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The Lady, the Radish Oil, and the Bishop: Two Byzantine Letters from the Bodleian Library

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- §1 We publish here two letters from Late Antique Egypt that have so far only been briefly described in print since their entry into the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in the 1890s. As often in letters, the details of the personal and business matters discussed are obscured by both damage and concision on points known already to the correspondents, and much of what remains is the careful politeness characteristic of Byzantine letters (↗ Fournet 2009). Dating is also difficult, as commonly the case in this genre: in the absence of internal dates, paleography and prosopography are the chief basis. The often embellished cursive used in letters, however, is different from the one used in dated documents such as contracts and not necessarily comparable. Both papyri adhere to the typical format of Late Antique papyrus letters predominant from the late fifth century onwards: the papyrus is written against the fibers, which usually results in a horizontal format, and dispenses with all introductory or concluding salutation formulae.
- §2 A few other characteristics allow a chronological classification. A paratextual sign centered above the first line of the letter gradually shifted from one generally thought to be an abbreviation of *παρά* to a simple cross from around the middle of the 6th century. The address on the back is more likely to introduce the name of the sender with *παρά* in relatively earlier texts (5th and 6th centuries, though never common) and simply place it in the nominative in later ones.¹ The use of a stylized, “chancery script” for the address is found from the second half of the 6th century onwards, especially in the province of Arcadia, but fading out of use towards the middle of the 7th century.² The use of this style, which is not confined to letters,³ is sometimes limited to the name of the recipient, with the name of the sender in a smaller and less elaborate script.
- §3 In the case of the new Bodleian papyri these observations do not contribute much to refining the date. At most, the crosses centered in the top margins of both letters favor a composition in the 6th century or later; the chancery script in the address of one (text I here) places it no later than the beginning of the early 7th century. Further details are considered in the respective editions.
- §4 The first of the two letters mentions a person of *spectabilis* rank and a “most decent (κοσμιωτάτη) sister, the lady Anastasia” in connection with a loan(?) of money, and the second requests that the addressee enlist the help of a bishop in a matter in which the sender hoped to be “saved” and claimed to be “wronged.”

I. Letter concerning a sum of money

- §5 This papyrus was purchased by the Bodleian Library from Bernard P. Grenfell in November 1895, as part of a lot “from the Fayûm, Hermopolis, and unspecified sources,” thus far described in the *Summary Catalogue* of the Library’s Western manuscripts as a “frag[ment] of a letter.”⁴ A sheet-join runs horizontally through line 3 on the front. The proficient, slightly right-leaning cursive may be assigned to the sixth or seventh century. This is supported by the “chancery” styling of the address

1 Deviations from the two common formulae (i. ἐπίδ(ος) N.N. (dative): recipient – π(α)ρά N.N. (genitive), and ii. N.N. (dative): recipient – N.N. (nominative): sender with a cross placed mostly in front of the name of the addressee and the sender alike) are usually due to errors in readings or supplements, as, e.g., P.Flor. 3 303 will have lost an initial ἐπίδ(); alleged abbreviations of *παρά* often cannot be confirmed on photographs (e.g. ↗ CPR 14 51 or ↗ 55, or ↗ P.Gen 4 173; *παρά* in ↗ CPR 25 11.9 is rather a cross).

2 See, e.g., the letters from the Senouthios archive around the time of the Arab conquest, CPR 30 and 36, which do not use it.

3 It also appears, for instance, in the introductory addresses of late Roman petitions, see e.g. ↗ P.Oxy. 81 5289, where the script similarly shifts with the name of the petitioner, or in circus programmes (↗ P.Bingen 128, ↗ P.Harrauer 56, ↗ P.Oxy. 34 2707). The most recent discussions to our knowledge are ↗ Hagedorn 2008 and the commentary of F. Morelli to P.Harrauer 56.

4 ↗ Madan and Craster 1924: 18 no. 31940 (with corrections, p. xx).

on the back (see the introduction), where every word is abbreviated, either by supralinear letters (first three words, δεσπό(τη) ἐμῶ τὰ and γνη(σίῳ)) or abbreviation sign. The *ny*, which usually has three legs in this style, is written in ligature with the following *tau* in π(ά)ντ(α). The style of the chancery script is closest to that of Oxyrhynchite letters; we have found nothing comparable from the Hermopolite, which is favored by internal criteria.

- §6 References to Θεοδοσιούπολις and a charge for the ναῦλον Ἀντινόου in an account on the sheet from which the substrate of the letter was cut indicate a Hermopolite provenance, which is shared with some other papyri in this lot: MS Gr. class. c. 26 (☞ P.Grenf. 1 26), d. 38 (☞ P.Grenf. 1 58), e. 36 (☞ P.Grenf. 1 67), and possibly also a. 6 (☞ P.Grenf. 1 62; ☞ P.Bodl. 1 47) and c. 27 (☞ P.Grenf. 1 64). The letter may then have been written and sent within the same nome, and it is tempting to connect “the lady Anastasia” mentioned in the letter with entries in the account for “the lady” (τῆς κυράς, 6, 8). A sum of two *solidi* is probably requested directly from the addressee, whom the phrasing of 2–3 suggests was of *spectabilis* rank.

☞ MS. Gr. class. d. 40 (P)
SC 31940

20.9 (w) × 15.7 (h) cm

6th–7th cent.
Hermopolite?

 Fig. 1: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. CC BY-NC 4.0.

r

†

[† καθὼς καὶ κα]τὰ πρόσω\πον/ παρεκάλεσα τὴν πάνσοφον καὶ περιβλεπτον

[-ca.10-] ἔνεκεν ὀλίγου ῥαφανελαίου δυσωπῶ τὴν ὑμετέραν

[-ca.8- φι]λίαν εἰ ἀβαρὲς αὐτῇ φαίνεται δύο νομισμά(τια)

- 5 [-ca.10-] καὶ ἐνεγκεῖν ἡμῖν μεθ’ ἑαυτῆς ἐπειδὴ κατὰ τὸ

[-ca.8-] αὐτῶν ἔχομεν· παρεκάλεσα δὲ τὴν κοσμιωτ(άτην)

[ἀδελφὴν τῆ]ν κυρὰν Ἀναστασίαν ἵνα γράψῃ ὑμῖν τούτου ἕνεκα

[-ca.8-]ηθεντα ἐγγὺς ὑμῶν ἕνεκεν Θεοδώρου τοῦ νοταρ(ίου)

[-ca.8- ἀ]δ[ε]λ[φ]ῆς τῆς κυράς Ἀναστασίας δ[έ]σπο]τα †

v

- 10 † δεσπό(τη) ἐμῶ τὰ π(ά)ντ(α) σοφωτά(τω) γνη(σίῳ) φίλ(ω) (καὶ) ἀδ[ε]λ[φ](ῶ)
κυρ(ίῳ) Ἰω[-ca.?-]

r.2 προσώ\πον/: σω overwriting partly effaced letters τήν: τ overwritten πάνσοφον: παν- corr. from σοφ-

r.7 κυράν: α overwritten ἵνα papyrus v.10 ἀδ[ε]λ[φ](ῶ): δ corrected

[As I also] asked [your?] all-wise and admirable [friendship?] in person on account of a little radish-oil, I beseech your [all-wise?] friendship (sc. now), if it seems not too much trouble for you, two *solidi* ... to bring to us with you, since ... we have [need?] of them. I have asked the most decent [sister] the lady Anastasia to write to you on account of this ... near you on account of Theodoros the secretary ... sister the lady Anastasia, master.

To my master, in all things most learned genuine friend and brother, the lord Io[

- §7 **1** The symbol of the cross is typically used to structure a text, framing each segment. In the case of letters, it usually appears at beginning and end of the letter proper and beginning and end of the address, sometimes also separately for addressee and sender. See in general ↗ [Carlig 2020](#) and ↗ [Amory 2023](#). A special case, as here, is the placement of the cross at the top of letters, in the middle of the margin where the π() sign, usually understood as π(αρά), once stood: see introduction.
- §8 **2** The opening formula is restored after ↗ [P.Oxy. 16 1856](#) (second decade of the 7th cent.: ↗ [Gonis 2015](#)); cf. also ↗ [P.Oxy. 16 1865](#) (6th–7th cent.), and ↗ [SB 18 13762](#) (late 6th cent.: ↗ [Gonis 2014](#): 201–202 no. 52; unknown provenance), 21–22. The simplest interpretation would be as a reference to a previous meeting between the correspondents, the addressee being of *spectabilis* rank; it remains conceivable, however, that the *spectabilis* is a third party, whose name has been lost in **3**, and the fulfillment of the request requires the intervention of the addressee, who might then be an employee of this high-ranking person.
- §9 τὴν πάνσοφον καὶ περιβλεπτον. For the collocation of epitheta, cf. ↗ [P.Oxy. 16 1843](#) (623), 1–2, 11–12 (μεγαλοπρεπῆς καὶ πάνσοφος φιλία); 1864 (623/624), 1–2 (ἐνδοξοτάτη καὶ πάνσοφος προστασία). There are only a handful of attestations of πάνσοφος. The epithet seems to evoke erudition, cf. σοφώτατος typically used to address a *scholasticus*. *Spectabilis* (περίβλεπτος) is an intermediate senatorial honorific.
- §10 Most likely an abstract, third-person reference to the addressee, lost in **3**, was qualified, e.g. [φιλίαν ὑμῶν] (cf. **4**); the addressee would then have been the one of *spectabilis* rank, though this is not reflected in the address (**10**).
- §11 **3** ῥαφανελαίου. Radish-oil is a staple in Roman and Late Roman Egypt (↗ [Morelli 1996](#): 6–7; ↗ [2004](#): 140–141), outside of which, as Mayerson observes, it is very little attested (↗ [2001](#): 109). It could be used for illumination as well as cooking and seems to have been produced in the Fayum and neighboring regions. Cf. l. **5n**. with the indication that something has to be brought, possibly upriver in this case, if the referent is the same radish-oil and the provenance is indeed Hermopolite.
- §12 **4** φι]λίαν. For the writing of the λι-ligature see ὀλίγου l. **3**; [θεοφι]λίαν is generally reserved for ecclesiastics. The noun was probably preceded by [πάνσοφον] (as in **2** above, which may also qualify a lost φιλίαν) rather than [γνησίαν] (suggested by the address).
- §13 εἰ ἄβαρὲς αὐτῇ φαίνεται. A late example of this polite formula (cf. ↗ [Steen 1938](#): 128), which so far is not attested after the fourth century: cf. (with forms of εἰμί rather than φαίνεται) ↗ [P.Nag.Hamm. 68.13](#) (4th cent.); ↗ [P.Neph. 4.25–26](#) (4th cent.; sent from Alexandria); ↗ [P.Oxy. 6.933.29](#) (late 2nd cent.); ↗ [P.Oxy. 34 2727.18](#) (3rd or 4th).
- §14 **5** Conceivably a request to come up or down river (ἀνελθεῖν, κατελθεῖν) and bring something along: something similar is probably to be restored in reference to a person in the letter ↗ [P.Iand. 2 25](#) (with ↗ [Hagedorn 2006](#): 166–167; 6th cent.; Hermopolite), θελήσατε κ[ατελθεῖν ἐνεγκόντες] μεθ' ἑατῶν καὶ τὸν γραμματέα (following Hagedorn); in the letter ↗ [P.Oxy. 16 1844.3–4](#) (6th–7th cent.), the addressee is to bring a person (ἐνέγκη αὐτὸν μ[ε]θ' ἑαυτῆς) in preparation for another party's journey down river to Alexandria. A periphrasis for raising and conveying the funds is also possible, as in ↗ [P.Oxy. 56 3869.3–4](#) φρόντισον τοῦ λαβεῖν καὶ ἐνεγκῖν. Radish-oil may be what the addressee should bring (ultimately produced in the Fayum [**3n.**], perhaps), but a reference to the two *solidi* (**4**) is also possible, even preferable if αὐτῶν in **6** has the same referent.
- §15 **5–6** κατὰ τὸ []. An expression of immediacy κατὰ τὸ νῦν would make sense but is not paralleled in the papyri; κατὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον (cf. esp. ↗ [O.Claud. 4 873.3](#) [circa 150]) seems too long.

- §16 6 ἀντῶν ἔχομεν. Probably preceded by [χρεῖαν], cf., e.g., ☞ [P.Rain.Cent. 80.5](#) (6th cent.; Hermopolite).
- §17 κοσμιωτ(άτην). The uncommon epithet alluding to piety is reserved for women (☞ [P.Oxy. 82 5340.8n.](#); on the related κοσμιότης, also applied to men: ☞ [CPR 25 6.12n.](#)) and generally confined to the 5th and 6th centuries (DDbDP), mostly in papyri from Palestine (Nessana, Petra). The few examples refer to either unmarried or soon to be married women (in marriage contracts) or relatives of clerics. Cf. the daughter of the Oxyrhynchite *scholasticus* Ioannes discussed in the note on Ἰω[below, [10n.](#)
- §18 8 Conceivably [κατὰ τὰ ῥ]ηθέντα or [λαλ]ηθέντα (the suggestion of Lajos Berkes). A nexus of the aorist passive participle of εὐρίσκω with ἐγγύς in ☞ [P.Lond. 5 1682](#) (circa 566/567; Aphrodite), 3–5 ἐπέτρεψα τῷ ποιμένι κατὰ τύχην εὐρεθέντι ἐγγύς μου μὴ ὀγλήσαι τοῖς γεωργοῖς σου, might suggest εὐρηθέντα but with an irregular spelling (l. εὐρεθέντα). It cannot be excluded that τά is to be divided and construed attributively with the following ἐγγὺς ἡμῶν.
- §19 Θεοδώρου τοῦ νοταρ(ίου). The man cannot be conclusively identified with any of the other *notarii* of the same name. Holders of this title worked not only in the imperial administration but also in the private sector, especially in the large estates of the landowning elite. On the former, see ☞ [Teitler 1985](#).
- §20 9 δ[έσπο]τα. An apparent diagonal on the image proves to be on a displaced fragment, folded over from the back: the fibers run left-right here.
- §21 10 δεσπό(τη) ἐμῷ τὰ π(ά)ντ(α) σοφωτά(τω). The recipient's titlature unusually lacks any indication of rank. Deliberate suppression of another's rank seems unlikely, unless there is a title that presupposes this rank, missing after the name of the recipient, cf. e.g. the endorsement of ☞ [P.Oxy. 59 4008](#) (6th–7th cent.): τῷ ἡμῶν ἀγα[θ(ῶ(?))] δεσπότ(η) κυρ(ίω) Ἰωάννη ἰλλουστρ(ίω) (καὶ) ἀντιγεούχ(ω) (following the reading proposed in [6n.](#)).
- §22 σοφώτατος, implying legal expertise, is a typical epithet for *scholastici*, who are usually *viri clarissimi*; for an exceptional application of the epithet to a man of higher rank, see ☞ [CPR 24 31.6n.](#)
- §23 φίλ(ω). The ink after *lambda* is most likely a two-part abbreviation-sign. The combination γνήσιος φίλος καὶ ἀδελφός is attested if not common in addressees of letters in the early 7th century (e.g. the letters of the archive of Victor, ☞ [P.Oxy. 16 1845](#) and ☞ [P.Oxy. 16 1860](#): see [n. 2](#) above).
- §24 κυρ(ίω). A term of respect usually assigned to persons of an elevated social standing who are not necessarily of noble origin (see in general ☞ [Papathomas 2007](#)). It also appears as a term of respectful address in family letters of a slightly earlier date, even between spouses and children and their parents.
- §25 Ἰω[. Either Ἰω[άννη or Ἰω[σήφ (or spelling variants), followed by either a title, as discussed above, or only the single name of the sender for reasons of space, probably in a second line. The name of the sender may have been omitted entirely, though there are few parallels: ☞ [P.Grenf. 1 64](#) (6th–7th cent.; Hermopolite): τῷ δεσπό(τη) μου τῷ πάντ() μεγαλοπρε(πεστάτῳ) (καὶ) περιβλέ(πτῳ) Ἀνατολίῳ κόμει(τι) χμγ and ☞ [SB 20 14118](#) (6th–7th cent.): † τῷ ἐμῷ δεσπότ(η) τὰ π(ά)ντ(α) θεοφιλεστά(τω) καὶ ὀσιωτά(τω) πατρὶ χμγ (from the online image we prefer θεοφιλεστά(τω) in place of θεοσεβεστάτῳ: the combination of the epitheta *theophilestatos* and *hosiotatos* is typical for a bishop). ☞ [PSI 14 1428](#) (as read in ☞ [P.Oxy. 82 5341.5–6n.](#); 6th cent.) is not a parallel: the sender Θεόδωρος is not the same as the σχολαστικός (or multiple σχολαστικοί?) addressed, for whom the abstract σοφία, rare and reserved for *scholastici* (☞ [P.Oxy. 8 1165](#) [6th cent.]; ☞ [P.Oxy. 51 3637](#) [623]; ☞ [PSI 7 790](#) [circa 546; Oxyrhynchus]; ☞ [PSI 8 963](#) [579; Oxyrhynchus]), is also used in the body of the letter (l. 1).
- §26 If the name is completed Ἰωάννη here, there would be many homonyms among the σχολαστικοί. In the second half of the 6th century there is a σοφώτατος σχολαστικός in Antinoe (☞ [P.Lond. 5](#)

1707, of 566) and in Oxyrhynchos (☞ P.Oxy. 1 126, of 572), the former a σχολαστικός and advocate (συνήγορος) of the *forum Thebaidos*, a more likely relation given the provenance of this letter. Both lack indication of rank, but the Oxyrhynchite Ioannes appears again as a *scholasticus* of the *forum Arcadiae*. (Another Ioannes, *scholasticus* of the *forum Arcadiae*, very likely appears 30 years earlier in ☞ SB 18 13949 [541; Oxyrhynchite], 3, which is probably not the same person.) In ☞ P.Oxy. 82 5340 (572) a rank of no lower than *clarissimus* is suggested: his father's μνήμη is λαμπρά. The daughter of Ioannes, Stephanous, is called by the rare epithet κοσμιωτάτη, which also appears in this letter (6n.). The same person might be recognized in ☞ P.Oxy. 1 128 (6th or 7th cent.) among the senders of a letter, or in the account ☞ P.Sijp. 35 (6th or 7th cent.; Oxyrhynchus) ii 6, iv 8, verso i 4, ii 13, iii 12, among recipients of vouchers; but not, *contra* ☞ P.Oxy. 82 5340.5–6n., in ☞ PSI 8 963, where the homonym, a former *praeses* with epitheta σοφώτατος and ἐλλογιμώτατος, has a different father, as does the ἐλλογιμώτατος σχολαστικός of ☞ P.Oxy. 27 2480 col. 4 63 (580–581: ☞ Hickey 2012: 95–97). The paleography of ☞ P.Princ. 2 105, a letter that mentions hosting a man of the same name, suggests a date early in the assigned 6th century. The present letter, however, most likely was found in the Hermopolite, which is probably also the provenance of the list ☞ P.Lond. 5 1761 (6th cent.?), 18, which mentions a *scholasticus* Ioannes, and ☞ SB 18 13756.19 from the early 7th century, attesting payment from a *scholasticus* Ioannes, son of Didymos.

§27 The address is written in the embellished epistolary chancery style common in the addresses of letters in the later 6th and early 7th century (see the [introduction](#)).

Verso: Account

§28 A hand distinct from that on the recto has turned the sheet 90° and copied an account of wheat and money whose background seems to be related to taxes; artabas are not explicitly written, except in the penultimate line. The abbreviation of κεράτια (cf., e.g., ☞ BGU 17 2720 [588/589?: ☞ Hagedorn 2002: 114; Hermopolis] or ☞ P.Bad. 4 95 [with P.Gascou pp. 487–508; early 6th cent.; Hermopolite]), and the references to Theodosioupolis (☞ Drew-Bear 1979: 111–112; TM ☞ Geo 3383) and Antinoou (polis) (TM ☞ Geo 2774; ☞ Drew-Bear 1979: 49) point to a Hermopolite origin. There are *lemmata* for different people, unnamed notables and specific charges. Lines 4–8 are indented and have control marks at the beginning. The pale ink makes the reading of ll. 9–15 particularly difficult.

 Fig. 2: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. CC BY-NC 4.0.

	Γ'Επει(?)φ κγ σίτου λ̄οα ̅ ̅ γ' [δ' -ca.?-] (ὕπερ) Θεοδοσιουπόλ(εως) σίτου α δ' κδ'	
	(γίνεται) σίτου λ̄ογ ̅ ̅ κδ̅[α] λ̄οζ η'	
5	x Βίκτορος πρ(εσβυτέρου) x Θεοτίμ(ου) πρ(εσβυτέρου) x τῆς κυρᾶς x Κολλούθου πρ(εσβυτέρου) x τῆς κυρᾶς	νο(μισμάτια) ς νο(μισμάτιον) α κ(εράτια) ιβ νο(μισμάτια) ε κ(εράτια) ιβ νο(μισμάτια) ζ κ(εράτια) ιη
	ναύλ(ου) κ(εράτια) ιδ νο(μισμάτια) θ	νο(μισμάτια) ις κ(εράτια) θ ̅ ̅ δ'
10	τοῦ κ[υ]ρ(ί)ου κ(εράτια) ς ̅ ̅ δ' συνβ[. . .] γρ κ(εράτια) ε ̅ ̅ δ'	λοι(π-) κ(εράτια) η δ' εξ̅ ἀποδειξ (ὕπερ) δημοσί(ων) κ(ερατίου) ς

[] ὄνοματ(-) νο(μισμάτια) β κ(εράτια) ς 11a | γί(νεται) σὺν προσθ(ήκη)
 ἄλλ(οῦ) Ἄντινίου νο(μισμάτια) γ κ(εράτια) ζ ζ 11b κ(εράτια) ς ζ δ' δ'

15 τοῦ κυρ(ί)ου κ(εράτια) ς λοι(π-) κ(εράτια) γ
 (ὑπὲρ) μισθ(οῦ) τηγ τοῦ ἐλαιουρ(γ-) κ(εράτια) ζ
 Παμιν Ματεῦ κ(εράτιον) α
 (ὑπὲρ) λουπάδ(ος) ἐμβολ[ῆ]ς Ἄντινίου (ἀρτάβη) α κ(εράτιον) α
 (ὑπὲρ) ἀναλωματ(-) [-ῶα.?-] ὄμ(οῦ) κ(εράτια) η

5 ἱβ papyrus 7 ἱβ papyrus 8 ἱη papyrus 9 ἱδ papyrus ἱς papyrus 16 I. Ματείου (?)

§29 1–3 Sums of artabas of wheat perhaps for the month of Epeiph. The siglum artaba is either missing or included in the irregular ending of σίτου: σίτ(ου) Ϝ. The numeral κγ in l. 1 could refer to a day of the month. The numbers are difficult to read and in part missing in l. 1. Line 3 contains the sum of the numbers from l. 1–2, which should equal 973 1/3 1/24. To match that total, 1/4 must be missing in l. 1. The higher number of 977 1/8 is placed next to the sum – perhaps another 3 2/3 1/12 artabas were added at a later date (in l. 1) and the former sum not corrected. The second *sampi* in l. 3 looks slightly different. On the form of *sampi* see [Soldati 2006](#).

§30 6, 8 τῆς κυρᾶς. This κυρά may be the “lady Anastasia” mentioned in the letter on the back (ll. 7, 9). Cf. ll. 10 and 14 with a possible reference to a κύριος, also without a name.

§31 10, 14 The reading τοῦ κυρίου is uncertain, as κύρου is also possible, and in l. 14 τω could be read instead of του with narrowly written ου. Cf. the reference to a nameless κυρά in ll. 6 and 8.

§32 11 συνβ[. . .]γρ(). A form of συμβολαιογράφος “notary” comes to mind. The lacuna seems too small to fit the 5 missing letters: perhaps a second abbreviation was in use, such as συν[βολ(αιω)]γρ().

§33 ἐξ ἀποδειξ(). An initial (καί) is unlikely; for the following noun, a form of ἀπόδειξις is probable: either ἐξ ἀποδείξ(εως) or ἐξ ἀποδείξ(εις), the first of which seems more likely. The passage is written in darker black ink and has possibly been added at a later stage. It seems to continue over the next two lines (11a and 11b). The new entry in l. 12 is separated from the rest of the line by a slash in ink of the same color.

§34 There is a difference between the two sums before and after the addition of ἐξ ἀποδείξεως — if the preference in the preceding [note](#) is accepted —, of 1 *keration* between l. 11 (5 3/4 *keratia*) and l. 11b (6 3/4 *keratia*). 2/3 of a *keration* seem to have been added for tax purposes ((ὑπὲρ) δημοσί(ων)) on account of a receipt (ἀπόδειξις), which would leave another 1/3 for the surcharge (l. 11a: σὺν προσθ(ήκη)) added to the money owed.

§35 The only parallel for ἐξ ἀποδείξεως is [P.Gascou 34](#) (6th cent.; Oxyrhynchus), 7–8, where it was understood as “aufgrund der Beweisurkunde”. In [SB 8 9770](#) (511; Arsinoite), 9, and [SPP 20 139](#) (531; Arsinoe), 16, an *apodeixis* is further defined as a repayment (ἀνακομιδή) of a note of debt (γραμματεῖον). The money mentioned here could refer to a debt in taxes to be collected.

§36 κ(εράτιον) Ϝ: the *kappa* seems to be abbreviated like in l. 11b with a loop.

§37 13 ναύλ(ου) Ἄντινίου. The name of this charge is not directly paralleled, but Nick Gonis points out that its existence is implied by the Coptic version $\text{ϩ}\text{A}\text{Θ}\text{Η}\text{Μ}\text{E}\text{ N}\text{Π}\text{E}\text{Χ}\text{Ι}\text{O}\text{O}\text{P}\text{ N}\text{Π}\text{T}\text{O}\text{Y}\text{ A}\text{N}\text{T}\text{I}\text{N}\text{O}\text{O}\text{Y}$ “for the

freight of the ferry-boat of the nome (of) Antinoou” in P.Bal. 291 (7th–8th cent.), 3, and (ὑπὲρ) ὁμοίως (sc. ναύλου) Ἀντινόου in [SB 20 14702](#) (7th cent.: [Gonis 2021](#): 162 no. 103), 12. Cf. l. 9, where the charge is not specified.

§38 [14](#) λρι(π-). The traces are supplemented by more ink on an overturned fragment visible from the front.

§39 [15](#) μισθ(οῦ) τηγ() τοῦ ἔλαιουρ(γ). The second word has a sinusoid abbreviation stroke with part of the fibers broken off; perhaps τηγ(άνου), rent for a metal frying pan, which might have been used for producing oil (read ἔλαιουρ(γοῦ) or ἔλαιουρ(γίου) in the following in that case). The letter on the back mentions a request for radish-oil in l. 3. Three τήγανα share space with a vessel of ἔλαιον in the shipment catalogued in [P.Oxy. 16 1923](#) (5th–early 6th cent.), 18 and 20 respectively; cf. also the obscure ὑ(πὲρ) τοῦ διαγράφου τοῦ τηγάνου in [P.Oxy. 1 127](#) (6th cent.), 2, 9.

§40 [16](#) Ματεω: no *omikron* can be discerned before the final vowel, unless it has essentially vanished into a ligature with *upsilon* on the line, which usually only appears above the line. One might suspect a non-standard spelling of Ματείου, which probably belongs among the variants of the biblical Ματθαῖος; cf. Foraboschi, NB 185 s.vv. Μαθαῖος, Μαθείας, Μαθθέας, Μαθθίας, Μάθιος; but cf. Coptic ΜΑΤΟΙ “soldier,” also a personal name ([Crum 1939](#): [190b](#)).

§41 [17](#) ἐμβολ[ῆ]ς Ἀντινόου. There is also reference to Antinoe in l. 13.

II. Letter to Kyriakos requesting the intervention of a bishop



§42 The papyrus was given to the Bodleian Library on 20 October 1896 by the Armenologist and biblical scholar Frederick C. Conybeare, part of a lot said to come from the Fayum.⁵ It is described in the *Summary Catalogue* simply as a “letter.” Among the Conybeare papyri eventually published, provenances from Hermopolis (e.g., [P.Grenf. 1 56](#): Gr. class. d. 55) as well as the Arsinoite (e.g., [SB 6 9269](#): Gr. class. d. 54) and the Thebaid (Gr. class. c. 35: [P.Grenf. 2 92](#) with P.Bodl. 1 p. 322) are represented; that of the present letter must be considered unknown.

§43 The fluent but idiosyncratic hand is difficult to date. It shows (deliberate?) archaizing features indicative of writing in the late 5th or early 6th century, alongside characteristics that point to a later time, like the paleography of the sender’s name in the address, which makes the mid 6th century the most likely date. The general lack of serifs and the majuscule form of phi contribute to an early impression. Rho is angular and pointy at the top. The writer’s usual way of forming lambda is especially peculiar, a single wavy stroke below the line with a loop at the end for which we were not able to find any parallels; the forms of this letter in κέλευσων (2) and μεγαλο-, δοῦλος (verso), however, are more normative, and the alternation may suggest again a deliberate archaism. The script in general displays the unsettled appearance characteristic of the 5th century, an impression to which the many non-standard spellings contribute. Embellished sigma at the end of l. 3 also gives an earlier impression; the form of delta in 2, however, points later. Phi and especially eta in majuscule form (κληρον, διαφυλάξη, ἐρημίαν, ἡμᾶς) resemble the so-called Heracleopolite style dominant between the late 5th and early 7th century, which preserves an archaizing character in its later phase,⁶ and might point to provenance from that nome. A sheet-join runs across the space between lines 4–5.

§44 The sender, writing to an employer (6n.), presents himself as wronged (6) in relation to some “allotment(s)” (κλήρος or κλήροι: 1n.) and asks for his correspondent to have a letter written to request

⁵ [Madan and Craster 1924](#): 158 no. 32456 with corr. p. xxii. No distinction is made there between what was given by Conybeare and what was bought from Bernard P. Grenfell in the same year, but the Library’s manuscript handlist traces Gr. class. d. 56 (and Gr. class. d. 46–d. 55) more specifically to Conybeare.

⁶ [Harrauer 2010](#): 70–71.

the intervention of a bishop. The legal background by which bishops in the East exercised power as arbiters (*iudicium episcopale* and *episcopalis audientia*) and were elevated to local notables fits the date of this text (see in general P.Col. 11 pp. 70–72). Adjudication of a disputed inheritance, e.g., is possible:  **P.Lips. 1 43** (Chrest.Mitt. 98) is the record of fourth-century judicial proceedings (δίαϊτα) over which a bishop presided ἐν τῷ πολῶνι τῆς κ[αθ]ολικῆς ἐκκλησίας (of Hermopolis?) in the case of a nun accused of wrongfully removing Christian books from an inheritance. Other kinds of intervention may be considered, however, based more generally on the status of the bishop as powerful figure: as e.g.  **P.Gen. 4 169** (6th–7th cent.), a letter to a bishop asking for help in the matter of a delayed shipment, probably of a donation of cereals destined for a monastery, which is at risk from rot and rodents.⁷

 **MS. Gr. class. d. 56 (P)**
SC 32456

29.0 (w) × 8.2 (h) cm

5th–6th cent.
Unknown provenance

 **Fig. 3: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. CC BY-NC 4.0.**

r

†

† καθὼς τὸ πρῶτον ἔγραψα τῇ σου δεσποτία ἔνεγκεν τῷ μικρον κληρον, καταξίοσι
εἰ ὑμετέρα ἐνδοξότιτος κέλευσον γράψον τοῦ πατρί μου τοῦ ἐπισκόπου ὅπως
μεσάσι εἰ δύναμε σωθῆν[αι -ca.5-] ο[] . εἰ ὅπω[ς] δι[αφ]υλάξῃ ἡμᾶς ...
ε .. ὀλ .. ο ..

5 καὶ περὶ τῶν φακῶν, εἰδὸ, Ἰερημίαν ἔπεμψα πρὸς τὴν σὺν δεσποτία
περὶ τούτω. παρακαλῶ τὴν σὺν δεσποτία μὴ εἰσὶς ἀδικί\σ\θῆναι ἡμᾶς δέσποτα †


v

† δεσπ(ότη) τ(ῶ) ἐμῶ τ(ῶ) τὰ πά(ντα) μεγαλοπρε[πεστάτ]ῳ καὶ ἐνδ[ο]ξ[ο]τάτῳ
κυρίῳ κόμιτ(ι) Κυριακῶ
[† -ca.?-]ς ὑμέτερος δοῦλος καὶ ἀδελφός † [-ca.?-] ...

r.2 *I. πρῶτον I. δεσποτεία I. ἔνεκεν I. τῶν μικρῶν κλήρων (or τοῦ μικροῦ κλήρου) I. καταξίωση* **r.3** *I. ἢ I. ἐνδοξότης I. κέλευσον τοῦ: ex corr.?: I. τῷ I. τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ* **r.4** *I. μεσάση I. δύναμαι* **r.5** *I. ἰδοῦ I. σὴν δεσποτείαν* **r.6** *I. τούτου (or τούτων) I. σὴν δεσποτείαν I. μὴ εἴσης* **v.8** *I. κόμιτι*

As I first wrote to your masterhood on account of the small allotment(s), may your gloriousness deign to give the order to write to my father the bishop so that he may intervene, if I can be saved ... so that he protects us ... and about the lentils, look, I have sent Ieremias to your masterhood about this. I ask your masterhood not to allow us to be wronged, master.

To my master the most magnificent in all respects and admirable lord count Kyriakos, [N. N.] your servant and brother.

§45 **2** τῇ σου δεσποτία – εἰ ὑμετέρα ἐνδοξότιτος. The jump between informal and formal forms of address is not uncommon (see, e.g.,  **CPR 36 46.1n.**). The first abstract (used two more times) in the address

⁷ In 14 ἐκ τῆς σήψεως καὶ ἐκ τῶν ποντι[κῶν] is already considered in the commentary, but in this context the latter is not the adjective “marin” but the substantive “rat.”

refers to the “masterhood” of the recipient (over the sender), not to his rank (like *μεγαλοπρέπεια* or *ἐνδοξότης*, which is used in the next line), and emphasizes the relationship between sender and recipient as “servitude” of the former in the employment of the latter.

- §46 μικρον κληρον. It is unclear whether μικροῦ κλήρου or μικρῶν κλήρων was intended. Despite the mention of a bishop (cf. [P.Louvre 3 235](#) [7th cent.; Arsinoite], 10–11, where he is greeted μετὰ παντὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ τιμίου κλήρου), the adjective points to an older sense of the word: perhaps a disputed inheritance (in that case, μικροῦ κλήρου), where the judicial intervention of a bishop is paralleled (see the [introduction](#), and cf. [P.Oxy. 6 903](#) [4th cent.]: an oath in a family dispute is made ἐπὶ παρουσίᾳ τῶν ἐπισκόπων [15]).
- §47 4 μεσάσι. The verb in the active voice seems to have the sense “intervene” (confined to the passive according to LSJ) also in [P.Berl.Frisk 6](#) (710; Aphrodite), 14, σὺ διὰ σεαυτοῦ μεσάζων μετ’ ἀκριβείας πάσης; cf. also [P.Mert. 1 46](#) (late 5th–early 6th cent.; Herakleopolite), 12; [P.Wash.Univ. 1 36](#) (428/429?; Oxyrhynchite), 5. As a loanword in Coptic μεσάζω becomes a technical term of legal agreements, “divide in half” ([Förster 2002](#): 516).
- §48 σωθῆν[αι ca. 5] ο[.] . εἰ. Probably a word that introduces the following ὅπως; before *omicron* perhaps traces of *pi*.
- §49 . . . ε . . ο λ . . ο . . The end of the line is particularly difficult. Lambda could be part of πολλά or another form of πολὺς, but the construction remains obscure. Just possibly πολλά ἔτι (for ἔτη) stood at the end, but e.g. εἰς or ἐπί before that (“for many years”: cf. [P.Herm. 8](#) [late 4th cent.], 23–24) is difficult. Alternatively, the preceding letter combination could be -το- with the word starting with epsilon after a short word ending in a descender, like καί, after ἡμᾶς (or, actually a small vacat); a possible reading is Εὐτόλμειος or -ον (or also -μιος/ν). Eutolmios could have been a third party (on the side of the sender), either somehow involved in the problem with the “allotments” (2n.) — if we read -μειον or -μιον — or one concerned in the next phase of the bishop’s intervention — if we read -μειος or -μιος. He would then be subject of διαφυλάξῃ and presumably a secular official or a notable.
- §50 5 εἰδό. Understand ἰδοῦ, the suggestion of Lajos Berkes; for the spelling with final -ό in place of -ού, compare [Gignac 1976](#): 211. In [PSI 7 823](#) (5th cent.), ἰδό (l. 9: ἰδο pap.) is apparently written for ἰδοῦ (not διό as ed.pr.).
- §51 6 μὴ ἐάσεις ἀδικεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς. If not an error for the more common ἀδικηθῆναι, this would be the first occurrence of ἀδικίζω, apparent by-form of ἀδικέω. There is a similar formulation in a seventh-century petition to an *antigeouchos*, [P.Oxy. 81 5289](#).17–18, μὴ ἐάσῃ ὁ ἐμὸς ἀγαθὸς δεσπότης ἀδικ[εῖ]θηῖν αἰ με.
- §52 7 No *comes* with the relevant ranks and the name Kyriakos is known to us. The titlature would match that of the *comites domesticorum* in the late fifth and sixth cent.: e.g., [SPP 20 128.2](#) (487, Arsinoite): Φλ(αουίω) Ε[ὐ]στοχίω τῷ μεγαλοπρεπεστάτῳ καὶ ἐνδοξοτάτῳ κόμισι τῶν καθοσιωμένων (l. καθοσιωμένων) δομειστικῶν. For this honorific title, see the discussion of B. Palme in [P.Eirene 1 19](#); for the meaning of *kyrios*, see [I 10n](#).
- §53 ὑμέτερος δοῦλος. The hierarchical relation between δοῦλος and δεσπότης is a typical expression of humility and reverence towards the recipient, especially in the context of large estates where it shows that the sender was most likely in the employment of the addressee. As Fikhman ([1974](#): 119) puts it, “in the papyri of Byzantine Oxyrhynchus ‘doulos’ was used almost exclusively by people of free status for themselves when addressing people of higher standing and very seldom about slaves”. This Oxyrhynchite material comes mostly from the Apion estate. The collocation of δοῦλος and ἀδελφός, if in fact present (see the following [note](#)), has one parallel in the endorsement of [P.Oxy. 59 4006](#)

(early 7th cent.: ↗ [Berkes 2017](#): 95 n. 67), which addresses a *meizoteros* of the Apions. According to Papatomas (↗ [2007](#): 509), the use of *doulos* shows the impact of Christianity on epistolary language.

§54 καὶ ἀδελφός. The reading is difficult; there are also additional letters after a short lacuna. Instead of what is read here, a partly abraded [ἀδελ]φός could simply follow there towards the end of the line. Then the proper name, which we would expect to precede this expression as in many letter addresses (e.g. ↗ [P.Oxy. 16 1939](#) [6th–7th cent.]; ↗ [PSI 5 481](#) [5th–6th cent.]), would come after δοῦλος instead. The word ending -φός could also be read as -τιος, or possibly the whole passage as Γεώργιος followed by a further specification, now partly lost. This alternative, however, is also problematic, as there is clearly writing before ὑμέτερος as well. ↗ [P.Münch. 3 129](#) (5th cent.) is the only letter known to us where the name follows *doulos*:ος δοῦλος Ἱερεμίας ἀρχιυπ(ηρέτης).

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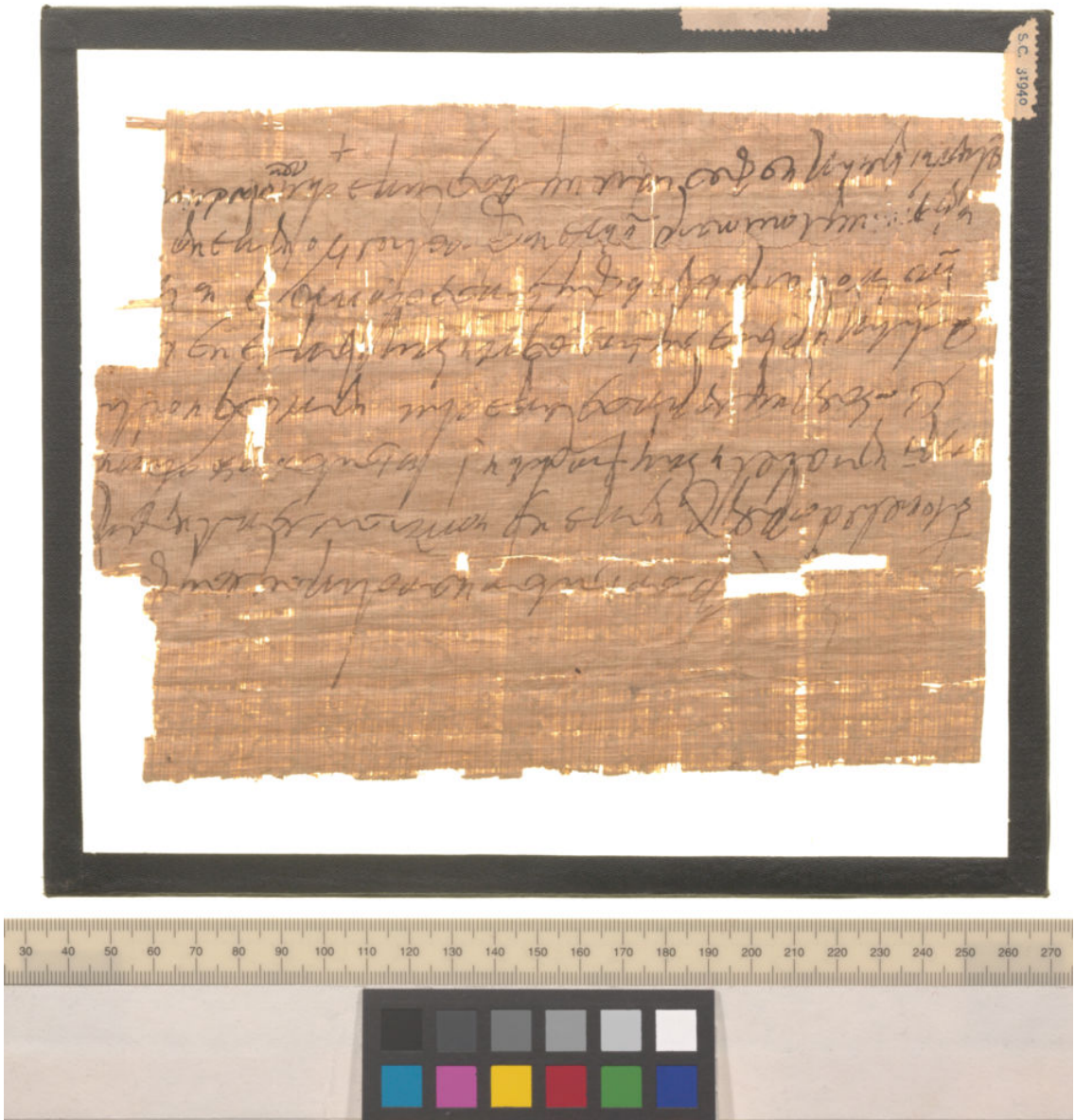


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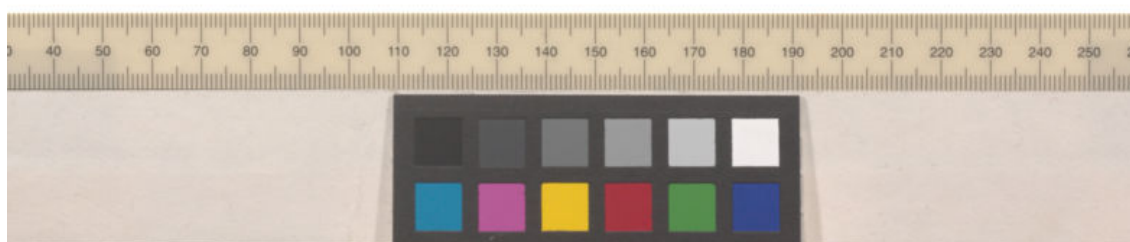
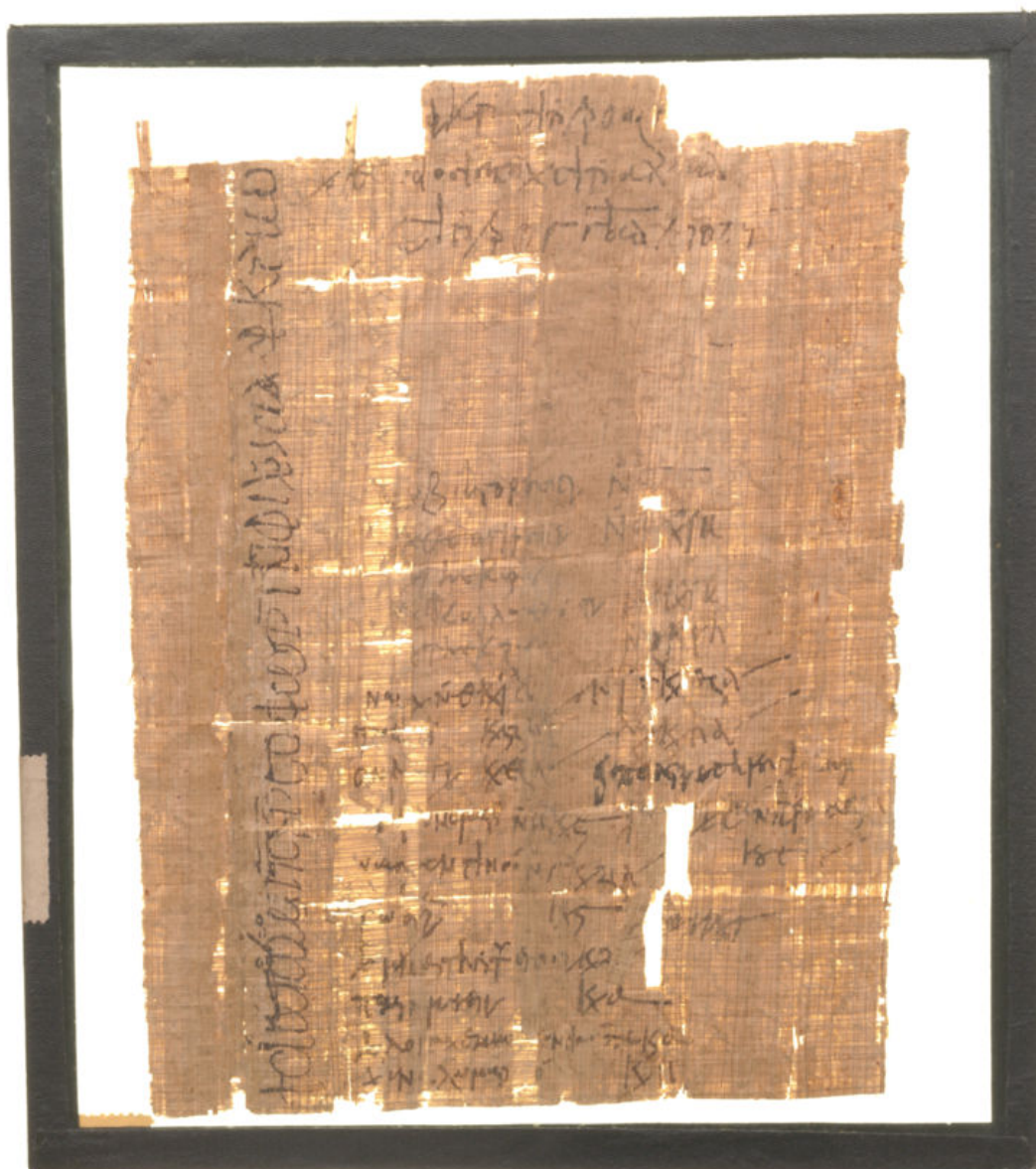


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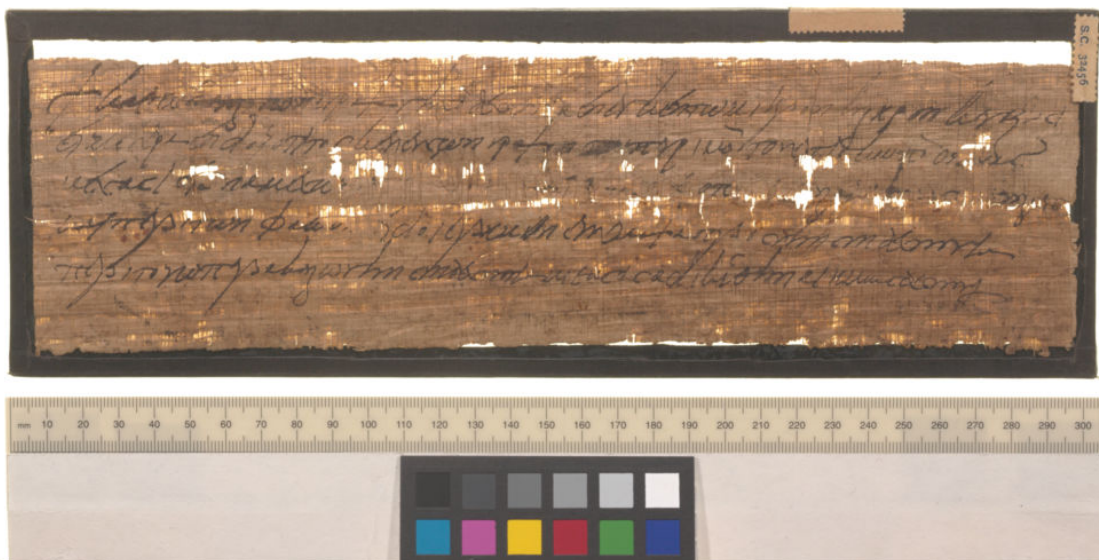


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