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Front cover. Drone aerial photo of the landscape at Attab, illustrating general differences between the right and the left river-banks (photo C. Geiger).

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Potential Old Nubian cognates for Meroitic *aleqese*

Gilda Ferrandino and Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei¹

Introduction

In this article we will analyse three potential Old Nubian cognates of the Meroitic word *aleqese*, taking up a prior suggestion of Claude Rilly. After providing an overview of the linguistic relationship between Meroitic and Old Nubian and the extant analyses of *aleqese* in the extant literature, we will inspect the Old Nubian conditional clause marker $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\eta}$, as well as the words $\ale\kappa\alpha\epsilon\bar{\eta}$ and $\ale\lambda\iota\kappa\omicron\tau\bar{\eta}$, both with an unknown, but seemingly adverbial function. It will be our claim that $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\eta}$, which is frequently used in Old Nubian literary texts, is a true cognate, a word supposedly deriving from the same potentially reconstructable root. The existence of this cognate relationship, which follows the sound correspondences that have so far been proposed by Claude Rilly, further substantiates the claim that Meroitic is a Nilo-Saharan, and, more precisely, a Northern East Sudanic language. We will suggest that, by contrast, $\ale\kappa\alpha\epsilon\bar{\eta}$ and $\ale\lambda\iota\kappa\omicron\tau\bar{\eta}$ are loanwords from Meroitic, which give us further evidence concerning the pronunciation, phonetic variation, and orthography of Meroitic.

Meroitic and Old Nubian both belong to the Northern East Sudanic language family of the Nilo-Saharan phylum (Rilly 2010). According to Rilly, the Eastern Branch of Northern East Sudanic includes Nubian, which further splits into Western Nubian and Nile Nubian, of which Old Nubian is a member; Meroitic; and Nara, with an ancestral language or close relative thereof, provisionally labelled ‘pre-Nubian’,² which is an assumed substrate beneath Old Nubian in the Lower Middle Nile Valley. Old Nubian has borrowed words from both Meroitic and this pre-Nubian language substrate, although the distinction is often unclear. Currently, all Northern East Sudanic loanwords in Old Nubian that cannot be attributed with certainty to Meroitic are attributed to the C-Group linguistic substrate.

It is certain that Meroitic and Old Nubian users were in contact and involved in cultural exchange, if only because the Old Nubian alphabet contains three characters taken from the Meroitic alphasyllabary. This implies the existence of biliterate users, comfortable enough with the Meroitic and Old Nubian languages to adapt characters from one script to the other. Rilly proposes that this development took place in the 6th century AD, two centuries before the first secure attestations of Old Nubian writing, and one century after the latest attested Meroitic inscription (Rilly 2008, 198). Such intense cultural contact cannot but have left traces in the Old Nubian language itself.

Although the distinction between an Old Nubian cognate with Meroitic in the true sense (i.e., regularly reconstructable to an earlier stage of the language) and a loanword remains blurry as long as the sound laws governing the development of the different members of the Eastern Branch have not been exhaustively described, there are several promising candidates for Meroitic loanwords in Old Nubian. The following Meroitic loanwords in Old Nubian have been proposed: Mer. *aroxe* ‘to protect’ /aruɣ^we/ > ON $\bar{\alpha}\rho\omicron\gamma\bar{\alpha}-\Gamma(\alpha)\rho-$, $\bar{\alpha}\rho\omicron\gamma\bar{\alpha}-\Gamma-$ (hapax), $\alpha\rho\omicron\gamma\omicron\gamma-\rho-$ (hapax) ‘to protect’ (Rilly 2010, 117, no 4); Mer. *ms-l* ‘the sun (god)’ /maɣala/ > ON $\mu\alpha\omicron\omega\alpha\lambda$ ‘sun’ (Rilly 2010, 286); Mer. *mte* ‘child, small’ /mate/; *mete* ‘junior’ /mæte/ > ON $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon$ (hapax) ‘generation’ (Rilly 2010, 134, no 23); Mer. *ns(e)* /naɣ(a)/ ‘sacrifice’ > ON $\bar{\delta}\Gamma\eta\gamma\epsilon-$, $[\bar{\delta}]\Gamma\iota\omicron\gamma\epsilon-$ ‘sacrifice’ and perhaps the widely attested $\epsilon\bar{\epsilon}\epsilon-$ ‘holy’ (Rilly 2010, 135, no. 24); Mer. *-se-l* ‘each’ /ɣela/ > ON $\epsilon\eta[\lambda]\bar{\epsilon}$ (hapax), $\epsilon\eta\epsilon$ (hapax) ‘each’ (Rilly 2010, 138, no. 27). There is little doubt that a developing understanding of the Meroitic language will yield further loanwords in Old Nubian. Our efforts below are based on that assumption.

Attestations of Meroitic *aleqese*

The role and meaning of *aleqese* has been debated for a long time. In most cases, the word appears at the beginning of texts, while in others it occurs inside the inscription without apparently a defined syntactical position.³ In the literature, *aleqese* has been analysed as containing a proper name (‘Aleq’) or noun (‘monument’), or being an adverb.

¹ In the present paper, Gilda Ferrandino wrote the sections on Meroitic, Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei those on Old Nubian. Both authors contributed to the introduction and conclusion.

² Rilly refers to this language alternatively as ‘Vestigial Language of Lower Nubia’ (Rilly 2010; 2011). Rilly 2014 proposes a ‘pre-Nubian’ language separate from the C-Group language, although it unclear on which basis he proposes the distinction. Our use of pre-Nubian covers both.

³ See for a brief overview also Rilly 2007, 200.

One of the first occurrences analysed by Francis Llewellyn Griffith was REM 0075, a text engraved on the back of the Isis statue (Griffith 1912, 2). Griffith suggested to divide the word in *aleq-se* [Proper name-GEN] ‘belonging to Aleq’. He compared Aleq with the Egyptian word *I-laq*, an ancient name for Philae (Griffith 1912, 3). This interpretation fits well with the text, which mentions the divine name Isis four times.

REM 0075, ll. 1-4

aleqese : *eqetertkelw* : *wos* : *aterekebe* : *tenekelxenel* : *tewwi* : *ays* :

aleqese	<i>eqeter-tke-l-w</i>	<i>wos</i>	<i>atere-kebe</i>	<i>teneke-l-xe-ne-l</i>
<i>aleqese</i>	<i>eqeter-to love-DET-OBJ</i>	<i>Isis</i>	<i>atere-VSUF.PL(?)</i>	<i>west-DET-from-ne-DET</i>
<i>te-wwi</i>	<i>ays</i>			
PREF-to move (?)	<i>ays</i>			

Hintze analysed *aleqese* differently, dividing it as *ale-qese* [noun + [Dim + GEN]], translating the noun *ale* as ‘monument, inscription’ (Hintze 1960, 142). According to Hintze’s hypothesis, the meaning of the noun phrase could be ‘his/her monument’. This theory was supported by László Török (1984), who studied religious graffiti from sacred sites at Philae, Qasr Ibrim, Kawa, Musawwarat es-Sufra, and Meroe. According to the formal aspects of the inscriptions, he categorised the graffiti in 10 classes. The 7th class comprised four graffiti with *aleqese*: two graffiti from Kawa, REM 0610 and REM 0619B; one from Gebel el-Girwai, REM 1155; and one from Meroe, REM 0414.

REM 0610

<i>aleqese</i>	: <i>ħrili</i> : <i>mkli</i> : <i>xriṃl[~1]</i> <i>s[~1]lw</i> : <i>ṛdʿime</i> : <i>[~4]li</i> : <i>ṣdik[~1]</i> <i>mneberekpliseli</i>
aleqese	<i>ħri-li</i> <i>mk-li</i> <i>xriṃ-l[~1]</i> <i>s[~1]-l-w</i> <i>ṛdʿime</i> <i>[~4]-li</i>
<i>aleqese</i>	<i>ħri-DET</i> <i>God-DET</i> <i>xriṃ-DET</i> <i>man(?) -DET-OBJ</i> <i>cow</i> <i>??-DET</i>
<i>ṣ-dik[~1]</i>	<i>mne-berek-p-li-se-li</i> ⁴
<i>??-all.the.way</i> ⁵	<i>mne-berek-p-DET-GEN-DET(?)</i> ⁶

In this text, Török (1984, 176-177) interpreted *ṣ* as a verb and suggested the translation ‘to write’, thus supporting Hintze’s interpretation of *aleqese* as ‘his/her monument’.⁷ The other three attestations are less clear. In REM 0619B and REM 0414 *aleqe* comes at the beginning, in REM 1155 in the middle of a sequence.

REM 0619B

<i>aleqese</i>	: <i>sṃne[~1]ħoṃ</i> <i>[~1]yt [...]</i>
aleqese	<i>s-ṃne[~1]ħoṃ</i> <i>[~1]yt [...]</i>
<i>aleqese</i>	<i>man-ṃne [~1]ħoṃ</i> <i>[~1]yt [...]</i>

⁴ The word *bereke* was found in different contexts, and interpreted as a title. In this case it is preceded by *mne*. If we consider *mne* as a variant of *mni*, where the presence of *e* instead of *i* is only attested in (A)*mnepte* (REM 0664), then *bereke* could be interpreted as an epithet of the god Amon. In REM 0031 there is the sequence *Amni Bero-te* ‘Amon of Bero’, where *Bero* is a place name, possibly linked to *Aborepi* ‘Musawwarat es-Sufra’, from the Egyptian *Ipbr-ḥḥ*. According to Rilly, *Aborepi* is composed of the word *-pi*, which indicates a generic place. So, here the sequence *mneberekpliseli* could be also divided in *mne-bere-k-p-li-se-li*, identifying in *-k-* the morpheme of spatial origin ‘from’: ‘under the authority of Amon (?) who (comes) from Bere’. Nevertheless, this is only an idea based on an interpretation of *mne* which, at the moment, need to be further substantiated.

⁵ The adverb *dik* is usually used in the sequence (Place Name)-*ke dik* (Place Name)-*yte* ‘from (Place Name) all the way until (Place Name)’.

⁶ *-se-l(w)* ‘under the authority of’.

⁷ Török translates: ‘Inscription written by *Hr* for the god....may it remain forever before Amon (?)’.

REM 0414

aleqese : *mdewetye* : *nmsldseke* : *mni* : *se keteli* : *hor[~1] [~2]⁸ mnite* : *we[~2] p lq* :

aleqese *mdewetye* *nms-l-dseke* *mni* : *se kete-li* *hor[~1] [~2]mni-se-le*
aleqese N⁹ *nms-DET-title(?)* *Amon* : *kete¹⁰-DET* *hor[~1] [~2]Amon-GEN-DET¹¹*
we[~2] p *l-q* :
we[~2] p *DET-COP*

REM 1155

[...]hre[...]se[...]bh[e] qribdey : *ame[~1] aleqese* : *we wrh[...]*

[...]hre[...]se[...]b-h[e] *qeribdey* *ame[~1] aleqese* *we* *wrh[...]*
 [...]north[...]se[...]PL-POSUF *qeribdey* *ame[~1] aleqese* *we* *wrh[...]*

Further evidence of *aleqese* is found in four royal texts: the stele of Taneyidamani, REM 1044; the I stele at Hamadab, REM1003; the fragment of the Obelisk of Meroe, REM 1041A; and the Amanishakheto stele from Qasr Ibrim, REM 1141. According to Hintze's hypothesis, *aleqese* here refers to the stele or to the royal decree itself.

REM 1044 L1-3

qore : *tneyidmni* : *aleqese* : *iblmni simdelw* : *terite* : *amnepteteselw* : *teritkto* : *qes* : *qrse* : *iplte* :

qore *tneyidmni* **aleqese** *iblk-mni* *simde-l-w* *terit-e*
 King Taneyidamani *aleqese iblk-Amon* *simde¹²-DET-OBJ* *terit-VSUF(?)*
amn-nepte-te-selw *terit-kto* *qes* *qr-se*
 Amon-Napata-LOC-PP *terit-VSUF* Kush *qr-GEN¹³*
i-pl-te
 VPREF(1SG)-grant(?)-VSUF

'King Taneyidamani, *aleqese* : *iblmni simdelw* : *terite*, under the protection of Amon at Napata *teritkto*, I(?) grant (?) Kush *qrse*'

REM 1003, ll. 15-17

allebso : *pertese* : *qes* : *qolebwi* : *xrp^rx^r mle^rwsekke^raleqesewide^rl^ri* : *eqetedebye* : *seb qleb witese* : *yese^rb^re* : *ns* : *nsi* : *qor* : *a[~4]*
eqepi : *me^rd^rewi^rte^rl* : *ayo[~2]esobe* : *tkk* :

alle-b-s-o *pertese* *qes* *qo-leb-wi* *xrp^rx^r*
 ETHN-PL-GEN(?)-COP¹⁴ *pertese* Kush DIM-DET.PL-EMP TITLE
mle^rwsekke^r **aleqese-wide^rl^ri** *eqete-de-b-xe* *seb*
mle^rwsekke^r¹⁵ *aleqese-brother-DET* *eqete-V-PL-PronObjSuf* *ADV*
q-leb *wite-se* *yese^rb^re* *ns* *nsi*
 DIM-PL *wite-GEN¹⁶* *yese^rb^re* offering *ADJ¹⁷*
qor *a[~4] eqepi* *me^rd^rewi^rte^rl* *ayo[~2]esobe* *tkk*
 king.DET *a[~4] eqepi* Meroe-LOC-DET *ayo[~2]esobe* plunder

⁸ In the photo of the text, it is possible to see before the word *mnite*, some vertical strokes, that were maybe over-interpreted by Garstang, Sayce and Griffith (1911, 58, 71) as the last part of the sign y followed by r.

⁹ *Mdewetye* is probably a person name including *Mdewe*, var. of *Medewe/Medewi*: 'Meroe'.

¹⁰ The verbal suffix *-kete* or *-ke* is frequently used in the benedictions of the funerary texts.

¹¹ The sequence could be divided in *yr-mni-se-lo* 'It is the yr of Amon'.

¹² The word is unknown but seems composed of the noun *mde*.

¹³ *Qr* perhaps means 'royal'.

¹⁴ The word *alle* is an ethnonym which occurs in the war report that is part of the same text. Because of the plural morpheme *-b* the noun may be linked to the verb *eqete-de-bxe* of the following sentence.

¹⁵ *Mle^rwsekke^r* is maybe a proper name as apposition to the title *xrpx(ne)*, which is usually translated as 'governor'.

¹⁶ *Wite* usually follows nouns.

¹⁷ For *nsi* Rilly suggests the meaning 'long', comparing it with the Old Nubian adjective */nass/*, and considers *ns nsi* a nominal phrase meaning 'a long offering'. The difference between *ns* and *nsi* may be tonal in nature.

REM 1041A, ll. 1-4

[al]eqese : am^rn^l[i]sxeto : qor : ^rkd^r[kel :] pewise : ^rm^l[lol] yi [...]

[al]eqese	am ^r n ^l [i]sxeto	qor	^r kd ^r [ke-l:]	pe-wide	^r m ^l [lo-l]
aleqese	Amanishakheto	king.DET	candace-DET	pe-N ¹⁸	good-DET
yi- [...]					
VPREF(1SG)- [...]					

REM 1141, ll. 1-6

aleqese : wos : tebweteli : medewike : arodokelw : m.s : sxi^rb^rti : abenbitelw : amni [s]xeto : qoreyi : kdweneyi : akinidd : ^ra^rnsney[i] : yi.^rpq^rrneyi : ḏnmde : pk^rr^rtr : dh.li ḳror. nirl [:] tretd : elx :

aleqese	wos	tebwe-te-li	medewi-ke	aro-doke-l-w	m.s
aleqese	Isis	Abaton-LOC-DET	Meroe-PP ¹⁹	N-ADJ-DET-OBJ ²⁰	m.s
sxi ^r b ^r ti		aben-bite-l-w	amni [s]xeto	qore-(n-e)yi	
ADJ-PL-ti		aben-bite-DET-OBJ	Amanishakheto	king-to be-VSUF	
kdwe-n-eyi		akinidd ^r	a ^r ns-n-ey[i]	yi.- ^r pq ^r r-n-eyi	
candace-be-VSUF		Akinidad	TITLE-be-VSUF	yi.-TITLE-be-VSUF	
ḏn-mde		pk ^r r ^r tr	dh.li ḳror.	nir-l	
dn-mde		TITLE-ADJ(“great”)	dh.li TITLE	nir ²¹ -DET	
tre-td		el-x :			

To offer-VSUF to give-POSUF

‘Aleqese Isis from Abaton to Meroe arodokelw : m.s : sxi^rb^rti : abenbitelw. While Amanishakheto was king and Candace, while Akinidad was ans and pq^r, ḏnmde the great(?) pkr dh.li ḳror offering(?) gives to her the nir’.

REM 1141 L 23-24

amn^p ^r: netes^lw : wos : nete selw : aleqese worte : ek.[~1]70 : ato ^r: apesel : ṣdte : asr : apesel : p[~2]tḗ :

amn ^p	nete-selw	wos	nete selw	aleqese worte	ek.[~1]70	ato
Amanapa	nete-PP ²²	Isis	nete PP	aleqese worte	ek.[~1]70	water
ape-se-l	ṣd-te	asr	ape-se-l	p[~2]-tḗ		
N-GEN-DET	V-VSUF	meat	N-GEN-DET	V-VSUF		

‘Under the authority of Amanapa the nete, under the authority of Isis the nete : aleqese worte : ek.[~1] 70 may bring(?)²³ the water of ape, may (offer?) the meat of ape’

In most cases, *aleqese* opens the inscription. It does not appear in this position only on three occasions. The first is the Taneyidamani stele, the most ancient royal text we actually know. Here, *aleqese* follows the royal protocol and precedes the sequence *iblmni simdelw : terite*, which is probably part of the royal epithets or eulogy. The second occurrence is the I stele at Hamadab. Here, the word, linked to the noun phrase *wide-l*, occurs after the reports of war and before a new section of the text which probably deals with rites or offerings to temples. The last case is the religious texts from Gebel el-Girwai. Unfortunately, it is difficult to give an interpretation of the text because of the state of preservation.

Despite the fact that some scholars have accepted Hintze’s proposal to translate *aleqese* with ‘monument/inscription’, this must be rejected for two reasons: 1. *aleqese* does not always begin the monumental inscriptions; 2.

¹⁸ *Wide* usually means ‘brother’. However, the sequence *pewise : ^rm^l[lo-l] yi- [...]* is very similar to REM 0408-409 *pwide mlol yesebohe*. Rilly translates the verb *bohe* as ‘to rule’, while Macadam (1966, 61) and Haycock (1978, 51) interpreted the noun phrase *pwide mlo-l* as an Egyptian epithet *p3 hwn nfr* ‘the good children’.

¹⁹ The postposition *-ke* following a place name indicates the origin ‘from’ or direction ‘toward’.

²⁰ The sequence probably is an epithet of the goddess Isis. It is associated with the general noun *mk* ‘god’ but also with Isis in REM 0075, ll. 16-17.

²¹ *Nir* indicates a kind of royal offering.

²² See footnote 16.

²³ The verb *sd* seem so similar to the word *sdk* translated by Rilly ‘travel’ (Rilly, 2010, 97-98). The translation of the sentence could be suggested by the passage in the List of the Nubian Nomoi of Ptolemy VI at Philae (FHN II, 614-630), where the structure of the phrases appears so similar to the Meroitic one.

the meaning ‘monument/inscription’ has not been verified by any comparative linguistic analysis.

In a 2002 article on the Obelisk of Meroe, Rilly (2002, 142-145) opted not to translate the word in REM 1041A, but he used a question mark to indicate an unknown word. From the grammatical point of view, Rilly commented on the different positions in which the word is found in the extant texts. He suggests that *aleqese* does not appear to be bound to a precise syntactical position, like in the cases of the royal protocols where it precedes or follows the royal names. Accordingly, Rilly suggested *aleqese* might be an adverb and be related to the Old Nubian word $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$. Since *aleqese* does not occur in all Meroitic texts, his idea is that it might be used to introduce or indicate some texts or sections of main texts of religious nature. Further, the word always precedes a nominal syntagma and in most cases is used in verbal sentences.

Attestations of Old Nubian *alesin*, *alkasin*, and *alikitin*

$\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ was one of the first Old Nubian words to be recognised, appearing with the correct translation ‘if’ already in Griffith’s ‘Some Old Nubian Texts’ (Griffith 1909, 547). Griffith connects the word etymologically to $\ale\epsilon$ ‘truth’ (Griffith 1913, 87), an analysis that is adopted by Gerald Browne in his *Old Nubian Dictionary* (Browne 1996, 9). The second part $-\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ is analysed as a ‘copulative/focus marker’ (Browne 1997, 28-37; 2002, 74). This etymological analysis, as we will show below, has now become questionable. $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ is a frequently occurring adverb introducing the protasis of conditional clauses.

M 4.15-5.4²⁴

$\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$	$\epsilon\text{O}\Delta\bar{\lambda}$	$\ale\bar{\text{i}}\text{k}\bar{\text{a}}$	$\text{M}\text{O}\Upsilon\Delta\text{O}\Upsilon\text{O}\Upsilon\text{K}\text{O}\text{N}\text{N}\text{O}'$	$\Phi\text{I}\text{L}\text{O}\text{Z}\text{E}\text{N}\text{I}\text{T}\text{H}\text{I}\text{G}\bar{\lambda}\bar{\lambda}\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\lambda}\text{O}\ \bar{\text{O}}\bar{\text{O}}\Upsilon\text{P}\bar{\epsilon}'$
<i>alesin</i>	<i>ηod-il-0</i>	<i>ai-ka</i>	<i>moudou-ouko-n-no</i>	<i>philoxenitē-gille-lō</i>
if	Lord-DET-NOM 1SG-ACC		lead-SUBORD-2/3SG-LOC	Philoxenite-ALL-FOC

jou-r-e

go-PRS-1SG.PRED

‘If the Lord guides me, I will go to Philoxenite’.

$\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ has also been attested in a curse, where a translation with ‘if’ is grammatically less felicitous. However, the sense of conditionality is still present.

P.QI 3 30.30-31²⁵

$\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$	ΔN	$\text{C}\bar{\lambda}\text{K}\bar{\text{K}}\bar{\text{A}}'$	$\text{O}\Upsilon\text{C}\bar{\text{K}}\bar{\text{A}}'$	$\text{E}\bar{\alpha}\text{G}\bar{\Gamma}\bar{\alpha}\bar{\Delta}\bar{\lambda}\bar{\lambda}\text{O}$	$\bar{\epsilon}\bar{\text{P}}\bar{\text{I}}\bar{\text{M}}\bar{\alpha}\text{X}\text{O}\bar{\text{C}}\bar{\lambda}$	$\text{T}\bar{\alpha}\text{N}$	$\text{O}\Upsilon\bar{\Gamma}\bar{\rho}\text{R}\text{O}\text{K}\text{O}$	$\text{T}\bar{\alpha}\text{K}\bar{\text{K}}\bar{\alpha}$	$\text{O}\bar{\alpha}\text{G}\bar{\text{I}}\bar{\text{O}}\bar{\alpha}\text{M}\bar{\text{H}}'$
<i>alesin</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>sal-ka</i>	<i>ousk-a</i>	<i>ηagg-ad-il-0-lo</i>					
if	1SG.GEN	word-ACC	speak.against-PRED	deny-INTEN-PRS.DET-NOM-FOC					
<i>epimakhosi-l-0</i>		<i>tan</i>	<i>šigir-ro ko</i>	<i>tak-ka</i>					
Epimachus-DET-NOM	3SG.GEN	spear-LOC		through 3SG-ACC					

šag-ij-a-mē

stab-PLACT-PRED-JUS.SG

‘Whoever will speak against and deny my statement, may Epimachus stab him multiple times with his spear’.

$\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ mainly occurs in literary texts, but there is one attestation in a letter that shows a phonologically reduced variant, P.QI 3 43.3 $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}-$. The fact that this phonological reduction can take place already suggests that the ending $-\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$ is perhaps not the same as Browne’s ‘copulative/focus marker’, which never undergoes phonological reduction.

In the *Old Nubian Dictionary*, Browne lists several other adverbs that appear somehow etymologically related to $\ale\epsilon\epsilon\bar{\text{c}}\bar{\text{n}}$, including $\ale\text{K}\bar{\text{K}}\bar{\text{A}}\bar{\text{C}}\bar{\text{n}}$ ‘indeed; now(?)’ (Browne 1996, 10), $\ale\text{K}\bar{\text{I}}\text{O}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{n}}$ ‘indeed; now(?)’ (Browne 1996, 10), with perhaps the shortened form $\text{K}\bar{\text{O}}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{n}}$, which Browne glosses as an ‘emphasiser’ (Browne 1996, 10). Despite uncertainty about their precise meaning, they appear at the beginning of orders, and in both cases these commands come at the end of a section in the letter in which various orders are given. Both sentences are then followed by closing formulas and greetings.

²⁴ M = Van Gerven Oei and El-Guzuuli 2012.

²⁵ P.QI 3 = Browne 1991.

P.QI 3 54.i.3-4

αλκασῖ σογοδακα μορ ῥ: | μαφε :ḳ:τα: τοδḳεσο:

alkasin soḡoja-ka mor 6 maše 9-ta
indeed(?) Soḡoja-ACC artab 6 bushel 9-ACC
toj-j-e-so

leave(?)-PLACT-IMP.2/3SG.PRED-COMM

‘Indeed(?) leave(?) 6 artabs and 9 bushels to Soḡoja’.

P.QI 3 55.i.7-8

αλικοτιῖ οὔρογκα τορικα ειτιρεσο παρρε δεσσι κερικικον

alikutin ourou-ka tori-ka eitir-e-so
indeed(?)king-ACC tori-ACC send-IMP.2/3SG.PRED-COMM
parre dessi ker-is-i-k-on
plot green gather(?)-PST2-1SG-ACC-CONJ

‘Indeed(?) send to the king the tori and the green plot that I gathered(?)’

The shorter form *κοτιῖ* has been attested twice, at different positions in the clause but both times in the context of a conditional order.

P.QI 3 52.4-5

τῖμογαν¹⁰ κοτιῖ καρτεκα ανικκλε παḳεσο

tir-mo-ga-n-no kotin karte-ka an-ni-kille
give>2/3-NEG?-SUBORD-2/3SG-LOC indeed(?) letter-ACC 1SG-PROP-ALL
pa-e-so

write-IMP.2/3SG.PRED-COMM

‘If he doesn’t give it to you, indeed(?) write me a letter’.

P.QI 3 51.7

ḳλοκ κοτιῖ ταννικα τῖκαγανδε παλα δοḳρεḳεσο

elok kotin tan-ni-ka tik-ka-u-an-de pal-a
now(?) indeed(?) 3SG-PROP-ACC give>2/3-SUBORD-3PL-ADE come.out-PRED
jour-ee-so

go-IMP.2/3SG.PRED-COMM

‘Now(?) indeed(?) when they have given it to her, go away’.

Potential Etymological Connections***Alesin***

There appears to be a possible correspondence between Meroitic initial *q-* and a proto-Nubian zero realisation. The most prominent example is the correspondence between Meroitic *qore* /k^wur/, proto-Nubian **ur*, and Old Nubian οḳρ /ur/ ‘head’, οḳρ-οḳ /urw/ ‘king’, οḳρ-αν /uran/ ‘chief’ (Rilly 2010, 136-138; 364, no. 17; 376; 517, no. 180). A second correspondence, more tentative, between medial *-q-* and Old Nubian zero may be between the Meroitic *pqr* /bak^wara/ or /bak^wora/ and ποḳρ /bur/ ‘prince’ (van Gerven Oei and Tsakos 2017, 272; van Gerven Oei 2017, 122).

It has been observed that there is variation in pronunciation of *q* /k^w/ ~ /w/ in funerary inscriptions, particularly in the epithets *wetneyineqeli* instead of *qetneyineqeli* for qualifying Isis and *wettri* instead of *qettri* for qualifying Osiris. The phenomenon of the different initial sign was highlighted in some inscriptions from Lower Nubia. According to Heyler the phenomenon might be related to a dialectal form (Heyler 1964, 34; Rilly 1999). In the inscription of Kharamadoye, REM 0094, Millet (2003) suggested that the word *wse* might be a variant of the known singular possessive *qese*.²⁶ The phonological alternation mirrored by the variation in orthography nonetheless suggests a possible weakening of *q*

²⁶ Millet 2003. However, the syntax and semantics of the context are still uncertain and *wse* could also be considered a noun.

from labialised velar to approximant, a development that could have been mirrored in proto-Nubian.

If we were to assume a correspondence between Meroitic medial *-q-* and Old Nubian zero, *alesin* is a good candidate for a cognate with Meroitic *aleqese*. The other sound correspondences also hold well: initial Meroitic */a-/* corresponds consistently to proto-Nubian **a-* and Old Nubian *a-*, cf. Meroitic *are /ar/* ‘to take, receive’ and Old Nubian *ap(p)* ‘to take’ (Rilly 2010, 354, no. 2; 377; 446, no. 53); non-initial Meroitic */l/* corresponds to proto-Nubian **l*, for example in Meroitic *wle /wal/* ‘dog’, Roman *wel* (Rilly 2010, 369, no. 23; 376; 433, no. 27); for non-initial *s /ε/* the evidence is less robust, although a relation with proto-Nubian **s* seems clear (Rilly 2010, 376).

There remains the final *-n* in *alecñ*, which is not present in the orthography *aleqese*. Rilly has argued convincingly that syllable-final nasals before stops are not written, although they can be deduced from Greek and Egyptian transcriptions. Examples are *kdke*, *ktke* ‘candace’ with Greek *κανδάκη* and *peseto* ‘viceroi’ with Greek *ψεντης* (Rilly 2007, 394; Rilly 2010, 367-376).

If indeed *alecñ* is a cognate of *aleqese*, this suggests a pronunciation */alək^wεεən/*, meaning that in Meroitic syllable-final */-n/* was not written altogether. We find negative evidence for this claim in that the two attested roots ending in the grapheme *-ne* were pronounced with a vowel following the nasal: the placename *Akine* (cf. Dem. *3kjny*, Lat. *Acina*) and the title *qorene* (Dem. *qrnj*, *qwrnj*, *qrnj3*).²⁷ However, the existence of assimilation patterns such as *sleqene + -l > sleqel* (but *sleqene + -lo > sleqenelo*) (Rilly 2007, 411; 414) suggests that the details of the orthographical rules covering nasals are still not completely known. There is no conclusive evidence that a final */-n/* of *aleqese* should be ruled out *a priori*.

In terms of lexical category, the parallel between *aleqese* and *alecñ* is suggestive. Both are adverbs often encountered in the first position of a clause. In literary Old Nubian, *alecñ* is generally used to introduce conditional clauses, but there may be indications that in non-literary texts its use was less restricted.

If indeed *alecñ* is a cognate of *aleqese*, this also implies that Browne’s analysis of *alecñ* as being composed of *ale* ‘truth’ followed by the suffix *-cñ* may be incorrect. Rather, *alecñ* should perhaps be included in a class of adverbs that also comprises *εiccñ* ‘behold’ and *τκκñ*, which probably means something like ‘finally’ (van Gerven Oei 2020, §17.4.1.3.3).

Alkasin and Alikotin

If *alecñ* is indeed a cognate of *aleqese*, *alkacñ* and *alikotñ* may very well be a direct borrowing of the same word. The main indication that *alkacñ* and *alikotñ* are loans is the presence of the velar consonant, with different vocalisation of the following vowel as an effect of the labialisation: Mer. */k^we/* > ON */ka/*, */ko/* (possibly */ga/*, */go/*). The rendering of Mer. */lə/* > ON */l/*, */li/* is also not unexpected. The schwa is either syncopated or rendered with the default Old Nubian epenthetic vowel */i/*. Finally, the alternation */-sin/*, */-tin/* may be indicative of an alternation that has already been attested in Meroitic, for example in the couples *kdite/kdise* ‘sister’ (Rilly 2010, 538, no. 10) and *mte/mse* ‘infant, small’, which has been borrowed in Old Nubian as *μετε* (Rilly 2010, 134, no. 23).

Furthermore, the existence in Old Nubian of the shorter variant *kotñ* may suggest that *aleqese* is composite, *ale-qese*. In Meroitic *-qese* has been identified as singular possessive of the third person, ‘his/her’, composed of the demonstrative pronoun *qo/qe* followed by the genitive postposition *-se*. Rilly speculated that this may be the second part of *aleqese* (Rilly 2010, 200), and we may see a reflex of that in *kotñ*. It seems unlikely, however, that *kotñ* has a possessive meaning.

If *alkacñ* and *alikotñ* are indeed direct borrowings from Meroitic, this means that Meroitic must have been used in the Middle Nile Valley for a long period after it vanished from the written record. Although there may have been a conscious effort from Christian scribes to avoid Meroitic loanwords in translations, the situation may have been different for non-literary texts, where scribes were at more liberty to use turns of phrase from Meroitic scribal conventions, such as the use of *aleqese*.²⁸ The fact that the documentary material from Qasr Ibrim dates to the late 12th, early 13th century suggests that *alkacñ* and *alikotñ* must have been absorbed into Old Nubian scribal practices centuries before, and was perhaps part of a chancery tradition developed in parallel to the translation practices used for liturgical texts.

²⁷ Rilly 2007, 394. Rilly, however, suggests that *-ne* has no final vowel; he proposes a pronunciation *[akiŋ(ə)]* for *Akine-te* (Rilly 2007, 376).

²⁸ Another loanword from Meroitic falling in the same category may be *εικε/εικε*, which again is only attested in non-literary contexts: the colophon of the Stauros text and a letter from Qasr Ibrim.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued an etymological relation between the Meroitic word *aleqese* and the Old Nubian adverbs $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\sigma\bar{\eta}$, $\alpha\lambda\kappa\alpha\sigma\bar{\eta}$, and $\alpha\lambda\iota\kappa\omicron\tau\bar{\eta}$, which confirms Claude Rilly's suggestion that *aleqese* should be interpreted as an adverb. We suggest, based on comparative and phonological evidence, that $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\sigma\bar{\eta}$ is a cognate of *aleqese*, widely used as an indicator of Old Nubian conditional clauses, whereas $\alpha\lambda\kappa\alpha\sigma\bar{\eta}$ and $\alpha\lambda\iota\kappa\omicron\tau\bar{\eta}$ should be considered loanwords from Meroitic used as adverbs. The late dates at which both have been attested, suggests the existence of (remainders of) Meroitic literacy extending considerably beyond the latest attestations of written Meroitic in the 5th century AD.

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List of Abbreviations:

ACC: accusative
ADE: adessive
ADJ: adjective
ADV: adverb
ALL: allative
COMM: command marker
CONJ: conjunction
COP: copula
DET: determiner
DIM: demonstrative
EMP: emphatic
ETHN: ethnonym
FOC: focus marker
GEN: genitive
IMP: imperative
INTEN: intentional
JUS: jussive
LOC: locative
N: noun
NEG: negative
NOM: nominative
OBJ: object
PL: plural
PLACT: pluractional
POSUF: pronominal object suffix
PP: postposition
PRED: predicate
PREF: prefix
PRON: pronoun
PROP: property
PRS: present
PST2: past 2
SG: singular
SUBORD: subordinate
V: verbal root
VPREF: verbal prefix
VSUF: verbal suffix



New door of Khorshid Effendi's house extension, 19th century, Suakin. SARS Greenlaw Archive GRE P045.01.