A little over a year after his retirement, on August 30, 2004, Gerald M. Browne, known to his colleagues as Michael, \textsuperscript{2} com-

\textsuperscript{1} My thanks go out to Alexandros Tsakos, a fellow lone Nubiologist. A passionate conversation on the plane from Rome to Amsterdam provided many of the sparks that lit this text. I am indebted to Stephen M. Bay, one of Gerald M. Browne’s last PhD students, for generously sharing his stories and experiences concerning his \textit{Doktorvater} with me. I want to thank Hans Henrich Hock and Dan Rudmann, who helped me with the Sanskrit, and Shayla Monroe and Claudia Näser for pointing me to valuable sources concerning Nubian archeology. Thanks also go out to Geoffrey Smith, who kindly shared photographs of the Old Nubian amulets with me. I also thank José Andrés Alonso de la Fuente for his critical remarks to improve this paper.

\textsuperscript{2} Even though his scholarly work is consistently signed “Gerald M. Browne,” no one except his parents referred to him by his first name (Stephen M. Bay, p.c.). Even so, it appears that some colleagues also referred to him as “Gerald” rather than “Michael.” See Gerald M. Browne, “Valedictory Address,” in \textit{Studia Palaeophilologica: Professoris G.M. Browne in honorem obdata}, ed. Stephen M. Bay (Champaign: Stipes Publishing, 2004), xv–xviii, at xv. However, note that Bay himself explicitly called him “G. Michael Browne” in Stephen M. Bay and Maryline G. Parca, “†G. Michael Browne
mitted suicide. This fact has been largely repressed within the scholarly community of Nubian Studies, as no one has yet tried to understand the context of his suicide and its relation to the way in which our field constitutes itself. This chapter offers a first attempt to do so, by reading Browne’s scholarship not only as the virtuoso philological performance it represents, but also as an allegory of the way in which Nubian Studies continues to struggle to connect the lives and deaths of the people from the past it studies with those who live in the present.

Browne was a Professor of Classics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and by far one of the most important and prolific scholars of Old Nubian, one of the literary languages of Makuria during what Artur Obłuski has termed the Two Kingdoms period. As a scholar he was a true polymath, publishing editions in Arabic, Armenian, Blemmyan, Coptic, Geez, Georgian, Greek, Latin, Lydian, Old Nubian, Sanskrit, and Syriac. For example, in 2003 he published a Latin edition of a piece of pottery inscribed with the Cushitic language Blemmyan written in Greek characters, no doubt one of the very few scholarly publications published in Latin that year. By choosing to express himself in this ancient language, he placed himself in a scholarly tradition stretching back centuries in time, as one of


the last authors proficient in the humanist language of scholarly inquiry, now all but abandoned and replaced by Browne’s native tongue, English.

Browne started to publicly articulate his feeling of non-belonging midway through his scholarly career, only a few years after he first started to publish on Old Nubian. In his article “Old Nubian Philology” from 1985, he draws a parallel between possible traces of a Makuritan philological tradition and his own scholarly practice. He ends the article by recalling an observation of his Doktorvater, the papyrologist Herbert C. Youtie, about an Egyptian scribe, a “frustrated érudit manqué” from “an outpost of civilization on the verge of the Fayum’s inhospitable desert,” who “for no apparent reason other than playful desperation, translated Egyptian names into Greek.” Browne sees here an analogy not only with the Nubian scribes whose work he is studying, but also himself:

But Egypt, at least in the areas responsible for the production and diffusion of texts, must have been more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than Nubia. For a more pertinent analogue I turn to the Egyptian village of Karanis, an outpost of civilization on the verge of the Fayum’s inhospitable desert. There, in the last quarter of the second century of our era, scribes produced enormous tax rolls that have survived and provided papyrologists with many a problem of decipherment and interpretation. One of the scribes who drafted the rolls seems to have been a frustrated érudit manqué: such was Profes-

8 Herbert C. Youtie must have made a lasting impression on Browne, as he returns to him again, twenty years later, in his “Valedictory Address,” xv.
sor H.C. Youtie’s conclusion when he noted that this scribe at times, for no apparent reason other than playful desperation, translated Egyptian names into Greek; he reached the height of his powers when he rendered Πανπῖν “he of the mice” by ἀνδίκτης, a poetic word designating the tongue of a mousetrap and found elsewhere only in the erudite verses of Callimachus. “Not many Greeks or Graeco-Egyptians at Karanis were in the habit of entertaining themselves with Callimachus,” writes Professor Youtie, in trying to understand the personality of a scribe who sought intellectual satisfaction by burying displays of linguistic virtuosity in gigantic money registers. I have a feeling that the men who translated Greek in Medieval Nubia would have been sympathetic with the Egyptian scribe’s plight. Cultural wastelands can often be conductive to the refinement of intellectual pleasures: faced with a bleak and dismal landscape, the mind seeks solace within itself, and the gentle art of philology—as I have learned from practicing it in an area culturally not unlike Nubia—is a remarkably effective anodyne for boredom and despair.10

This quotation tells us much more about Browne’s state of mind than about Nubia a thousand years ago. Because contrary to Browne’s imagination, the Makuritan kingdom appears to have had a rich scribal culture and was anything but a “cultural wasteland.” Rather than in a “bleak and dismal landscape,” the Makuritans lived along the fertile grounds of the Nile river, on one of the main trade routes between sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean, a society that “fused Greco-Roman legal forms and indigenous African social, cultural, and ceremonial practices.”11 In his description, Browne echoes the distinctive-ly Egyptological view of Nubia, which, strongly influenced by

10 Ibid.
the way in which hieroglyphic texts portrayed Egypt’s southern neighbors, viewed Nubia as a “poor and barbarous frontier province,” to which they consistently applied the epithets “miserable” or “abominable.”

This uncritical application of Egyptological stereotypes serves not so much to depreciate his area of study, as to situate his own scholarly environment, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as “an area culturally not unlike” a “cultural wasteland,” where Browne himself practices philology as a “remarkably effective anodyne for boredom and despair.” At the same time, casting Nubia as a region that is in need of development, scholarly or otherwise, allows Browne to claim that it “needed” him, as he states nearly twenty years later upon his retirement in his “Valedictory Address” from 2003, published in the Festschrift, Studia Palaeophilologica: “About Old Nubian I have only to say that I pursued it for the same reason that I bought a Yugo: I felt it needed me.” It appears, in another reversal, that Browne needed Old Nubian at least as much as it needed him:

My 30 years in Urbana have been a wonderful time, filled with enough uninterrupted hours to pursue a philological career with some degree of success and with a great deal of personal satisfaction. Not having an orthodox belief system to support me, and refusing to succumb to the make-it-up-as-you-go-along spirituality of this our darkling and narcissistic age, I have ever sought solace in the secular salvation of textual criticism, remembering — with Erasmus — that

unless we purify our texts we can never hope to purify ourselves.¹⁴

Philology or textual criticism is here proposed as a secular belief system that offers “salvation” to its practitioners, a way to “purify” oneself. From these lines from both the 1985 article and his 2003 address, we gather an image of Browne clinging to his field of scholarship as a lifeline, as that which wards off a constant feeling of a deep despair and depression.

The lengths to which Browne went to “purify” the Old Nubian corpus are impressive. Not only did he publish new editions of nearly all previously edited material, but many of the texts went through series of revisions, leading to publications with baroque titles such as “Griffith’s Old Nubian Lectionary: The Revision Revised.”¹⁵ Browne’s tendency to constantly correct, refine, and expand his readings also seems not to have escaped his colleagues. In a transcription of a brief encomium at a dinner on the occasion of his retirement, his colleague Howard Jacobson said:

To be sure, Michael is not always right. He too makes mistakes. One of the disadvantages — or perhaps advantages — of being the authority in the field is that no one out there recognizes that you’ve gone astray. Michael has even developed a technique to capitalize on this. Michael will publish a piece and then, down the road some, he will recognize that he was wrong. And so, he has published quite a number of deuterai phrontides, second-thoughts, self-corrections.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., xvii–xviii.
In fact, it seems Browne’s career in Old Nubian set off with such a correction, albeit not of himself. Jacobson relates the story:

An eminent scholar had published a papyrus which he identified (and translated) as a documentary text in Coptic about land. Michael then demonstrated, beyond any doubt, that it was in fact Old Nubian, not Coptic, and the text in question, far from being a document about land-possession, was a section from the gospel of Luke.  

Jacobson notes that Browne was particularly “proud” of this discovery, and indeed a reproduction of the fragment graces the cover of *Studia Palaeophilologica* as an emblem of his entire career.

The article in question, published in the *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* in 1980, is simply titled “A New Text in Old Nubian,” and provides a completely revised reading of a manuscript fragment found in 1968 in the prothesis of the church in Sunnarti, first published by noted Coptologist C. Detlef G. Müller. Browne rejects Müller’s idea that the manuscript contains a Coptic documentary text, and identifies the text instead as an Old Nubian translation of Luke 1:27–29. This identification hinges on the suggestion of an Old Nubian translation of the textual variant εὐηγγελίσατο αὐτήν καὶ in verse 28 in order to make sure the word spacing works out correctly.

For seven years, Browne’s new identification of the Sunnarti fragment stands uncontested. But in a chapter published in a
1987 *Festschrift* for Müller,²⁰ Rüdiger Unger severely criticizes the proposed variant reading. Although agreeing with the identification of the text as Old Nubian, Unger argues that Browne’s variant reading is unverifiable as it mainly falls in a lost part of the fragment, while there is no evidence for the existence of this textual variant elsewhere in the Old Nubian corpus;²¹ the Sunnarti fragment is the only part of the Gospel of Luke attested in Old Nubian.²² Furthermore, Unger claims that this textual variant is very unlikely to have featured in the material that would have been available to Old Nubian scribes.²³ He thus proposes something of a compromise. The text is Old Nubian, but it cannot be securely identified as a fragment from Luke. It should be noted that Unger’s article is the only published scholarly rebuttal.

²¹ Ibid., 259.
²³ Unger, “Sunnarti,” 263.
Browne ever received regarding his Old Nubian work, a fact that will be relevant later on.

Browne doubles down two years later by providing a new edition of the fragment, which he now defiantly calls “The Sunnarti Luke,” with a full reconstruction of the lost right and left margins of the text (fig. 1), maintaining the translation of the textual variant εὐηγγελίσατο αὐτὴν καὶ in ll. 2–3 as [ⲧⲁⲕⲁ ⳝⲁⲩ ⲛⲣⲁ ⲡⲧⲣⲁ] takka jau a tra. He also dismisses Unger’s criticism, claiming that it is “obvious” that “the Nubian translators of the New Testament followed a text that often deviated from [the standard edition] Nestle-Aland,” adding in a footnote that biblical scholar and textual critic Bruce M. Metzger also has assured him

24 The same reconstruction is also shown on the cover of Browne’s collection Literary Texts in Old Nubian (Vienna–Mödling: Verein der Förderer der Sudanforschung, 1989), published in the same year.
that his “methodology [was] ‘entirely correct.’” Apart from this somewhat problematic appeal to authority, Browne’s response to Unger is typical for his entire oeuvre: to overwhelm with the force of his own philological imagination.

The Sunnarti Luke is not the only fragment whose edition contains more reconstruction than actually attested text. An impressive example, allegedly an apocryphal text from Qasr Ibrim (fig. 2), again features a massive reconstruction based on a “scrap” on which only five words can be fully read. The identification is even more shaky than in the case of the Sunnarti Luke, because there is no known Greek Vorlage and Browne reconstructs the Old Nubian “loosely” on the basis of several Biblical passages:

Although only a small number of words survive undamaged, the general sense of the passage is clear enough: it is from an apocryphal text loosely based on Christ’s instructions to his disciples as given at the end of the Gospels.

Despite the great uncertainty of the actual wording of the original document, and in the absence of any true parallel text in Old Nubian, Greek, or any other scriptural language, Browne reconstructs several lines of text: “This reconstruction […] is merely intended as an example of how the passage may have run. With so much lost, it would be reckless to claim any degree of certainty for restorations here offered.” Nevertheless, Browne’s restoration “recklessly” provides the evidence for the

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26 Alexandros Tsakos states that the edition is “characteristic of the extremes to which he was going with a language that back in his days he was the only one to claim an understanding of” (“In Search of Apocryphal Literature in Nubia,” lecture at the 2019 Oslo Workshop on Apocrypha and Monastic Literary Culture, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, June 19, 2019).
apocryphal nature of the fragment which is then reinscribed onto it through the publication’s title. As with the Sunnarti Luke, the title of the article suggests much more certainty than warranted by the textual evidence.

A final, similar example concerns the reconstruction of two passages from the *Liber Institutionis Michaelis Archangeli*, based on Greek and Coptic versions of the same text. Even though this reconstruction is again “hypothetical,” the differences between the original reconstruction and the new reconstruction proposed in this short article are considerable, and there is no way to objectively evaluate their quality except through our trust in Browne’s philological prowess.

But Browne went even further than extensive reconstructions; he also created new Old Nubian texts. In the years after his death, University of Texas professor Geoffrey Smith acquired four framed “Old Nubian” documents on eBay, which he decided, after some research, had been forged, based on the fact that two of them contained nearly the same text (figs. 3, 4).

One of the two papyri is identified as an “Old Nubian amulet” containing Luke 1:1, making it the second “identified” Old Nubian fragment containing the Gospel of Luke, besides the Sunnarti text. Browne’s imagined fragment of Luke can be reconstructed on the basis of the two extant versions:


30 Ibid., 132.

31 I discovered the existence of these documents on Twitter, after Geoffrey Smith posted some photographs of them, stating: “Here’s something fun: Old Nubian papyri of Luke ‘forged’ by Gerald M. Browne himself!” (@G_S_Smith, *Twitter*, November 18, 2019, 4:03PM, https://twitter.com/G_S_Smith/status/1196443754384764932). Professor Smith was kind enough to provide me with high-resolution images of the documents, as well as the information concerning their provenance.
Fig. 3. Old Nubian fragment of Luke 1:1 on papyrus, forged by Gerald M. Browne. Courtesy of Geoffrey Smith.
Fig. 4. “AMVLETVM PALAEONVBIANVM (Luc. 1,1 continens).” Old Nubian fragment of Luke 1:1 on papyrus, forged by Gerald M. Browne. Courtesy of Geoffrey Smith.
Browne has made sure only to include partial words, so as to minimize any room for errors on his side: -γογκα -gouka is a plural accusative ending, perhaps forming the end of the object of the verb παξ paj, which means “to take away,” and is difficult to place in Luke 1:1, perhaps rendering ἐπεχείρησαν “they have taken in hand.” The sequence -νια -amadj- is no doubt inspired by SC 8.2 κενουτούρο[σεν]ια -amadjokka kenoutourosenia “that he has hastened to beach [his ship]” but again difficult to reconcile with Luke 1:1. Perhaps the final ending -νια is supposed to render the infinitive ἀνατάξασθαι “to compose,” but the possible role of the verb ἀμαλαθ do “to strive, hasten,” remains obscure. -σαν-joun is yet another bunch of verbal morphology without root, meaning “because they X-ed.” Perhaps this is already supposed to be the beginning of Luke 1:2 καθὼς παρέδοσαν? In any case, even if these fragments were authentic, it would be impossible (for anyone not Browne), to assign them to the Gospel of Luke, or any other known text for that matter.

The backside of the “Old Nubian amulet” contains a dedication (fig. 5): “For Charlotte — Love, Michael — Christmas 2000.”

Fig. 6. “Old Nubian Version of Apc 9.17.21; 10,1.” Old Nubian fragment of Revelation 9:17 on paper, forged by Gerald M. Browne. Courtesy of Geoffrey Smith.
Fig. 7. Backside of “Old Nubian Version of Apc 9,17; 21; 10,1” (fig. 6). Old Nubian fragment of Revelation 10:1 on paper, forged by Gerald M. Browne with the dedication “For Charlotte with love from Michael: Christmas 1994.” Courtesy of Geoffrey Smith.
Fig. 8. Old Nubian fragment of a letter on papyrus, forged by Gerald M. Browne. Courtesy of Geoffrey Smith.
We find a similar dedication on another framed Old Nubian text, this time written on paper and dated 1994 (figs. 6, 7): “For Charlotte with love from Michael: Christmas 1994.” We will return to the identity of “Charlotte” below.

As with the forged fragments of Luke, these fragments of Revelation clearly express Browne’s own philological desires. Recto l. 2 (fig. 6) happens to show ϛⲥⲧ- hua-, no doubt meant to render (as a loan word) Revelation 9:17 ὑακίνθινος, which would provide a welcome “parallel” to his very shaky reconstruction of the hapax P.QI 1 10.C.i.10 <ⲥⲧ>ⲕⲛ̄ⲟⲥⲕⲁⲧ. Verso l. 3 (fig. 7) [ⲉⲓ ⲁⲅⲕⲧⲱ][ⲕⲧⲱ] eis aggelos- is no doubt meant to render Revelation 10:1 ἄλλον ἄγγελον, again with nominal morphology conveniently omitted.

The fourth framed text (fig. 8), without title or dedication, neatly contains the opening greeting of a letter, ḫⲃⲃⲃⲧ ⲁⲛ ⲏⲕⲧⲱⲝⲏⲉ ⲏι daoummelo ein ṭokaneka “I greet Your Lordship.” As the language of letters written in Old Nubian is significantly more difficult to comprehend, it makes sense that Browne here forges the only aspect of letter that is known relatively well: the greeting formula. Rather than showing us novel aspects of Old Nubian, which nearly all newly discovered documents do, no matter their size or provenance, the framed fragments that Geoffrey Smith acquired online show us a precise cross-section of Old Nubian knowledge while Browne was alive: the lacunas in his forgeries coincide precisely with Nubiology’s philological blind spots.

The Sunnarti Luke, the Qasr Ibrim Apocryphon, the Liber Institutionis Michaelis Archangeli, and the forged papyri are all exam-
amples of Browne’s philological skill, showing a masterful competence of a language not written for nearly a thousand years. The suspension of the philologist and their text between reality and imagination is, in fact, a prominent feature of Browne’s practice. Its most pervasive feature is the reconstructed Vorlage, usually in Greek. Such Vorlages are retrotranslations from Old Nubian to Greek and are always “attempted” or “hypothetical.” Nevertheless, their mere presence as typeset and published text inevitably lends them a sense of scholarly authority. What speaks from all of them is the “refinement of intellectual pleasures,” the intense pleasure of creating, or even inventing language. Again, Jacobson affirms so much in his encomium:

Michael will even go to the extreme of inventing languages, more or less. There is a modern language, Beja, spoken in Sudan and Ethiopia, but we have no traces of an early version or forerunner of this language. I recently finished reading his latest monograph […], Textus Blemmyicus Aetatis Christiana, in which he claims to have identified and deciphered fragments of this unknown language, Blemmyian.

This is, one hopes, partially spoken in jest, but it contains a core of truth. Because Browne’s philological imagination extended beyond the realm of reconstructions and Vorlages, into the invention of actual philological objects and even personae. In the same way that Browne imagined a Nubian scribe stuck in a “cultural wasteland” and imbued with his own feelings of “boredom
and despair,” he created scholarly alter-egos, called “stufflings.” These were not a mere caprice of the imagination but can be analyzed as a projection of Browne’s personal thoughts and emotions into the scholarly realm. Through the stufflings, philology becomes biography.

The first open acknowledgment of the stufflings’ existence as Browne’s scholarly companions appears in the footnote apparatus — yet another treasured tool of the philologist — of his “Valedictory Address,” roughly a year before his suicide. The first footnote corrects Jacobson’s claim that Browne no longer uses the pen as his main writing implement, which would imply that he no longer operates in the philological tradition he imagined for himself:

I still use the pen for composition, and only after I have finished the work in all its details do I entrust it — but only if the publisher insists — to the infernal word-processor (which, incidentally, the stufflings [see n. 2] and I will not keep in the sanctity of our home).

Note here the use of “our home,” in which the possessive pronoun refers to both Browne and the stufflings. This suggests a certain intimacy between Browne and his philological alter-egos, which is confirmed by what follows. The second footnote, to which this first one refers, is written entirely in Latin, in the time-honored manner of disguising potentially subversive material from the lay reader. The footnote deals directly with

39 Ibid.
41 A notorious example is Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, where he writes in the introduction: “In order that unqualified persons should not become readers, the author saw himself compelled to choose a title understood only by the learned, and also, where possible, to express himself in terminis technicis. It seemed necessary also to give certain particularly revolting portions in Latin rather than in German.” In a footnote, he even adds, for good measure, that “the Latin is left untranslated” (*Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary...*)
Browne's death, as it contains the inscription for his gravestone. This strongly suggests that his suicide was premeditated.42

Cum non credam umquam fore librum memoriae meae dedicatum (qui germanice Gedenkschrift vocatur), hoc loco titulum sepulcri mei refero. quid significet intellegent qui me noverunt; confundantur reliqui. N.B. quod ad versiones quae sequuntur pertinet, si latina et graeca paulo magis priscae sunt quam ut fautoribus Ovidii et Callimachi placeant, ipsi suos versus componant!

[As I do not believe there will ever be a book dedicated to my memory (usually called Gedenkschrift), I here convey my epitaph. Those who know me will understand what it means. Let others be confused. N.B. with respect to the versions that follow, if the Latin and Greek are a bit more old-fashioned than would please the supporters of Ovid and Callimachus,43 let them write their own verses!]44

What follows is an epitaph in English, followed by translations in Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Old Nubian, and Sahidic Coptic. I give here only the English:

Every bond is a bond to sorrow,
   To sorrow and despair,
Except the bond to stufflings,
   Which removeth every care.45

42 Studia Palaeophilologica was published before Browne's death (Stephen Bay. p.c., May 16, 2019).
43 Note that Callimachus also appears in the final paragraphs of “Old Nubian Philology,” 296.
45 Ibid.
In the Old Nubian translation of the inscription, the stufflings are poetically called χαρμίτογ χοφιτάκολγουχ harmitou goñitakolgoul, “constructed heavenly creatures.” Harmit- is here an Old Nubian neologism, based on the noun χαρμ harm “heaven,” and moreover forms a slightly macabre rhyme with χαρμίτ ng-armit, the Old Nubian word for the Beast. The inscription thus testifies to the attachment Browne had to these stufflings, perhaps stronger than most human bonds he forged in his life — if we may believe the symbolic importance of an epitaph.

These stufflings were a group of stuffed animals, each with a different scholarly specialization, which Browne kept throughout his career. Charlotte the dog studied Old Nubian (fig. 9), Willie the racoon Sanskrit, Arthur the raven specialized in Coptic, and Freddy the floppy-eared dog was a numismatist. In fact, Charlotte Stuffling made her first public appearance in

46 Ibid., xvi, n. 2.
Browne’s *Old Nubian Dictionary* from 1996, which is dedicated to “Charlotte. Thou from the first wast present.”\(^{48}\) This phrase derives from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and refers to the “Heav’ly Muse” inspiring the poet.\(^{49}\) Charlotte, the same Charlotte who received the forged Old Nubian papyri for Christmas 1994 and 2000, was Browne’s plush muse. The stufflings were thus essential to Browne’s scholarly practice, his sole interlocutors in the “cultural wasteland” of Urbana-Champaign.

But the stufflings do not only appear as Browne’s scholarly companions. In *Studia Palaeophilologica* they also appear as scholars in their own right. The volume contains two contributions by a Browne that is not Michael: W.S. Browne’s “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā” (fig. 10) and C.S. Browne’s “Tatianus Nubianus” (fig. 11).\(^{50}\) W.S. stands for Willie Stuffling, the Sanskritist, while C.S. stands for Old Nubian specialist Charlotte Stuffling. As Stephen Bay, who published their contributions in the *Festschrift* narrated to me in an email:

Anyway, the Festschrift project was not a secret. Michael sent me suggestions for colleagues around the world that might want to contribute to the volume. One morning I found that two manuscripts for inclusion in the Festschrift had been slipped under my door. One was by C.S. Browne (Charlotte Stuffling Browne), the other by W.S. Browne (Willie Stuffling Browne). Michael always claimed that his stuffed animals had dictated the articles to him and that I should include

\(^{48}\) Browne, *Old Nubian Dictionary*, v.


A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā

W. S. BROWNE

The text, from a private collection, is carried on three paper leaves, each 17.5 cm. in width and 6 cm. in height. The hand is late (probably of the nineteenth century), as is the text, a hymn to the goddess Durgā. It consists of eight stanzas (hence its title Durgāstaka—see the colophon) in bhujānpāpyāya and a coda of one stanza in mālīni.

The hymn is not the same as the two Durgāstakas listed in K. Kurjumani Raja, New Catalogus Catalogorum IX (Madras 1977) 83, nor can it be identified with any of the hymns in such standard collections as T. Chandrasekaran, Sotrāāraṇavah (Madras 1961). For the most part, its descriptions are commonplace, as may be quickly seen from perusal of J. Woodward, Hymns to the Goddess (reprint: Madras 1973). Pertinent parallels for understanding the phraseology appear below in the commentary.

Especially indicative of a late date is the failure of āsādṛ to make position (see the commentary for details); note also the suspension of sandhi between 3c and d, although the latter could be due to the scribe. The manuscript is peppered with deviations from classical sandhi and application of anāsvara and also contains downright blunders. Except for replacing the scriptura continua with a format in which each of the feet of each stanza occupies a separate line, I give a purely diplomatic transcript and correct the abnormalities either in the commentary or, where feasible, through the following sigla in the transcript:

< > = editorial addition
| } = editorial deletion

Note in addition that the scribe has also corrected his text in several places: these I signal as follows:

` ' = scribal addition
[ ] = scribal deletion

Fig. 10. Opening page of Willie Stuffling Browne's “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā.” Photo by the author.
Tatianus Nubianus

C.S. BROWNE

The text is inscribed on a paper fragment measuring 5.0 cm. in height by 3.6 cm. in width. Discovered at Quæ Infrin in 1963/4 by the Egypt Exploration Society, the fragment preserves part of the original outer and lower edge of the page, but the upper and inner edges have been lost, taking with them—if the reconstruction proposed below is along the right stack—at least half of the sheet. Apparently the original page had been folded in half twice, once horizontally and once vertically, and then torn along the fold lines. What we have is the lower outer quadrant:

The writing is characteristic of Nubian literary hands and is careful without being particularly elegant. The scribe has accurately placed the supralinear strokes, but his use of the diacritic (ἡμαια in II 8 and οὐθηματο in II 8) is not formally correct, though it finds parallels in e.g. BE II 3, ΢ημαια and IN I 14 14 οὐθημαι; cf. also IN II 18 at 3 Μαμη.²

¹ It is the absence of inscribing lines that suggests that this is the outer, not the inner, edge.
² N.B. G.M. Browne transcribed the text at M. Pliny's house in Cambridge in 1963, but made no photograph. The text has not appeared in Pliny's Nubianus and must be preserved here.
³ For the standard system of supralination, including the use of diacritics, see G.M. Browne, Introductions to Old Nubian (Warne, 11), Berlin, 1989, §13 (with bibliography).
⁴ I refer to Old Nubian texts by the sign employed in G.M. Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientis) 556, Debrücker, 1996, pp. xiv–xxi.
them in the volume as their work. It was a Festschrift for him, so what could I do? So, unbeknownst to the rest of the world, I have introduced two stuffed animal scholars into the standard academic bibliographies and, consequently, into academia.51

Indeed, the textual evidence strongly suggests that Browne himself wrote both contributions. “Tatianus Nubianus” discusses a fragment deriving from Martin Plumley’s 1963–64 Qasr Ibrim excavations, from which Browne published most of the Old Nubian material.52 As in the other examples discussed above, Charlotte’s reading and identification depend on a minimum of material, as only six words in the Old Nubian fragment appear to have survived completely. Furthermore, the breadth of sources cited from Arabic, Middle Dutch, and Middle Italian, the translation made from the Manichean Middle Persian made by the author herself, footnoted with a snarky comment about a prior, erroneous translation,53 as well as the typical reconstructed Greek Vorlage and extensive reconstructions of the Old Nubian,54 combined with a commentary that relies twice on Syriac,55 all point to skillset and editorial style of a single scholar: Gerald Michael Browne.

54 Ibid., 97.
55 Ibid., 98.
Whereas his article “Old Nubian Philology” from 1985 argues for the availability of the *Hexapla* in Makuria, “Tatianus Nubi-anus” uses the Qasr Ibrim fragment to argue for the availability in Nubia of another philological treasure, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, originally composed in Syriac. With this article, Browne thus re-captures — through Charlotte — the parallel between the deserts of Nubia and Urbana-Champaign, and the figure of the scribe purging his despair by leafing through rare philological tomes.

It is even questionable whether the Old Nubian fragment discussed by Charlotte actually exists, considering the fact that Browne actually did forge Old Nubian documents. The first footnote states: “G.M. Browne transcribed the text at J.M. Plumley’s house in Cambridge in 1986 but made no photograph. The text has not appeared in Plumley’s Nachlass and must be presumed lost.” The typewritten excavation registry lists under register number 64/24 “Old Nubian letters on paper, now with J.M.P. — church 1, south crypt,” but no photographs were taken in situ or afterward. Plumley’s published excavation notes from the 1963–64 season mention them too: “manuscript fragments in Greek and Old Nubian, which had certainly originated from the Library of the Church,” but no further specifics are mentioned in Plumley’s article or Plumley and Browne’s later publication of part of the Old Nubian material in 1988. The state of the Old Nubian fragment, suspended between reality and imagination, therefore uncannily resembles the status of its edition’s author.

The same uncertainty plagues us in the case of Willie Stuffling’s “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā.” Like Charlotte Stuffling’s edition of the Old Nubian fragment from Qasr Ibrim, the existence of the original manuscript of this text cannot be ver-
fied, as it resides in an unspecified “private collection.” Like the Old Nubian text, the hymn is a philological oddity. It is “not the same” as other published hymns to Durgā, “nor can it be identified with any of the hymns” recorded in standard collections. Moreover, “[t]he manuscript is peppered with deviations from classical sandhi and application of anusvāra and also contains downright blunders.” If we look at the structure of the verse, it is remarkably similar to the Sanskrit translation Browne produced of his epitaph in footnote 2 of the “Valedictory Address.” And as in the case of “Tatianus Nubianus,” it is impossible to verify whether this hymn actually exists or is a brilliant philological invention, as imaginary as the author who wrote it. But the “refined pleasure” that speaks from composing Sanskrit verse including “downright blunders” suggests, just like with Charlotte’s article, that also this text may hover on the edge of existence.

W.S. Browne, “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā,” 47. Michael published relatively few texts from private collections, and most of his critical editions can be checked against publicly held manuscripts. There is, however, the publication of a bilingual Fayumic Coptic–Old Nubian papyrus fragment from a “private collection” that is equally suspect. The text was published in a Gedenkschrift for Coptologist Zbigniew Borkowski (G.M. Browne, “A Papyrus Document in Coptic and Old Nubian,” Journal for Juristic Papyrology 23 (1993): 29–32). Not only would this be the only extant bilingual Coptic–Old Nubian letter, Browne also claims a very early 7th c. CE date, making it the earliest attestation of Old Nubian. Furthermore, it would be the only Old Nubian text on papyrus, and the text would contain — remarkably — the unattested and partially reconstructed Latin loanword λιβεραλις < liberalis. A remarkable coincidence of unique features, to say the least.

W.S. Browne, “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā,” 47.

Hans Henrich Hock (p.c., May 23, 2019) vaguely recalls discussing Willie Stuffling’s edition with Browne (cf. W.S. Browne, “A Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā,” 48), but admits that “[he doesn’t] think [they] talked about the text, or its provenance, in any detail.” I also showed the edition to Dan Rudmann, a Sanskritist colleague, asking him for his opinion about the text without revealing my own suspicions. This is what he wrote: “I will say that the sandhi is off, as the intro points out, which by extension messes up the meter. I don’t usually come across texts with dissonance
Neither article shows up in Browne’s official bibliography, and the original manuscripts have been respectively “lost” or are located in an inaccessible “private collection.” They were published in a non-peer-reviewed, celebratory *Festschrift* printed in a small edition, and written semi-pseudonymically. If anything, the articles of Charlotte and Willie appear to be “displays of linguistic virtuosity” buried in the “vast registers” of philological scholarship.

How then to read these two articles, written by imaginary scholars discussing probably invented texts? Why did Browne write them and what can they tell us? Perhaps the footnotes he attached to the “Valedictory Address” can give us a clue here: Browne’s contributions to the *Festschrift* deal with his own impending death. They are, following footnote 1 the *Gedenkschrift*, the *in memoriam* that was never written. In this reading, which brings us straight into the literary territory surveyed by Vladimir Nabokov’s famous novel *Pale Fire*, in which a murder mystery unfolds itself in the scholarly apparatus to a poem, the articles by Charlotte and Willie Stuffling should be read not only as works of (imaginary) scholarship, but as biography.

Read through such a biographical lens, the “Sanskrit Hymn to Durgā” suddenly becomes understandable. Durgā is a Hindu like this — perhaps it’s because what I read is much older and presumably more combed over. But sandhi strikes me as a strange thing to mess up if the writer has much experience in Sanskrit because it is so foundational. It could suggest that the work was translated into Sanskrit” (p.c., May 11, 2019. My emphasis).

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63 Cf. Bay, “Gerald Michael Browne.”
65 This already seems to be intimated by Stephen Bay, when he suggests that Browne’s “Valedictory Address does indeed read as if he meant it for such occasion [sc. as tribute to a departed colleague]” (Bay and Parca, “†G. Michael Browne (1943–2004),” 14).
goddess, a “defender of the dharmic order, an all-powerful warrior goddess who manifests unsurpassed martial skills to confront various demonic threats to world.” And reading the actual text of the hymn, one gets the strong impression that Browne, who professed to have “no orthodox belief system” to support him, found “secular salvation” in composing and editing this hymn:

3. For a man hopeless, afflicted, violently suffering, sick of existence, terrified of (worldly) bondage, you, Goddess, are the cause of deliverance, the only refuge. […] 4. In foreign land, in dreadful battle, in the midst of the enemy, or in water, in fire, in the palace, in the cemetery, you, Goddess, are the maker of deliverance, the only refuge. […] 5. For the embodied ones who sink in the boundless, very hard-to-cross, extremely terrible ocean of misfortune, you, Goddess, are the raft of deliverance, the only refuge.

The adjectives used in this passage are eerily reminiscent of Browne’s own “plight,” which he compared to a “frustrated erudite manqué” who, stuck in a “cultural wasteland,” out of “playful desperation” sought “solace within […] the gentle art of philology” as “anodyne for boredom and despair.” Durgā, in other words, figures here as goddess of philology, delivering those who are “hopeless, afflicted, violently suffering, sick of existence, […] in foreign land, […] and] in the boundless very hard-to-cross, extremely terrible ocean of misfortune.”

71 W.S. Browne suggests that such descriptions are “commonplace,” but I have only been able to find a few lines in a much longer hymn that could correspond to some of the imagery (but certainly not verse form) in W.S. Browne’s hymn. See Arthur and Ellen Avalon, eds., Hymns to the Goddess, trans. John Woodroffe, 3rd edn. (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1964), 144: “Thou
Whereas Willie's article can be straightforwardly read as a dirge, if not a cry for help, Charlotte's “Nubianus Tatianus,” an Old Nubian version of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, is more subtle in the way in which it settles scores and plays with figures of absence and presence. I here reproduce the edition of the “lost” Qasr Ibrim fragment:

i

\[\text{ⲡⲉⲥⲁⲛⲁ} \text{[ⲇⲏⲓⲧⲓⲣⲓ]} \text{[Lk 24:5]}\]
\[\text{ⲡⲏⲥⲥⲏⲥⲏ} \text{[ⲧⲩⲩⲩⲩ]}\]
\[\text{ⲡⲕⲉⲩⲩⲩ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]
\[\text{ⲡⲓⲓⲓⲓ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]

5 \[\text{ⲡⲕⲉⲓⲓⲓⲓ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]

ii

\[\text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]
\[\text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]
\[\text{ⲧⲧⲧⲧ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]

5 \[\text{ⲧⲧⲧⲧ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]

10 \[\text{ⲧⲧⲧⲧ} \text{[ⲧⲧⲧ]}\]

(Lk 24:5) … they said to them: “Why [do you seek the living with] the dead? (6) He is [not] here but he arose. [Remember

art called Durgā by all because Thou savest men from difficulty. / Whether in dangerous lands or sinking in the great ocean, / Thou art the sole refuge of men. / When assailed by robbers, when crossing streams and seas, / As also in wilderness and great forests, / Those who remember Thee, O Māhadevi! are never lost.”
that, when he was] still [in Galilee, he spoke to you, (7) saying that the son of man will be delivered to the hands of sinner and will be crucified and] will [arise on] the third day. (Mt 28:7) And going quickly, [say] to his disciples (Mk 16:7) and to Peter...”

The first thing that should be noted is that, through a remarkable coincidence, the majority of the surviving — and extensively re-constructed — Old Nubian text contains a long fragment from the Gospel of Luke, the very same Gospel whose existence in Old Nubian Unger questioned in his critique of Browne’s Sunharti Luke. As Unger was the only scholar ever to publicly dispute one of Browne’s Old Nubian identifications — an identification which initiated his Old Nubian career and an accomplishment he was proud of — the edition of this fragment reads like a firm rebuttal.

Furthermore, as may be clear from the translation, much of the material that is “actually” in the Old Nubian is highly suggestive. Only i.3 Διολγοῦ - diolgoud- “the dead” are found in the manuscript, while ἄνιλ- añil- “the living” are under erasure, reconstructed. Equally mesmerizing is the reconstructed negation in i.4 δου[μ] - doum[mennalo] “He is [not] here.” Both reconstructions thematize the suspension of the dichotomy of absence and presence, life and death.

A similar game with a reconstructed negation can be found in another article from 2003. The article, entitled “Ad Sphujidhvajae Yavanajātakae,” and, like footnote 2 of the “Valedictory Address,” composed in Latin, comprises a single comment on a verse from the Sanskrit horoscope Yavanajātaka by Sphujidhvajae. According to the opening paragraph, its publication was occasioned by the death of Miroslav Marcovich, who was

73 We may perhaps also note that there are two parallel texts adduced by Charlotte that don’t have “Peter” in the last phrase. The Arabic Harmony has instead “Céphas,” whereas the Turfan (Manichean) Fragment has “Simon”: C.S.
head of the Classics Department at the University of Illinois at the time Browne was first hired as Assistant Professor in 1974.\(^7^4\) Both the use of Latin and the personal dedication “ad memoria m collegae mei” should alert us to the biographical relevance of this text.

The verse reads as follows in English translation:

One should say that a man born under sunaphā of Saturn is a clever and prosperous person who is secretive in his actions \([kriyāsu guptaṁ]\), a man who is honored or is the mahattara of a city or town, a greedy fellow of impure character but healthy body.

Browne emends, based on a Greek parallel from Manetho’s Apotelesmatica, the reading \(kriyāsu guptaṁ\) to \(kriyāsv <a>guptaṁ\), rendering “secretive in his actions” into “non-secretive in his actions.”\(^7^5\) Taken within the context of Browne’s other philological interventions from the same period, this emendation is highly suggestive. It appears that Browne, yet again, buried here a “display of linguistic virtuosity” doubling as biographical note.

There is increasing evidence for a mental health crisis in academia,\(^7^6\) which may not be entirely unrelated to the pressures and inhospitality created by the continuous submission of the university to the logic and forces of the neoliberal market at the hands of a well-remunerated cadre of managers and bureaucrats without any personal stake in scholarship or education.\(^7^7\)

\(^7^4\) Again, explicitly acknowledged in Browne’s “Valedictory Address,” xvi.

\(^7^5\) G.M. Browne, “Ad Sphujidhvajae Yavanajātakam,” 175.


\(^7^7\) In his “Valedictory Address,” Browne touches upon this subject and finds also himself to blame: “For years the U[iversity] of I[linois] maintained its position as a research institution, but recently — within the time of my
However, I would like to think through Browne’s death precisely in relation to his scholarship and its broader academic context. Much of Nubian Studies is built upon death and erasure. Not only is the archeological enterprise continuously engaged with recovering the remainders of past lives, the blossoming of the scholarly field of Nubian Studies itself is predicated on a massive erasure of living culture and human displacement caused initially by the construction of the Aswan Dam, which destroyed many lives and even more livelihoods. In Egypt, the Nubians fruitlessly wait for their constitutional right to return to their ancestral lands to be enacted,\(^78\) while in Sudan the ancient Meroitic word *kandaka* continues to resonate as Sudanese from all backgrounds wage a struggle to oust a military dictatorship and combat its deeply rooted legacy.\(^79\) Yet, much of Nubian Studies’ progress remains predicated on dam construction.

Even though Browne’s oeuvre is to a certain extent unique in the way it allegorizes his depression and suicide, we should take seriously his deeply felt, if amorphous, sentiment that Old Nubian “needed” him. What is this feeling of need? A need for rec-
ognition of a language and culture which continues to remain erased from so many maps — including the “medieval” one; a need to recognize that our field of Nubian Studies, by largely continuing to ignore the very real struggle of the currently living inheritors of Nubian culture, out of a fear this may “politicize” the field, or, even worse, threaten our state-sanctioned access to the archeological sites, we ignore the very reason that makes being engaged in our field worthwhile: that it relinks the dead with the living, that it scrutinizes the past so that we may imagine a future. And this activity — and here I disagree with Browne — is not merely to “expand the limits of human thought,” but also to expand the possibilities of human life.

This is not to say that no reflection on the ethical and political implications of our research has taken place at all. A recent turning point was the construction of the Merowe Dam on the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in Sudan, which was inaugurated by ousted Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in 2009. The construction was accompanied by several salvage-archeological missions, which encountered resistance from the local Manasir population, who argued that the archeological work legitimized the government’s project of forced and violent expropriation and displacement.

Claudia Näser and Cornelia Kleinitz, who were involved in salvage archaeology at the Fourth Cataract through the mission of the Humboldt University, provide great detail on the interactions and tensions between archaeologists and the local community, and critically analyze the “idealised self-understanding” with which many of the archaeologists involved framed their own commitment to the project:

The archaeologists working in the Fourth Cataract acted upon the deep conviction that salvage i.e., the documentation of archaeological heritage along the western notion of its innate value, is a universal goal of first priority and that the value system along which western archaeologists act is objective and universally valid. Moreover, they often had a “romantisised” [sic] involvement with the research area and its inhabitants.\(^82\)

They also offer a withering critique of the response of Derek Welsby, former president of the International Society for Nubian Studies (ISNS), who stated that “by banning archaeologists from the region the Manasir Higher Committee is wantonly destroying the heritage of the people it is there to represent.”\(^83\) Näser and Kleinitz conclude: “These are strong words against people who faced the irretrievable loss of their ancestral land and their previous way of life as riverine farmers, in exchange for an uncertain future due to the development project that also brought in the archaeologists.”\(^84\)

Henriette Hafsaas offers an extensive review and analysis of the responses from the Nubiological community and their interactions with the Manasir and Sudanese government, remarking that “we still lack a self-reflexive critique that would involve a deconstruction of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project—its truths, motives, knowledge, and power relationships,”\(^85\) while pointing out that ISNS members continue

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82 Ibid.
84 Näser and Kleinitz, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” 288.
to operate without a “code of ethics regulating their professional conduct.”\textsuperscript{86} She urges us that:

By uncritically participating in archaeological salvage projects, archaeologists run the risk of being accused of complicity in human rights abuses, forced resettlement, and violations of international environmental standards. […] It is a global problem that archaeologists conduct their business as if they are not implicated in the representations and struggles of living people. In this way, we ignore the ethical dimensions of our work and hide behind research agendas and scientific objectivity. […] The idea that our work is retrospective rather than prospective and passive rather than active needs to change.\textsuperscript{87}

In another article dealing with the same project, Kleinitz and Näser conclude:

Taking a “neutral stance” within this web of interests while at the same time failing to consult with local communities about their heritage values and views of the past proved extremely counter-productive for the archaeological missions. […] The case of the MDSAP underlines the fundamental point that securing adequate conditions for human life and human rights cannot be considered separately from, or irrelevant to, the study and preservation of archaeological heritage.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
But it is not only archeology that needs this reflection: the entirety of Nubian Studies, including philology, needs to become aware of how its constant preoccupation with the past is firmly rooted in the present, and how the way we deal with our dead reveals much about how we treat those who are alive. Browne’s oeuvre shows us, in its breathtaking scope, how the personal and biographical are deeply enmeshed with the scholarly. His case is perhaps extraordinary, but it therefore has the virtue of clarity. What Browne’s philological oeuvre teaches us is that all research is inevitably biographical, and because it is biographical, it carries the imprint of our own ethics and politics. It is, because of its very existence as text in a community of scholars and a much broader community of readers present and future, a reflection of how we are with other people, whether real or imaginary.

Browne liked to quote Erasmus: “unless we purify our texts we can never hope to purify ourselves.” I would like to turn that around and say, “unless we get our hands dirty, our texts will remain sterile.”
Bibliography


@G_S_Smith. Twitter. November 18, 2019, 4:03PM. https://twitter.com/G_S_Smith/status/1196443754384764932.


