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## **Reflections on Six Private Letters: P.Ross.Georg. 3 1, 9–11, 15, and 18**

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§1 The papyri discussed in this article were edited by G. Zereteli and P. Jernstedt in the third volume of *Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen* that came out in Tbilisi in 1930.<sup>1</sup> Letters were grouped by the editors in the first part of the volume under the heading ‘Briefe’ (nn. 1–23). Of the six papyrus letters presented here, two are held at the Archive of G. Zereteli in the Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (10 and 15), two at the Ancient Orient Department of the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (11 and 18), and two at the Ancient Orient Department of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (1 and 9). I offer a discussion of some problematic readings and several corrections.

### [P.Ross.Georg. 3 1](#)

3rd c., prov. unknown.

§2 In this letter, medical doctor Marcus updates his mother Antonia and other relatives on some military events and gives instructions regarding various matters. It has been assumed that Marcus wrote from Alexandria<sup>2</sup> but there is no indication of that in the text. He reports about a battle in which fifteen *equites singulares* were killed. However, the battle could have taken place anywhere in Egypt. The letter [P.Ross.Georg. 3 2.22](#), sent by Marcus’ brother Serenus, implies that they both live in a village, but it is not known how much time passed between these two letters. Another geographical indication in the first letter can be found in ll.15–16, Marcus speaks about his travels; he could not reach the land of a certain Cassianus who asked him to write about ‘the city’: καὶ γὰρ ἐξερχόμενος Κα[σ]σιανὸς ἐνετίλατό μοι γράψαι αὐτῷ τὰ περὶ τῆς πόλεως [ἐ]κ <κ>νου καὶ ὁ ἄρτος εἰ ἀναρπάζεται.



Fig. 1: P.Ross.Georg. 3 1, line 16

§4 The editors understood the text after a small lacuna in l. 16 as ἐκ κοινοῦ, meaning ‘in general’: *Bei seinem Aufbruch hat mir ja auch Kassianos den Auftrag gegeben, ihm über die Stadtangelegenheiten insgemein zu schreiben und ob das Getreide geraubt wird.*

§6 Other scholars followed this interpretation in their discussions and translations.<sup>3</sup> Roberts was convinced that Marcus wrote from Alexandria where granaries were looted because of general unrest. Hirt Raj observed that the city in the letter could be any other Egyptian city.<sup>4</sup> The reading of Zereteli and Jernstedt is problematic. It is not attested in this meaning in papyri or literary texts; there is not enough space for an epsilon in the lacuna; and the letter after nu is rather an omega than an omicron. It might be better to read Κυνῶγ, *l. Κυνῶν*, where gamma is written instead of nu before the word beginning

<sup>1</sup> On the history of publication and reception of this volume, see [Chepel 2019](#).

<sup>2</sup> Roberts ([1950](#): 112) linked the two letters P.Ross.Georg. 3 1 and 2 to the events around 270: the attacks of the Marmarides and the invasion of the Palmyrenes under Zenobia.

<sup>3</sup> E. g. [Hirt Raj 2006](#): 336, *au sujet des affaires de la ville en general*.

<sup>4</sup> [Hirt Raj 2006](#): 153–154.

with a velar stop, as a hypercorrection.<sup>5</sup> The passage of text with the new reading is now: ... τὰ περὶ τῆς πόλεως Κυνῶν, (l. Κυνῶν) καὶ ...

§7 The place, therefore, is either the village Kynon Polis in the Fayum (↗ [TM Geo 1195](#)), or one of the two cities named Kynopolis in Lower or Upper Egypt. The peculiar word order has parallels in P.Ryl. 2 119.1 ↗ <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.ryl;2;119> (62–66, Hermoupolis Magna) and ↗ [P.Lond. 5 1678 .2](#) (566–568, Antinoopolis). The village in the Arsinoite was called κόμη Κυνῶν πόλις or κόμη Κυνῶν, so a confusion is possible: ↗ [BGU 13 2252.4–5](#) (330, Kynopolis, Arsinoite), ↗ [P.Oxy. 51 3602.23](#) (215, Arsinoite). An argument for the location in Upper Egypt is possibly supported by l. 13 where a Theban man is mentioned.

§8 Another problematic place is l. 23:

§9 ἐὰν μὴ σοι ἦν ἐκεῖνος, πειρώς δούσα τὸν σεῖτ[ο]ν.



Fig. 2: P.Ross.Georg. 3 1, line 23

§10 Zereteli – Jernstedt translated the clause thus: *Wenn er dir nicht zur Verfügung stehen wird, so mache den Versuch mit der Veräußerung des Getreides*. However, the verb πειρώω is used in papyrus documents in medial form and never with a participle.<sup>6</sup> Palaeographically, it is better to read πλήρης instead. Although eta has more often a different shape in this handwriting, the ductus here occurs also in μη in the same line, ἐὰν μὴ σοι ἦν. The adjective is used in an adverbial meaning ‘in full’ and is indeclinable. It must go with the grain – give or sell all of the grain, but the meaning of the sentence remains elusive.

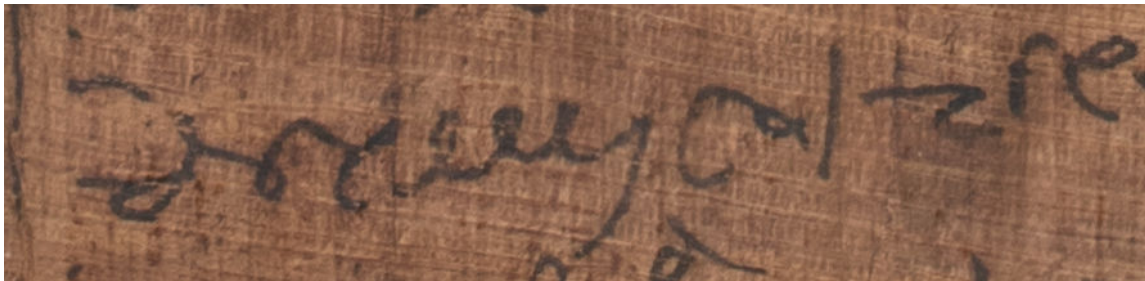


Fig. 3: P.Ross.Georg. 3 1, line 23

### ↗ [P.Ross.Georg. 3 9](#)

2nd half of 4th c., Memphis.

§11 This is a polite letter from a Christian Marcianus to his business partner and friend Isak who is in Memphis. Isak is told to receive pepper, some beans, apparently sent by Marcianus (ll. 14–17), and the payment, also from Marcianus, for palm wine (ll. 17–19), which he already sent or is about to send to Marcianus (ll. 24–25).

§12 In l. 8, the editors read Σ[ε]λεύου, which is a ghost name and should be corrected to Φλαυίου. Elsewhere, epsilon is written differently, especially with a following ypsilon, and the traces around the lacuna look more like a phi. The latter does not have a connecting stroke to the right, whereas lambda

<sup>5</sup> See Gignac I, 167 (no. 3).

<sup>6</sup> This grammar irregularity has been pointed out by Jan Shavrin in his MA thesis.

tends to have its upper hook extended horizontally to the left. Although it is unusual to have the name Flavius on its own, it occurs as such in [P.O.Bodl. 2 2141.7](#) (3rd/4th c., Thebes); [P.O.Douch. 5 546.3](#) (4th c., Kysis, Oasis Magna); [P.PSI 15 1558.1](#) (3rd c., Oxyrynchus), and [P.SB 14 11490.1](#) (2nd/3rd c., prov. unknown), of which the last two examples are letters. The author of the letter under discussion has himself a Latin name.

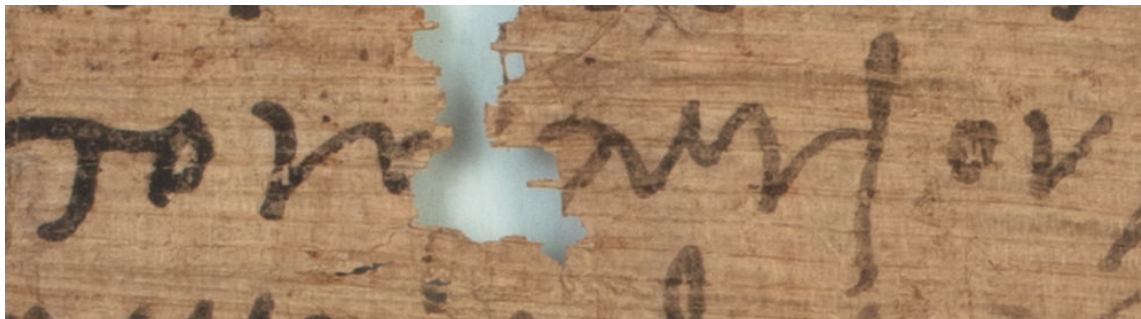


Fig. 4: P.Ross.Georg. 3 9, line 8

§13 In ll. 17–20, the *editio princeps* has the following text and translation:

καὶ τίμημα σπαθίτου  
οἴνου χρυσίνων τεσσάρων διζότων παλαιοχαράκτων  
ἵνα προτρέψη μαι ἐν τούτῳ πυκνῶς τῇ λογιότητί  
20 σου γράφιν ἐξερétως περὶ τῆς ὑγίας σου.

18 l. διζότων παλαιοχαράκτων 19 l. με 20 l. γράφειν, ἐξαιρέτως, ὑγείας

§14 ...und den Preis Spathion-Weines in der Höhe von vier zweifigurigen Goldmünzen alter Prägung, damit du mich hierdurch bewegest, deiner Gelahrtheit (sic!) häufig zu schreiben, insonderheit bezüglich deiner Gesundheit.

§15 The editors understand σπαθίτου as a form of the measure σπαθίον, but this variation does not occur elsewhere in papyri or other texts in Greek and is unexplainable as a mistake. Moreover, it would be highly unlikely that the writer repeated the same mistake twice, also in ll. 24–25: πόσους σπαθίτας τοῦ χρυσίνου ἀπέστילάς μοι. Naldini in his collection of Christian letters from Egypt translates σπαθίτου οἴνου as palm-wine.<sup>7</sup> It is well-attested as a pharmaceutical ingredient in literary texts, although there is no other mention of palm-wine in papyri.<sup>8</sup> Grammatically, σπαθίτης is a noun, which can be seen in the word order. The phrase in l. 24 should be translated as ‘how many units of palm-wine...’.

§16 The text as it is understood by the editors and Naldini has further problems. In ll. 17–18, Marcianus tells Isak to receive four *solidi* as the payment for wine, but, in l. 24, he wants to know how much wine was sent to him for one *solidus*. Furthermore, it is odd that the next sentence starts with ἵνα, although there is no causal relation between the two requests. The request in ll. 19–20 cannot in any way be connected to Isak receiving the goods and the money. The imperative ἵνα, although it can be used independently from a governing verb, still requires some sort of logical relation to the preceding sentence or to the general situation and usually appears in a clause; it never introduces a completely new idea.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [P.Naldini 1968](#): n. 77 p. 306: *E il prezzo del vino di palma di quattro aurei a due facce antico conio, perché tu mi spinga così a scrivere spesso alla tua saggezza, particolarmente intorno alla tua salute*. However, he understands σπαθίτας in l. 24 as a mistake for σπάθια.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of palm-wine as an ingredient in ancient medical recipes are collected in [P.Sonina 2023](#): 87–89.

<sup>9</sup> [P.Mandilaras 1973](#): 262–264.

- §17 I would like to suggest a new reading that solves these problems. The first letter of the first word in l. 19 is in fact an epsilon, not iota. (The long descender between the rounded first part of the epsilon and the nu, written with a slight slant, is in fact a crack in the papyrus, not ink.) The epsilon + nu resembles the same combination at the end of l. 11. An iota would be expected to be longer, projecting below and above the line and slightly concave to the right, not to the left.



Fig. 5: P.Ross.Georg. 3 9, line 19



Fig. 6: P.Ross.Georg. 3 9, line 11

- §18 The numeral ἕνα agrees with χρύσινον, which has a misspelled acc. sg. ending (instead of χρύσινον). The phonetic variation ο/ω occurs in the papyrus in the same line (δίζωτον, *l.* δίζωδον, ‘with images on both sides’) and also in l. 25 (καταζίοσον, *l.* καταζίωσον). The remaining adjectives are also misspelled with omega instead of omicron and agree with χρύσινον. The only problem in this case is τεσσάρων. I believe that it is a colloquialism instead of longer and rare τετραγραμμιαίων and should be probably understood as τεσσάρων γραμμάτων. The golden four-gram weight *solidus* was introduced

under Constantine and began to be widely used in transactions from 350 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Its weight is referred to explicitly in two documents dated to the 4th c. and in one later document dated to 7th c. from Palestine:

- ☞ **P.Flor. 1 95.10** (4th c., Hermoupolis Magna), χρυσοῦ νομισμάτια δεσποτικὰ τετραγραμμιαῖα ἑβδομηκονταδύο
- ☞ **BGU 1 316.15–16** (359, Ascalon), χρυσ[ίνων] δεσποτικῶν τετραγραμμιαίων διζώδων δέκ[α ὀκτώ]
- ☞ **P.Ness. 3 46.3–4** (605), χρύσινα δεσποτικὰ ὀμβρυζα τετραγραμμιαῖα προτῖα δόκιμα τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἑννέα παρὰ κεράτια ἑννέα ζυγῶ Γάζης

§19 The characteristic ‘two-imagined’ occurs in three fourth-century papyri – two contracts of money loan, and a model contract for money loan in a textbook for business education:

- Loan of money, ☞ **P.Lips. 1 13.9–10** (366, Hermoupolis Magna), χρυσοῦ νομισμάτια δεσπ[ο]τικὰ [εὐ]χάρακτα δίζωδα δύο.
- Loan of money, ☞ **P. Gen. 1(2) 12.12–14** (384, Philadelphia), χρυσίου δοκ[ί]μου δίζωτων νο[μ]ισματίων ἕν.
- Model contract for money loan, ☞ **P. Math. A1 R 3–4** (2nd half of 4th c., Oxyrhynchite), χρυσ[ο]ῦ νομισμάτιαν ε[ὐ]χάρακτον δίζωτον ἕν.

§20 The word order, where the number of *solidi* is placed after the modifying adjectives also speaks against the reading of *ed.pr.*

§21 The passage is to be understood as follows. Isak purchased some palm-wine for Marcianus and informed the latter that the cost was one *solidus*. Marcianus, while still waiting for the wine to be delivered, sent the said one *solidus* with his servants to Isak and asked to clarify how much wine he should expect (in ll. 24–25).

§22 The following phrase in ll.19–20 needs to be revisited as well. It serves as a polite conclusion of the main part of the letter. The expression ἐν τούτῳ summarises the business relationship and exchanges of favours between Marcianus and Isak. The reading of προτρέψη in *ed.pr.* as 2nd *sg.* has no parallels in other papyrus letters. The verb προτρέπομαι introduces a polite and urgent request to do something, for instance, to come or to write a letter. It would be absurd for Marcianus to ask Isak to ask himself (Marcianus) to write to him (Isak) enquiring about his (Isak’s) health. On the other hand, a polite request, addressed to the receiver at the end of the letter, to write frequently about their health is standard in letters, *e.g.*:

- ☞ **P. IFAO 2 15.4–5** (3rd c., prov. unknown), προτρέπομαί σε ἐπ[ιστέλλειν] μοι περὶ τῆς ὑγείας σου.
- ☞ **PSI 12 1247 V 4–8** (3rd c., Oxyrhynchus), γράφω ... προτρεπομένη ὑμᾶς γράφειν μοι συνεχῶς περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν.
- ☞ **SB 4 7335.6–7** (117–138, Soknopaiou Nesos ?), προτρέπομαί σε γράψαι μοι ἥιδιστα ποιήσονται.

§23 It is difficult to pinpoint the logic behind the wrong spelling in προτρεψημαί. Some examples of ο > η in papyri are collected in ☞ **Gignac 1976: 293**.

§24 The erroneous dative of τῆ λογίῳτητι is perhaps the result of the similarity in pronunciation with the accusative – nu at the end of the word tended to fall out – combined with the rarity of the word λογίῳτης: it is not attested in accusative in papyri and is used in dative in a total of eight out of ten texts, including this letter. Its position far from the verb προτρέπομαι in the sentence could have also contributed to the confusion of cases, and it is possible that the presence of the verb γράφειν

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<sup>10</sup> See ☞ **Bagnall and Bransbourg 2019**.

automatically prompted the dative case, even though the relation between the subject and object is the opposite here.

§25 The new text and translation would be, as follows:

καὶ τίμημα σπαθίτου  
οἴνου χρύσινων τεσσάρων δίζωτων παλεοχάρακτων  
ἕνα. προτρέψημαι ἐν τούτῳ πυκνῶς τῇ λογιότητι

20 σου γράφιν ἐξερέτως περὶ τῆς ὑγίας σου.

18 *l.* χρύσινον τεσσάρων (*scil.* γραμμάτων) δίζωδον παλαιοχάρακτον 19 *l.* προτρέψομαι *vel* προτρέπομαι *l.* τὴν λογιότητα 20 *l.* γράφειν, ἐξαιρέτως, ὑγείας

§26 [... in Memphis please order your servants to receive ...] and the cost of palm-wine – one two-imagined old-minted solidus of four grams. In such circumstances, I urge Your Learnedness to write frequently, above all, about Your health.

§27 In the final greeting, Marcianus wishes Isak to lead an εὐπετῆ βίον (l. 22), according to the text of the *editio princeps*. However, the papyrus reads εὐτελῆ.<sup>11</sup> Neither adjective occurs in this context. In Byzantine private letters, εὐτελής and εὐτέλεια are used as self-deprecation: ‘my poor letter’, ‘my insignificance’, e. g. ☞ **P.Michael 38.12** (6th c., prov. unknown); ☞ **P.Oxy. 8 1165.4,8** (6th c.); ☞ **P.Bodl. 1 69.1** (6th–7th c.); ☞ **P.Gen. 4 168.2** (6th–7th c., Apollonopolis Magna); ☞ **P.Oxy. 59 4006.6** (6th–7th c.); ☞ **P.Apoll. 36.4** (713?). In the 4th c., this adjective had not yet acquired this pejorative sense. In literary texts in combination with βίος, it tends to mean ‘simple’ with positive connotations: D.L.6.22; Ath.1.15; and especially about Jesus, Chrys. *hom.* 62.45.

§28 Finally, the editors signal the change of hand in ll. 21–25. Although the concluding greetings and the postscript are indeed written in a slightly more cursive way and the handwriting is smaller than in the main body of the letter, the ductus is the same and these lines were written by the same person as the main body of the letter. There is also a slight confusion with the numbering of these lines. The greetings starting with υγιενα continue in the same line 20, whereas the postscript is divided in two lines which is not reflected in the *ed.pr.*: in fact, -τιλάς μοι is written in the next line (l. 25) and is shifted to the right.

☞ **P.Ross.Georg. 3 10**

4th/5th c., prov. unknown.

Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, Archive G. Zereteli N 246.

§29 In l. 2, Ψεράκου is a ghost name. It should read Ἰεράκου, with a trema on both sides of the hasta of the iota. The genitive is unusual and not attested elsewhere, being a mixture between Ἰέρακος and Ἰερακίου. The name on the verso is illegible in the present state of the papyrus.

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<sup>11</sup> I am thankful to Nikolaos Gonis for this correction.



Fig. 7: P.Ross.Georg. 3 10, line 2

- §30 In l. 19, Zereteli – Jernstedt read Ῥεάκων, which is in fact a ghost name. Instead, the papyrus has Ῥισακων, *i.* Ῥισακων, with a trema on both sides of the hasta of the iota.

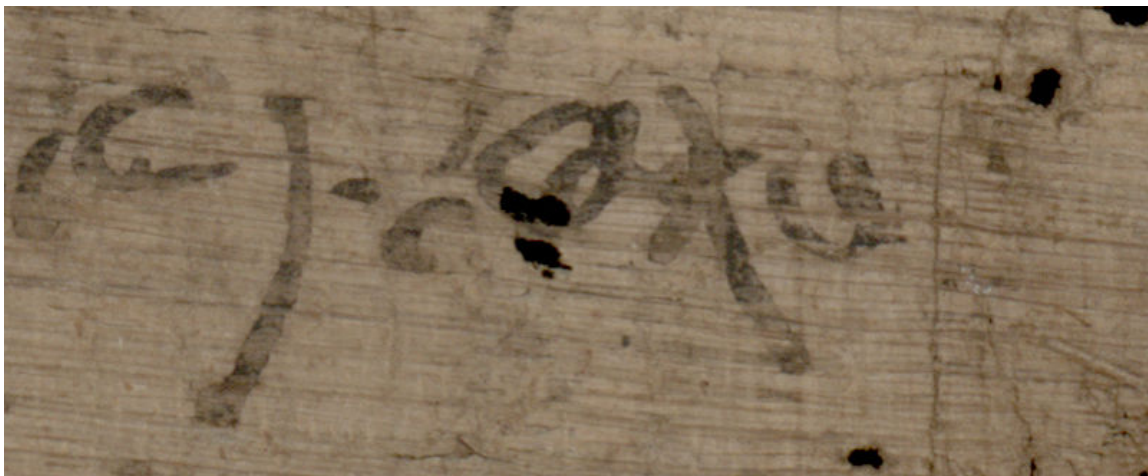


Fig. 8: P.Ross.Georg. 3 10, line 19

- §31 The sigma in l. 23 is peculiar, but common for this papyrus. *Cf.* l. 23 Ῥισακων.



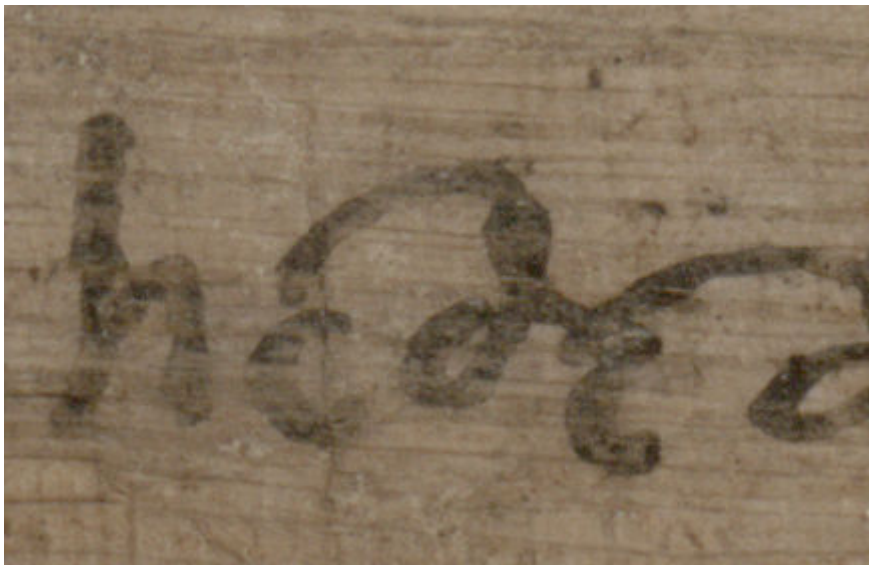


Fig. 9: P.Ross.Georg. 3 10, line 23

### ☞ P.Ross.Georg. 3 11

2nd half of 4th c., prov. unknown.

State Hermitage Museum, Ancient Orient Department, 5659.

- §32 This letter is a brief business note from Silvanus to his mother, in which he asks her to give back to Pasiris a tunic, which had evidently been deposited by him as a pledge for wine.
- §33 In the beginning, Ἀναστασαρ(ίω) is a ghost name (Fig. 10). It should be read instead as ἀποστασαρ( ), resolved as ἀποστασαρ(ίω) or ἀποστασαρ(ία). The name of the profession ἀποστασάριος, cellar-keeper, occurs in several papyri and ostraca dated to 5th–6th c.: ☞ P.Col. 10 292.5 (Oxyrhynchus); ☞ P.Wash.Univ. 2 99.1 (Oxyrhynchus); and SB 12 10990, nn. 16–26 (Abu Mina). It is derived from ἀπόστασις, storehouse, wine cellar.<sup>12</sup> From the layout, it can be suggested that the first line was added by the writer above the line later, as something he initially forgot to include in the greeting: τῆ κυρία μου μητρὶ Ἀποστασαρ(ία)/ ‘to my lady, mother, cellar-keeper’. It looks similar to the insertion of τῶ Πασίρι (or τῶ πατρί?) in l. 10, which was apparently added for clarification above τῶ ἀντῶ. The new interpretation shifts the numbering of the lines. In the discussion below, new line numbers are given. If my interpretation is correct, this is the first case of a female cellar-keeper.

<sup>12</sup> ☞ P.Oxy.16.2044.15–16 (6th c.), ☞ P.Oxy.18 2197.64,164 (6th c.); ☞ Husson 1983: 41–42.

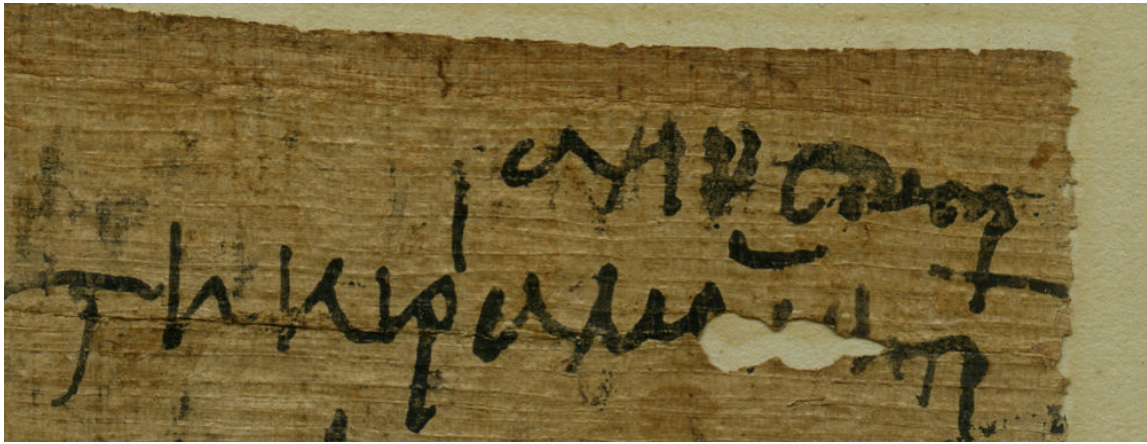


Fig. 10: P.Ross.Georg. 3 11, line 1

- §34 In l. 3, the editors read κολοβιω, *l.* κολόβιον, but in my opinion the regular version κολόβιον can be seen on the papyrus. The left hasta of the nu is slightly abraded on top, and the right one is written as in Σιλβανός.



Fig. 11: P.Ross.Georg. 3 11, line 3

- §35 In l. 6, the editors read τω, *l.* τούτο. It would be a peculiar mistake; furthermore, the first sign does not resemble other taus in the text. Instead, I suggest interpreting it as the symbol for talents: (ταλάντων) ω. This line hence gives not only the quantity of the wine but also its price. 800 talents (=120 myr. den.) for 8 (in case didiploun was the same measure as diploun) or 16 (if it was equivalent to two dipla) *sextarii* of wine<sup>13</sup> is a rather low price that indicates the dating in the second half of the 4th c. The tunic that was given as pledge for the wine would cost much more.<sup>14</sup>
- §36 In l. 7, αὐτή of the *ed.pr.* should be αὐτά.

<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, one diploun could measure also 4 1/2, 5, 6, or 7 .

<sup>14</sup> See [Morelli 2019](#): 30.

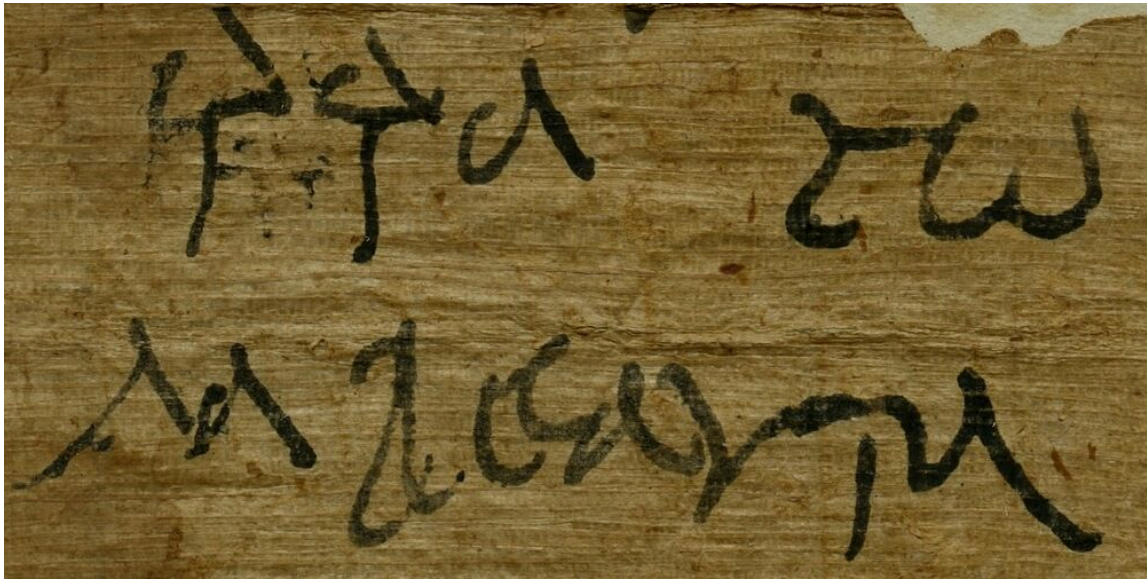


Fig. 12: P.Ross.Georg. 3 11, lines 6–7

§37 In l. 8, Παχύμο\ς/ should be read as Παχυμίου. Cf. οἴνου in l. 5 and μου in l. 1.

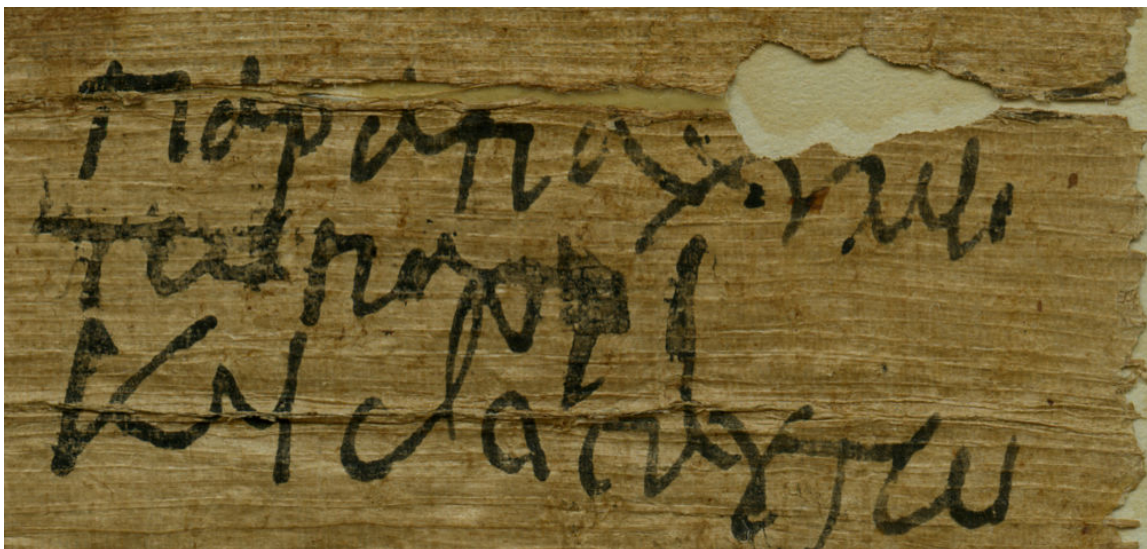


Fig. 13: P.Ross.Georg. 3 11, lines 8–10

☞ **P.Ross.Georg. 3 15**

6th c., prov. unknown.

Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, Archive G. Zereteli N 247

§38 The author of the letter, Horigenes, must be employed at some administrative office, since he is supposed to get *syntheia*, an annual bonus usually paid to provincial officials, and writes to *singularii* as his superiors.<sup>15</sup> A certain Horigenes, *tractator*, receives *syntheia* in a document belonging to Dioskoros' archive (☞ P.Cair.Masp. 1 67058 Col. 3.3) and could be the same person. Together with the mention of *singularii*, who occur frequently in the archive, this could be an argument that the letter belongs to Dioskoros' milieu as well. Among Zereteli's collection in Tbilisi, there are several

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<sup>15</sup> ☞ Fournet 2016.

documents from the archive of Dioskoros, including P.Ross.Georg. 3 16, 38, 41, 43–45, 48, and 5 9, 32, 35, 62.

- §39 In l. 1, π(αρά) in the middle of the line was not reported by the editors. This conventional sign written in the papyrus as a large letter pi crossed out diagonally is common for headings of Byzantine letters. The new reading shifts the numbering of lines.

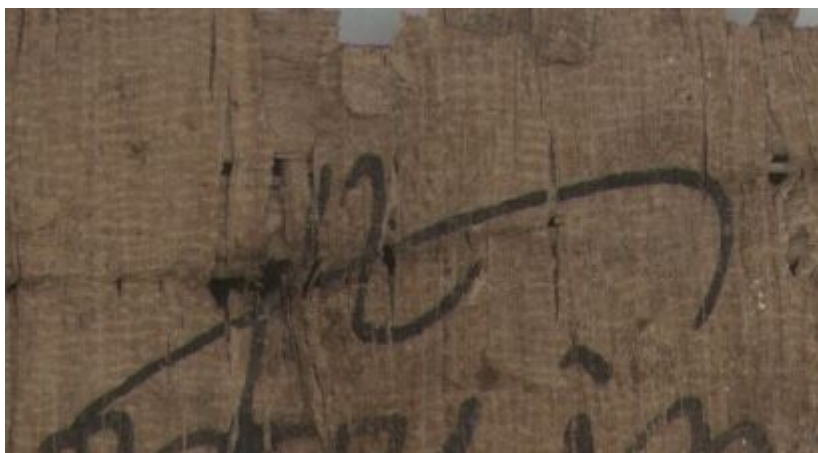


Fig. 14: P.Ross.Georg. 3 15, line 1

- §40 In the address on the verso (l. 7), the editors read:

θαυμασ(ιωτάτοις) [καὶ] ἔναρ(έτοις) μ[ο]υ ἀδελφ(οῖς) [NN καὶ]

θαυμασ, εναρ *pap.*

- §41 However, the abbreviations have in fact double letters:

θαυμασ(ιωτάτοις) κ[αὶ] ἔναρρ(έτοις) ἀδελφ(οῖς) *ca.* 13 [ καὶ]

θαυμασσ, εναρρ, αδελφ *pap.*

- §42 Above the first rho in εναρρ there is a sinusoidal line that marks the abbreviation and above the second rho is another, even longer sinusoidal line. The latter was understood by the editors as a supralinear ypsilon. The top of the second rho is abraded and for this reason this letter was read by the editors as a long-legged mu.

- §43 The traces of the first name after the abbreviations could read Πλάτωνε. In the following line 8, the profession of Ioannes, ἀννονι[ of *ed.pr.* is not compatible with the traces. One can read with some certainty only three letters: ιγο... [.

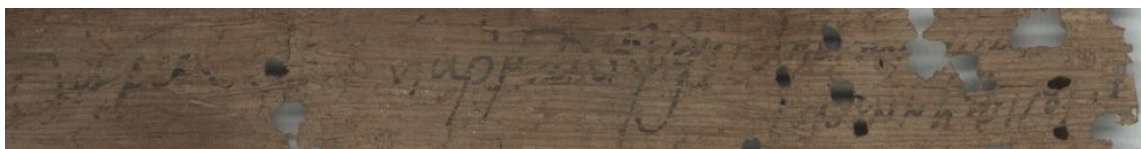


Fig. 15: P.Ross.Georg. 3 15, lines 7–8

[↗ P.Ross.Georg. 3 18](#)

7th c., Arsinoite.

State Hermitage Museum, Ancient Orient Department, 13500.

§44 The author of the letter expresses deep concern about their daughter and asks *comes* and *chartularius* Menas to send her to the author in the Arsinoite.

§45 The traces of letters in the first half of l. 6 are left untranscribed in the edition:

κα[. . .]λ[.] . . [ . . . . . ]δ[ . . ]ς

§46 One may attempt to read these as καταπλέου[σ]αν κατὰ τ[ά]χ[ο]ς.

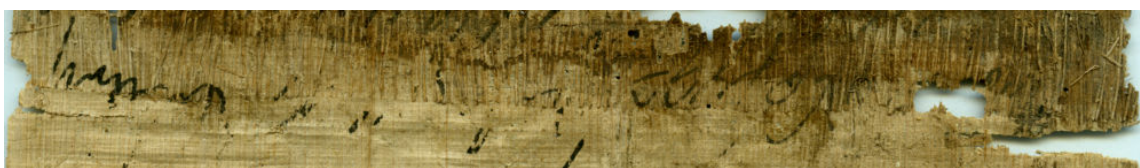


Fig. 16: P.Ross.Georg. 3 18, line 6

§47 In the address on the verso, κόμητι καὶ χ. . . (l. 13) should be read as κόμητι καὶ χαρτ(ουλαρίω).

§48 The following line 14 is read as εδω . . . in *ed.pr.* It might contain the name of the sender, which is probably Ἐδοξία, *I. Eὐδοξία*. If this reading is correct, we have an addition to the corpus of letters whose authors are women.

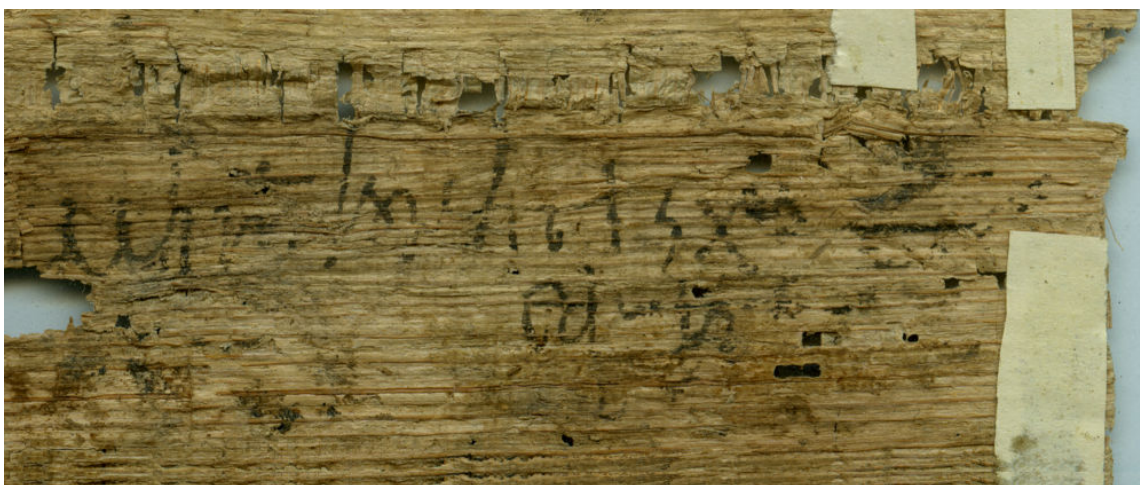


Fig. 17: P.Ross.Georg. 3 18, line 14

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