmed 2023, p.32.
- (31) First publishing in: Ahmed 2019, pp.16-18.
- (32) CD, 485a
- (33) CD, 843b , BACS II, p.22
- (34) artflsrv03.uchicago.edu
- (35) Translated wrongly by Hall as “dark grain”.
- (36) O. Brit. Mus. Copt. I, p.42.
- (37) I am thankful to John Ryland Library for sending me the image of papyrus.

- (38) I took the transcription from Crum but I make all translations here.
- (39) Written in two lines.
- (40) Ahmed 2023, p.26 Coptic Dictionary.org, CD, 40 b. Bell & Crum 1925, L. 195
- (41) Ahmed 2023, p.25
- (42) Ibid, p.32.
- (43) BACS V, p. 56.

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