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Four Unpublished Papyri from Hamburg

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I would like to express my gratitude to the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky staff for their assistance during my research at the library. The papyri were examined through a combination of high-resolution digital images, personal inspection in situ and a Dino-Lite digital microscope. Some of the snippets appearing in this paper come directly from microscope photographic material.

Special thanks are due to the anonymous or eponymous reviewers of the draft of this article for their valuable comments and thought-provoking observations.

- §1 This contribution presents an edition of four fragmentary papyri housed in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Hamburg. The acquisition history of these papyri is closely linked to the broader formation of the Hamburg collection, primarily through purchases coordinated by the Papyruskartell between 1906 and 1913, with additional acquisitions extended until 1939. Conservation of the papyri was carried out in Berlin by H. Ibscher.¹ While the provenance of certain pieces may be identified through internal indicators (e.g., Oxyrhynchos), the origins of others remain indeterminate. At any rate, the information on the library website regarding their alleged Theadelphia provenance seems to be a technical error.

I. Private letter referring to quinquennial games

📄 **P.Hamb. graec. 742**

8.2 (w) × 11.2 (h)

1st c. – beginning of 2nd c. CE?
provenance unknown

- §2 This light-brown papyrus is regularly cut off at the left and right, preserving the original margins; at the bottom, only a small portion of the text is lost, but can be confidently restored, while the extensive margin survives, together with the original edge. The top has sustained significant damage resulting in the loss of probably more than half of the original text. Written in a flowing but irregular cursive script, it displays characteristics typical of rapid cursive hands from the 1st up to the beginning of the 2nd century CE; cf., for instance, 📄 **BGU 1 197** (Dionysias, 17 CE) or documents from the grapheion of Tebtynis (the Kronion archive, 📄 **ArchID 93**), such as 📄 **P.Mich. 5 349** (Tebtynis, 30 CE). This dating is further supported by the concise farewell formula including the day of the month, which is uncommon in papyri from the 2nd century onwards.²
- §3 With only the final part of the letter preserved in a good state, the text contains greetings to the addressee and his family from the author and his people. As an afterthought the sender informs the addressee that he failed to send him a mirror in connection with the Quinquennial (counting inclusively, i.e. every four years) games. He promises to buy and send one once the occasion appears.
- §4 The games mentioned likely refer to the so-called ἑκαετηρίς (see 6–7 n.), held every four years at Nicopolis near Alexandria in the mid-1st century CE, as reported by Strabo.³ Given that the latest (dated) attestation of the Pentaetērikos agon in Alexandria is in c. 110 CE, it provides a convenient chronological framework, corroborating the internal evidence of the papyrus.

¹ On the history of the collection, see 📄 **Essler 2021**.

² See 📄 **Sarri 2018**: 117–118.

³ See 📄 **Remijsen 2014**: 192–193.

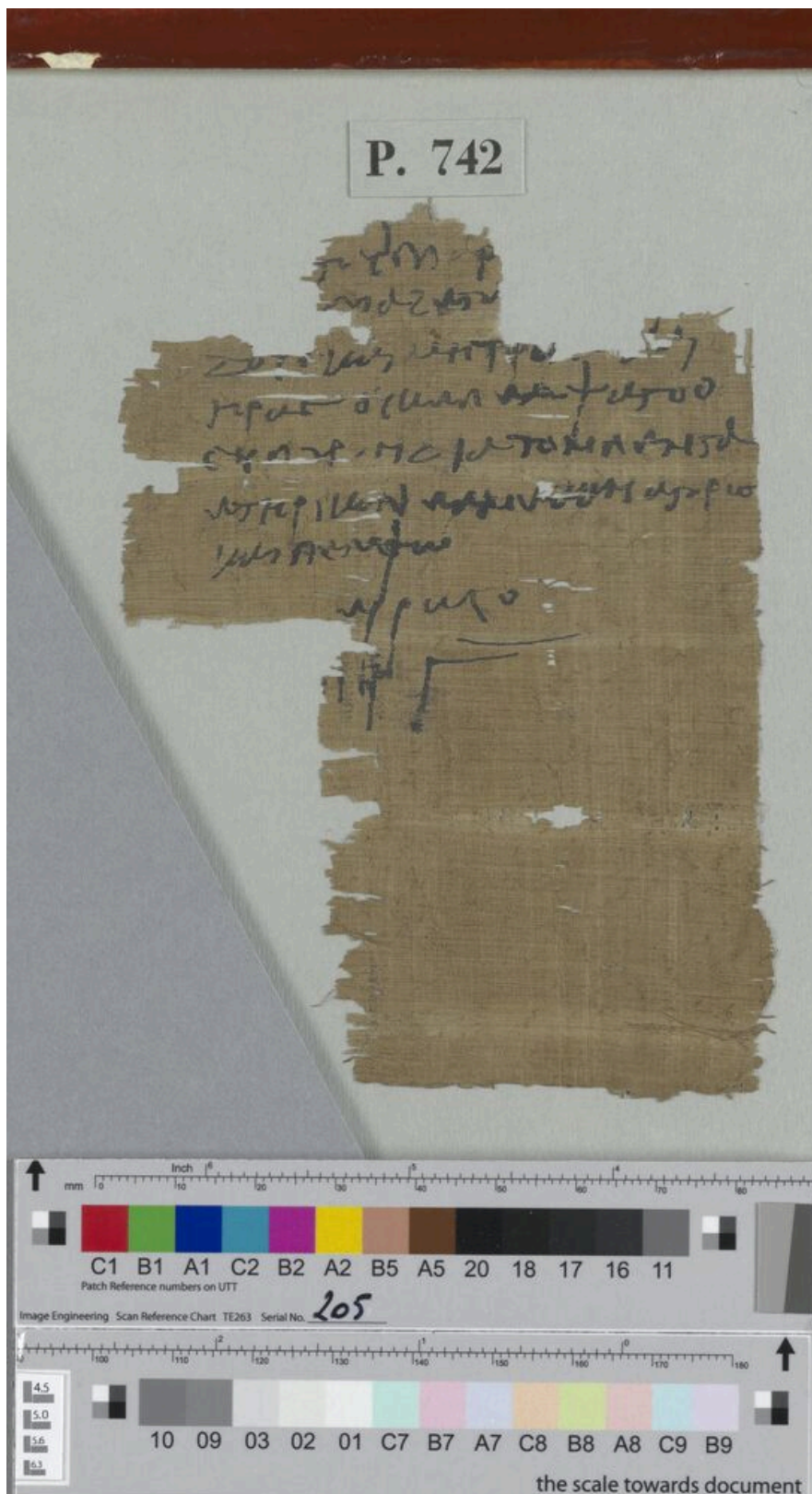


Fig. 1: P.Hamb. graec. 742 Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky. Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

[[--- --- ---]]
 [-ca.6-] [-ca.11-]
 [-ca.4-] τοὺς παρ[-ca.7-]
 [c ... ᾱ]σπάζετα[ί σε -ca.2-]ρ[-2-3-]-
 δοῦς καὶ Μητρόβ[ις] καὶ
 5 Ἡρᾶς. οὐκ ἔπεμψα τὸ ὄ-
 συπτρον διὰ τὸν πεντα-
 ετηρικόν. ἐὰν ἐκβῇ, ἀγορῶ
 καὶ πέμψω.
 ἔρρωσο
 10 [Ἐ]πὶ γ

5-6 Ἰ. ἔ|σοπτρον 10 Ἰ. Ἐπεῖφ

‘... greets you ...dous and Metrobis and Heras. I did not send the mirror for the Quinquennial Games. If everything pans out well, I will buy it and send it. Farewell. Epeiph 3.’

§5 1–3 In these lines, one expects to find a greeting formula that could have looked as follows:

ᾷσπα-]		ᾷσπα-]
[σαι] ⁴ τοὺς παρ[ά σοι πάν-]	or	[σαι] τοὺς παρ’ [ὕμῖν πάν-]
[τας ᾱ]σπάζετα[ί σε etc.		[τας ᾱ]σπάζετα[ί σε etc.
ἀσπάζο-]		ἀσπάζο-]
[μαι] τοὺς παρ[ά σοι πάν-]	or	[μαι] τοὺς παρ’ [ὕμῖν πάν-]
[τας ᾱ]σπάζετα[ί σε etc.		[τας ᾱ]σπάζετα[ί σε etc.

§6 3–4 -δοῦς: this is the ending of a feminine name starting in line 3, where the partially preserved descending stroke of a rho can be observed. It is not clear where line 3 ended as the lengths of the subsequent lines vary. However, presumably, after the rho a single additional letter may be sufficient to complete the sequence. In such a case, a good option would be Ἀφροδοῦς (Ῥοδοῦς would be too short). Other names that could be considered include: Ἡραΐδοῦς, Χαριδοῦς, Ζωιδοῦς (if the descending stroke is interpreted as an iota).

§7 4 Μητρόβ[ις]: < Μητρόβιος. The reading of the final part of the name is not secure but a nominative is expected here. However, the majority of search results in the papyrological corpus include -almost exclusively- only two long compound names with the first compound Μητρο-: Μητρόδωρος/-δώρα and Μητροφάνης. Thankfully, we find one example of a slave named Μητρόβις in [SPP 4 pp. 62-78.322](#) (c. 73 CE). In contrast, the name Μητρόβιος is ubiquitous in inscriptions, particularly those originating from Asia Minor.

§8 5–6 ὄ|συπτρον: This form of the classical ἔσοπτρον/ἔῤσοπτρον (‘mirror’) has been recognized as a variant, not a deviation, apparently limited to Egypt only.⁵ In fact, ὄσυπτρον produces more attestations

⁴ ἀσπά[[ζου] could also be considered

⁵ [Bonati and Reggiani 2020](#): 63–67.

than the standard ἔσοπτρον. Although found in 2nd–3rd c. CE papyri predominantly, one re-edited papyrus, [P.BGU 6 1300.17](#) (210/193 BCE), furnishes a much earlier example of this form, suggesting a continuity of its use since the Ptolemaic period.

- §9 [6–7](#) τὸν πεντα|ετηρικών: as previously stated, it is probable that the games in question are those held in Alexandria, known simply by the adjective πενταετηρικός. This is evident in the inscriptions that attest to these games, listed by Moretti,⁶ who associates them with the Actia established by Augustus in nearby Nicopolis, which mirrored the Actia of the Epeirotan city of the same name.⁷ A variety of other games is also attested, albeit exclusively in late-second century sources: a Sebasteios, a Seleukeios, a Hadrianeios Philadelphios agon and Olympia.⁸ These Quinquennial Games could not have been any local Capitolia (also quinquennial), which were established much later in the 3rd century, initially in Hermopolis under Septimius Severus, it seems ([Remijsen 2014: 194](#)).
- §10 [7](#) εἰν ἐκβῆ: the sentence uses an impersonal construction of ἐκβαίνω to convey the meaning ‘if it works out well,’ ‘if it occurs.’
- §11 ἀγορῶ: contracted future forms of ἀγοράζω do not occur after the early 2nd century CE. One additional example, dated only broadly to the 2nd century (see below), cannot be considered an exception. Another papyrus ([P.BGU 3 948.20](#) from Herakleopolis, 4th–5th c.) contains an anomalous middle-voice future form, ἀποστελῶ [σο]ι τὸ κέρμα ὅσου αὐτὰ ἀγορᾶ (2nd pers. sg. of an unattested ἀγορῶμαι), but its reading cannot be verified because the papyrus was destroyed in the Hamburg fire of 1899. However, it is important to note that future forms of this verb are not frequently encountered, even prior to this period. Perhaps it is useful to cite the limited examples that are present in our documents:
- §12 [P.Cair.Zen. 2 59161.4](#) (255 BCE) ἀγορᾶν; [P.Cair.Zen. 3 59499.48](#) (254 BCE) ἀγορῶ;⁹ [P.Leid.Inst. 1 31.13](#) (late 1st – early 2nd c. CE) ἀγορῶς; ¹⁰ [SB 10 10529 b.19/23](#) (late 1st – early 2nd c. CE) ἀγορῶμεν / ἀγορῶ; [SB 12 11148.17](#) (late 1st – early 2nd c. CE): ἀγορᾶ/; [SB 22 15453.10](#) (2nd c.): ἀγορῶ.
- §13 For such forms, see [Mandilaras 1973: 358](#), although the work lacks later published examples. A comprehensive and updated overview of the formation of the future tense of similar verbs (e.g. ἐκβιβάζω) can be found in [Benuzzi 2024](#).¹¹ Cf. also [Jannaris 1897: 889–890](#).

II. Sworn declaration to the chief of the nome’s police

[P.Hamb. Graec. 739](#)

11.5 (w) × 11.5 (h)

12 Nov. 340
Oxyrhynchos

- §14 This is a light brown papyrus with the upper portion of the text almost completely intact. Only parts remain of the left and right margins, with the right extending into several more lines. The latter is cut regularly at the edge, while the letters in some cases appear cramped to fit in the available space. The lower part of the document is lost and its extent unknown. Presumably though, based on

⁶ [IAG 65](#) (c. 60 CE, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ τῇ κατ’ Αἴγ[υπτου] | πενταετηρικών), [67](#) (c. 90 CE, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ τὸν ἱερὸν πενταετη[ρι]κόν), [68](#) (c. 110 CE, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ἱερὸν πενταετηρικὸν ἀγῶνα Ἀκ[τιακῶν παίδων] | παγκράτιον), as well as [CIL 2 4136](#), where one reads: Alexan|driae agonotheae | certaminis penta|heterici.

⁷ [Hanson 1980: 249–250](#) with notes.

⁸ [Fauconnier 2023: 154–158](#).

⁹ In [P.Cair.Zen. 2 59235.7](#) the Future form ἀγορᾶι is restored.

¹⁰ This one and the next two belong to the small archive of Askas from the Panopolite nome ([TM Arch id: 274](#)), consisting of four letters only.

¹¹ Last update on 30/04/2025.

standard heights, approximately a half of the text is missing. The verso is blank. The handwriting is characterized by irregular letter shapes, a certain lack of dexterity, and the presence of corrections.

- §15 The text is a sworn declaration addressed to Aurelius Dioscorus, a police official known from other Oxyrhynchite documents, who held the title ἐπόπτης εἰρήνης. It was issued by a certain Aspidas, son of Dios, from the village of Chysis. From the limited information available, we may assume that Aspidas is a lower ranking police officer,¹² possibly an eirenarch, who acts in accordance with the chain of command.¹³ reporting to the chief of the nome police about robbers held in custody at the local station. However, the overall details are unclear due to the poor condition of the papyrus at the beginning of the narratio.

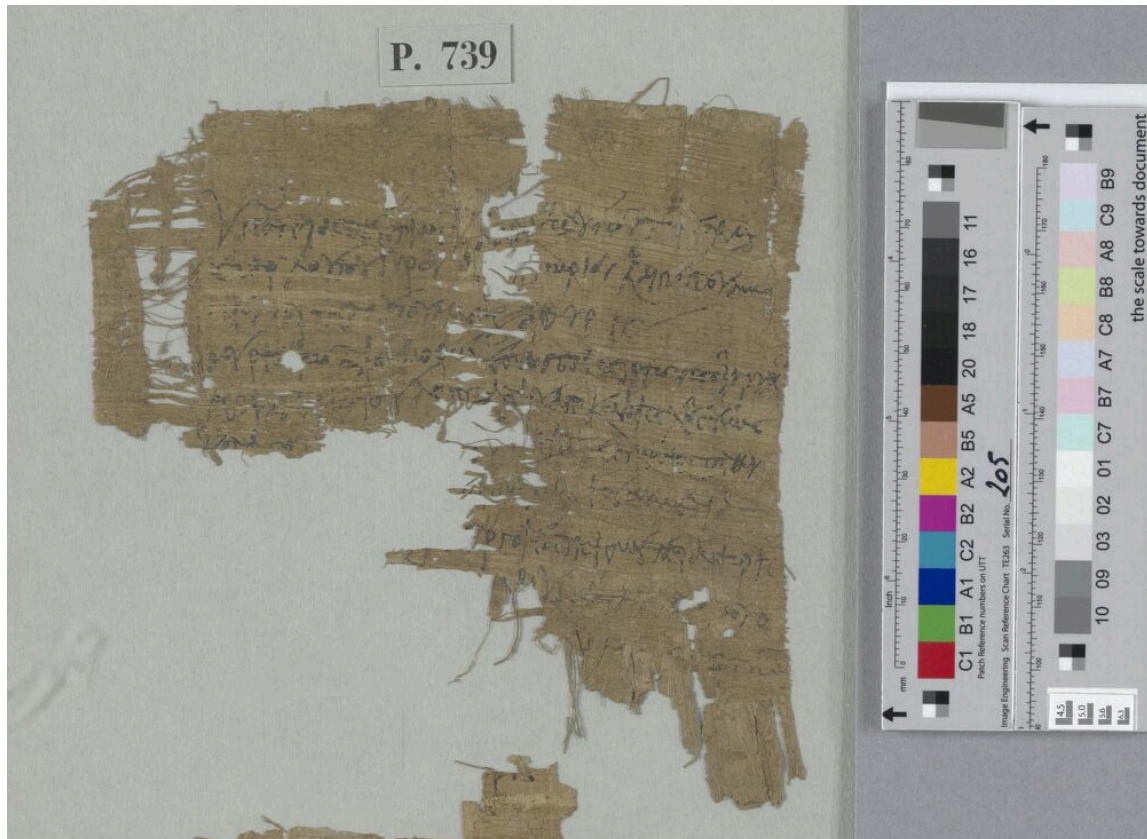


Fig. 2: P.Hamb. Graec. 739 Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky. Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

ὑπατείας Σεπτιμίου Ἀκινδύνου, τοῦ λαμ(προτάτου)
 ἐπάρχου τοῦ ἱεροῦ πρ[αι]τωρίου καὶ Ποπουλω-
 νίου Πρόκλου του λαμ(προτάτου) Ἀθὺρ ις
 Αὐρηλίῳ Διοσκόρῳ ἐπόπτη εἰρήνης Ὁξυρύνχῳ(ν)
 5 παρὰ Αὐρηλίου Ἀσπιδᾶ Δίου ἀπὸ κόμης Χύσεως
 α / πάγου [-ca.2-] [-ca.5-] εσεῖς αἰσθῆται αὐ-

¹² On the police hierarchy, see [Torallas-Tovar 2000](#): 115–123; further insights are offered in the printed edition of [P.Pintaudi. 18](#). A similarly structured Oxyrhynchitan text from roughly ten years later ([P.Oxy. 19 2233](#), 350 CE) is addressed to the riparii of the nome by eirenarchs of two pagi.

¹³ On eirenarchs, their role in the local policing activities, as well as their standing in the police hierarchy, see [Sänger 2005](#).

- [-ca.15-] ἡ σὴ ἐμμέλεια
 [-ca.12-] κακ[ο]ῦργοι ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τηρή-
 [σει -ca.17-] . . . κατὰ ταῦτα ὁμολο-
 10 [γῶ ὁμνὺς τὸν σεβάσμιον θεῖον ὄρκον τῶν δε[σ]ποτῶ(ν)
 [ἡμῶν Αὐγοῦστων -ca.?-]
 [[--- --- ---]]

2 ἱεροῦ papyrus 7 ἡ ἐμμέλεια 8 corr. ex ημετα

‘In the consulate of Septimius Acindynus, the most brilliant prefect of the sacred praetorium, and Populonium Proclus the most brilliant. Hathyr 16th. To Aurelius Dioscorus, overseer of the peace of the Oxyrhynchite nome, from Aurelius Aspidas son of Dius from the village of Chysis of the 1st pagus. ... your Diligency ... robbers in our custody ... Regarding this, I acknowledge that it is true, swearing the august imperial oath of our lords the Augusts ...’

§16 1 The consulship of Septimius Acindynus and Populonium Proclus, see [CSBE](#)² 188.

§17 4 Αὐρηλῖω Διοσκόρῳ ἐπόπτη εἰρήνης Ὁξυρυγχ’ ὧ(ν): Interestingly, all our evidence for ἐπόπτης εἰρήνης comes from a narrow chronological span between the years 339 and 342. Most of this evidence comes from Oxyrhynchos,¹⁴ with the exception of a recently published papyrus (dated before July 339) addressed to officials of Arsinoe, among whom is an ἐπόπτης (without εἰρήνης).¹⁵ The earliest reference to an epoptēs in Oxyrhynchos is found in [P.Oxy. 55 3794.3/20](#) (16 July – 1 August 340). The editor (J.R. Rea) suggests that the person implied is Dioscorus since he is the only known holder of the office. This is a reasonable suggestion as the present document (12 Nov. 340) bridges the gap between his attestation by name on 5 April 341 and the nameless reference in July-August 340.

§18 Among the Oxyrhynchite attestations, four documents ([P.Oxy. 6 991](#), [P.Oxy. 12 1559](#), [P.Oxy. 50 3575](#), [P.Oxy. 50 3578](#)) are petitions addressed to Dioscorus, one document ([P.Oxy. 50 3576](#)) is an undertaking on oath likewise addressed to him, another ([P.Harr. 1 65](#)), is a bail for a prisoner (not explicitly stating the name of the epoptēs but it is probably Dioscorus), and one other is a private letter ([P.Oxy. 55 3821](#)) from Dioscorus ἐπόπτης Ὁξ(υρυγχίτου) to Heras.¹⁶ Therefore, we can safely assume that all documents including the present one come from the same office and that the career of Dioscorus spanned at least from July–August 340 until May 342.

§19 Another notable feature is Dioscorus’ nomen. Sometimes he is named Aurelius, sometimes Flavius, which may reflect a fluctuation between municipal and state status (for Flavius), though this interpretation remains tentative. Rea attempted to explain this inconsistency in [P.Oxy. 50 3575.3–4 n.](#), arguing that the variation implied that Dioscorus first held state office (with the name Flavius) but later reverted to Aurelius, possibly due to a demotion from state to municipal rank. However, this argument appears unsatisfactory as in this earlier text from November 340 he is addressed as Aurelius and not Flavius. Perhaps then, the position was originally a municipal one, subsequently elevated to a state office for a brief time (hence the nomen Flavius), and finally, reverting back to its municipal status. Nevertheless, scribal ignorance could not be excluded. At any case, the current data indicates that the

¹⁴ In chronological order: [P.Oxy. 6 991](#) (5 Apr. 341); [P.Oxy. 12 1559](#) (13 Nov. 341); [P.Oxy. 50 3575](#) (28. Oct. – 26. Nov. 341) and [P.Oxy. 50 3576](#) (30 Nov. 341); [P.Oxy. 50 3578](#) (25 Febr. – 26 Mar. 342); [P.Harr. 1 65](#) (5 May 342).

¹⁵ [Gonis 2022](#). This is the earliest attestation of the official in Egypt.

¹⁶ To be dated to c. 340–342. On Dioscorus and his correspondence, see [Frend 1989](#): 248–250.

specific office of ἐπόπτης εἰρήνης (a police authority over the nome) seems to have been a short-lived innovation of 339, soon abandoned.

- §20 5–6 κόμης Χύσεως α / πάγου: the village is located in the southern part (former Upper Toparchy) of the Oxyrhynchite nome, see [Benaissa 2021](#): 443–445. The present text adds a further, hitherto unknown detail that the village belonged to the 1st pagus. The transcribed alpha is somewhat ambiguous and could also be interpreted as a beta, given its large upper loop. However, the ductus of the stroke — continuing from the loop toward the pi of πάγου — suggests that alpha is the more likely reading. The papyrus additionally confirms that Chysis in this period was part of the Oxyrhynchite nome before switching to the Hermopolite nome later in the 4th century ([P.Lips. 1 99](#), 375/376 or 390/391).

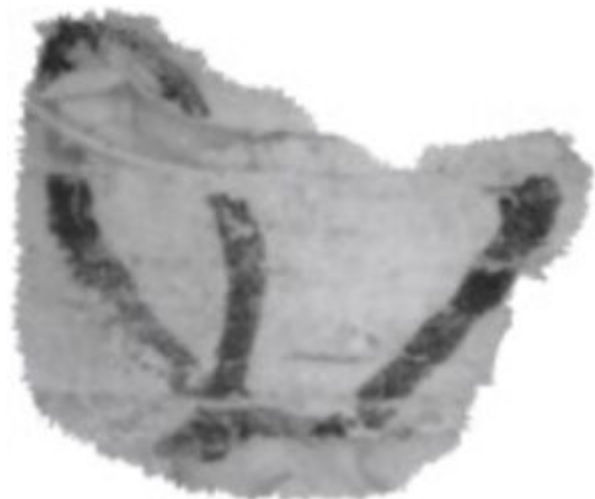


Fig. 3: line 6.

- §21 7 ἡ σὴ ἐμμέλια (l. ἐμμέλεια): this abstract noun was used to address various officials: logistēs, ekdikos, syndikos, riparius, exactor, epitropos and beneficiarius, see [P.Harris 2 207.11n](#). For a concise overview of its origins, see also [Zilliacus 1949](#): 45.
- §22 Ἡ σὴ ἐμμέλια could have been preceded by a verb such as ἐπέθετο, cf. [P.Oxy. 6 897.7](#) (a similar declaration to riparii, 346): ἐπέθετο ἡμῖν ἡ ὑμῶν ἐμμέλια (l. ἐμμέλεια), or [P.Oxy. 10 1265.11–12](#) (336) ἐπέθετό μοι ἡ | σὴ ἐμμέλε[ια]. It is possible to read the verb ending -ετο just before ἡ σὴ with some effort. However, the poor state of the text as well as the idiosyncratic handwriting makes the reading particularly challenging.
- §23 8–9 ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τηρήσει: τήρησις = Lat. custodia, see also [P.Oxy. 47 3346.5–6 n](#). Cf. e.g. [P.Brem. 28 V.8](#) (113–120) ἐν τηρήσει ἔσχον.
- §24 10 δ[ε]σ[π]οτῶ(ν): The section restored in the lacuna should be followed by the expected δεσποτῶν followed by ἡμῶν Αὐγουστων etc. in the following line, cf. e.g. [P.Oxy. 6 897.10–12](#) κατὰ ταῦτα | ὁμολογοῦμεν ὁμνύντες τὸν σεβάσμιον | θεῖον ὄρκον τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν Αὐγουστων.

III. Petition

[P.Hamb. Graec. 749](#)

6.7 (w) × h 13.3 (h)

351–352

provenance unknown

- §25 This light-brown papyrus is broken on all sides, with only part of the bottom margin preserved. The verso is blank. The document was penned by a trained professional hand, exhibiting a continuous flowing ductus and many ligatures, letter strokes of varying thickness, and a slight rightward slope.

The handwriting bears a resemblance to that of [P.Oxy. 19 2233](#) (a declaration to the riparii, dated 350 CE).

- §26 From a structural standpoint, the document exhibits certain characteristics of petitions: it is divided into two sections—the preserved main body and the subscription written in a different hand; there is a narratio, where the petitioner employs the first person (ἐμοῦ).
- §27 Presumably, the text is a denunciation, according to which someone promised to give something (ὑποσχομένου δίδόναι) but showed disregard (καταφρονῶν τελείως) in connection with some finished work (ἔργον τελειωθέν). There is a reference to a speculator (on whom, see [7n.](#)), to items being taken away (ἀφαιρεθέντων) and to the court (δικαστήριον). Perhaps most importantly, the text mentions the praeses of Augustamnica Flavius Areianus Alypius, which serves to anchor the events chronologically. The lack of further context makes it challenging to assess the content in more detail, but a criminal case should not be excluded.

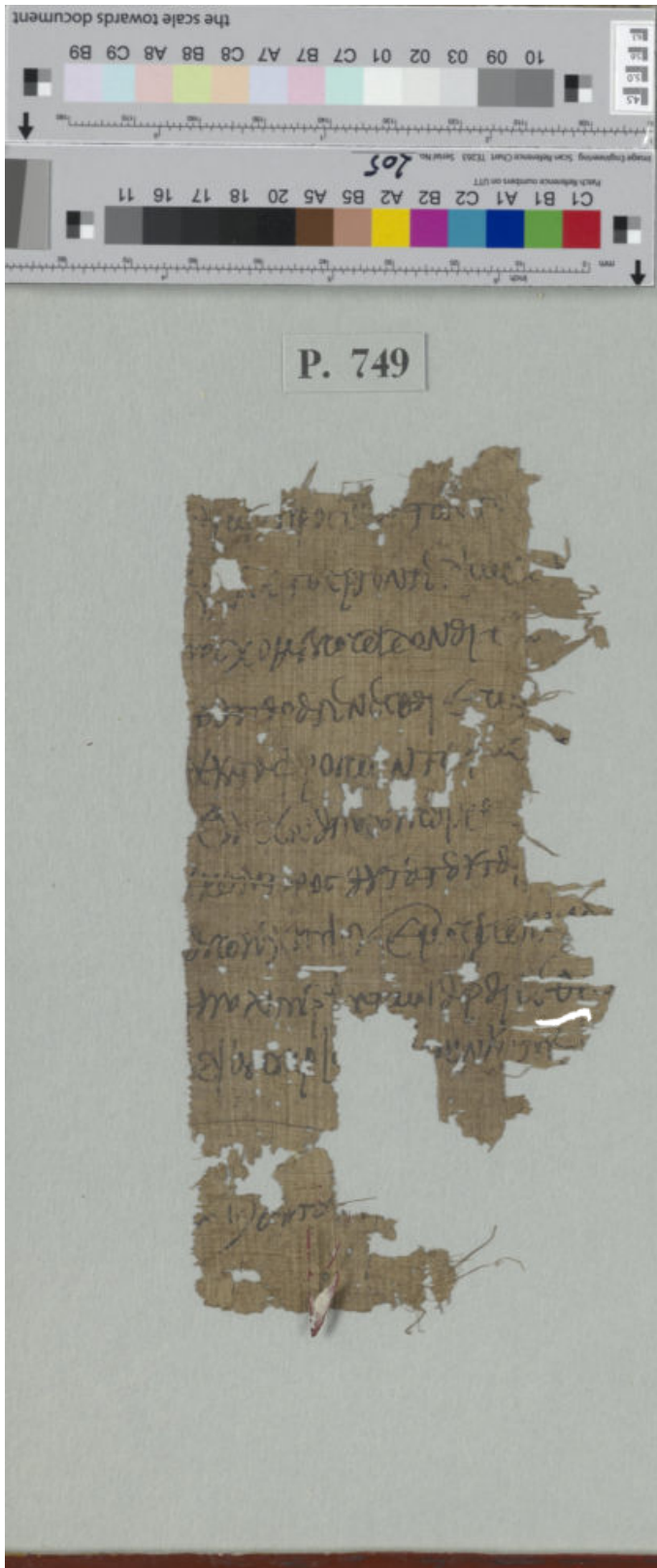


Fig. 4: P.Hamb. Graec. 749 Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky. Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

[[--- --- ---]]
 [-ca.?-] λη α πρὸς ἑκάστον τῶ[-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] ἐξ ἑσα τὸ ἔργον τελιωθεῖν[-ca.?-] [-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] ὑποσχομένου διδόναι θ [-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] εὐθὺς παραγενέσθαι, ἐγὼ [-ca.?-]
 5 [-ca.?-] δὲ καταφρονῶν τελίως [-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] οὐδὲν ἀποδοῦναι Ἡρα[-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] σπεκουλάτορος αὐτὰ ταῦτα [-ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] Φλαουίου Ἀρηιανοῦ Ἀλυπίου ἐμοῦ ἤδη μέλ[λοντος -ca.?-]
 [-ca.?-] ἀποχ περὶ δὲ τῶν ἀφαιρεθέν[των -ca.?-]
 10 [-ca.?-] δικαστηρι [- το]ίνυν κατὰ ε ι[-ca.?-]
 — —
 [(m2)] ..εἰαπτα[.]..

2 or τελειωθέν or τελειωθέν[τ-] 5 I. τελείως

‘the work was completed ... having promised to give ... to come immediately, I ... disregarding completely ... did not return to Hera[]... speculator ... of Flavius Areianus Alypius, while I was already about to ... concerning the things taken away ... court ...’

§28 7 σπεκουλάτορος: The speculatores were mobile military intelligence officers serving on the governor’s staff. They were charged with the duties of scouts, special messengers, and enforcers, sometimes collaborating with beneficiarii, and, occasionally, acting as executioners too. On speculatores, see the Introduction to [P.Neph. 20](#) with 23 n., and a list on pp. 96–99; [P.Oxy. 59 4002](#) 6 n.; [Palme 1999 \[2000\]](#): 85–133, esp. 94/110/119; [Nelis-Clément 2000](#):117–118 / 282–283 / 338 with 32 n. See also [Dickey 2023](#), s.v. σπεκουλάτωρ.

§29 8 Φλαουίου Ἀρηιανοῦ Ἀλυπίου: This constitutes merely the third occurrence of his name in the papyri. The other two are [CPR 5 12.10](#) (Arsinoites, 351) [Φλ(άουιος) Ἀρηιανὸς Ἀλ(ύπιος) ὁ διασημώτατος κόμης καὶ ἡγεμών, and [P.Oxy. 60 4091.8–9](#) (352): [ἀ]κολουθῶς τοῖς προσταχθεῖσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ διασημοτάτου | [ἡγε]μ[ό]νος Φλ[αο]υίου Ἀρηιανοῦ Ἀλ(ύ)π(ι)ου. His career included both an appointment as praeses of Augustamnica and as a praeses of Pamphylia, honoured in an inscription for the repair of the harbour and the city of Sidē (presumably sometime between 338–350).¹⁷ For an overview of his career, see [Agostini 2020](#): 316–320 with further literature.

§30 11]..εἰαπτα[]..: following a clearly marked section division with a horizontal stroke, this line was written by a second hand, which I was unable to resolve into something coherent. The text can be transcribed in various ways, including ὑ(πὲρ) θυγα[τέ]ρ[ων]. Should this be considered a petition, one could expect the name of the petitioner to be given here, followed by the verb ἐπιδέδωκα or, in the event that the petitioner was illiterate, an additional clause referring to an amanuensis: Name + ἔγραψα

¹⁷ [AE 1958, 201](#), see [PLRE I](#), Alypius 12, p. 49. For the date of the inscription, I have consulted [Moser 2018](#): 105, as it has been ambiguously dated to the late 3rd - early 4th century. [Agostini 2020](#): 319–320, disagrees with the conclusive assignment of his term-in-office as praeses Pamphyliae prior to his governorship of Augustamnica.

ὕπερ αὐτοῦ γράμματα μὴ εἰδότης et sim. There are multiple ways to read the letter sequence, yet none has thus far proven to be compelling.

IV. Private letter

☞ **P.Hamb. Graec. 762**

15.4 (w) × h 20.7 (h)

6th c.
provenance unknown

- §31 This is a light-brown papyrus with the top margin and part of the right margin preserved. The text is written transversa charta with the address on the verso running along the fibres. It is uncertain whether the last line marks the letter's closing, though the absence of potential ink traces in the interlinear space suggests that it does. Despite the fluctuating breadth of the interlinear space in general, after line 10 the lines appear rather squashed, thereby indicating shortage of space. The hand can be characterized as rudimentary but elegant overall, with clearly formed letters executed slowly with a thick pen, showing a mix of uncial and more cursive forms, e.g. the diverse shapes of epsilon or eta.
- §32 The sole internal chronological marker that limits the span is the mention of τρακτευτής (tractator), whose first dated attestation is in 524 (☞ **P.Cair.Masp. 3 67329 = ChLA 41 1194**), on whom see **10n**. From a palaeographical perspective, the hand can be convincingly placed to the 6th century. Handwriting specimens worthy of comparison are ☞ **P.Oxy. 16 1995** (Oxyrhynchos, 542) and ☞ **SB 14 11982** (Upper Egypt, 554).
- §33 The addressee of the letter is unknown, but he is clearly referred to on the back side as the most brilliant (λαμπρότατος) and the most distinguished (εὐδοκιμώτατος). It is conceivable that the author is a subordinate clerk in the office of the exceptores, though the precise nature of his rank remains uncertain. This hypothesis is supported by his use of πριμικηρίων ἀθθεντῶν ('my lords the primicerii'), on which see **13n**. The addressee is requested to grant the author leave lasting until Thoth (the day is not preserved). Despite the text's fragmentary state, one may infer that the reasons for his absence are financial, in that he was required to pay a certain amount of money (probably to repay a tax), and then issue a receipt (πληρωτική ἀποχή). The amount of money appears to be substantial, counted in the tens of solidi ("ty five"). The involvement of a trakteutēs could offer a justification as he was responsible for overseeing the tax collection process and issuing payment receipts in his capacity as a tax clerk attached to the pagarchy or the provincial administration. The amount in question amount could correspond to a specific village. The author also urges the addressee to come before the month of Mesorē, so that he can give him the money. The final part contains greetings seemingly from a woman named Toma (sc. Thomais?), but the passage is ambiguous and various interpretations can be proposed.
- §34 It is notable that the address appears twice on the verso. It can be hypothesized that the line at the top served as a model for the second version, which was written by the same hand that wrote the main body of the text on the recto. After the papyrus was folded, the "model" would be hidden from sight, while the second line would be visible both to the courier and the addressee. In this case, however, one wonders how the author managed to misspell the "model's" δεσπ(ότη) as τεσπό(τη). Conversely, one may argue for the opposite chain of events. Initially, the second line was written. Subsequently, someone decided to intervene and rewrite the address, now without the misspelt δεσπότη, in a more elaborate style (the hand is certainly more professional), placing it above the first one (without deleting it).
- §35 The address is followed by six lines of tachygraphic text of unknown content.

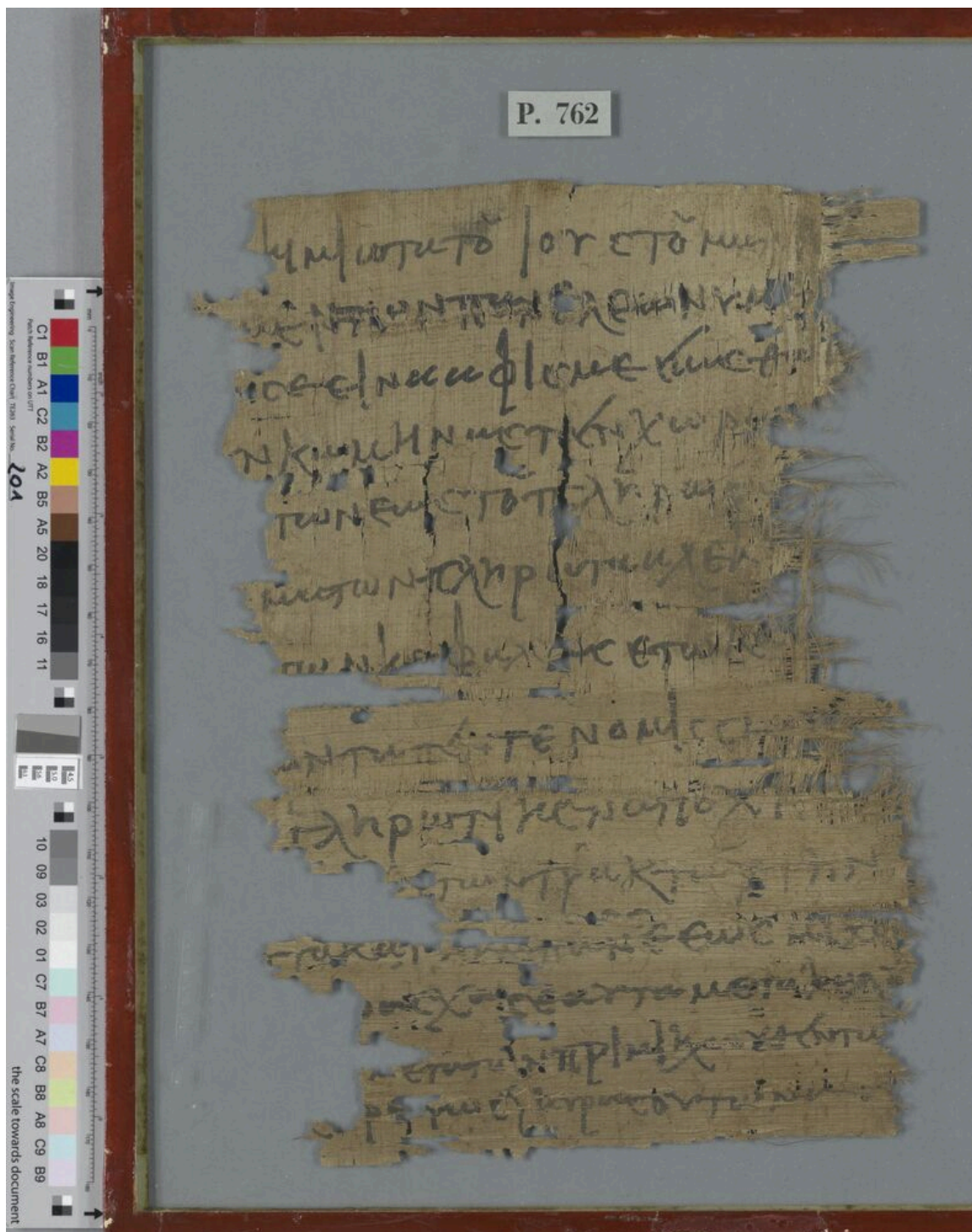


Fig. 5: P.Hamb. Graec. 762 R Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky. Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

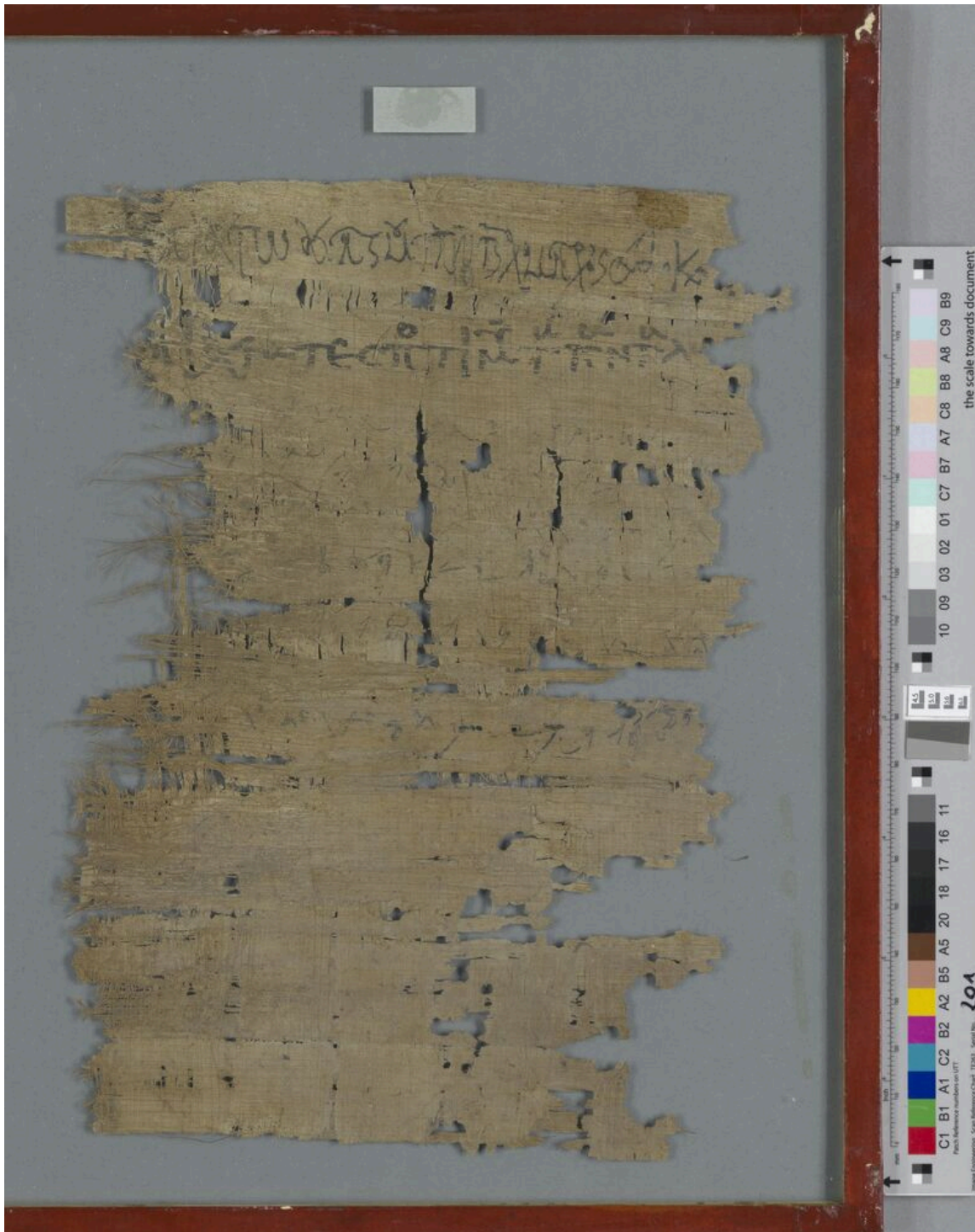


Fig. 6: P.Hamb. Graec. 762 V Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky. Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

r

[-ca.?-]κιμωτάτου Ἰούστου μαλ . . -3-4-

[-ca.?- εὖχο]μεν τὼν πανελεωνυμον[α θεὸν]

[-ca.?- παρακαλ(?)]ὦ σε εἵναεῖνα ἀφῖς με ἕως Θῶθ [-1-2-]

[-ca.?-] ν κόμην ὥστ' ἐν χώρᾳ [-ca.3-]

- 5 [-ca.?-]των ἕως τοῦ πληρῶσαι [-ca.3-]
 [-ca.?-] μάτων πληρῶ τὰ Ἀλεξ[αν]-
 [δρ- -ca.?-]των κεφαλῆω σε τωκω [-ca.3-]
 [-ca.?- κ]οντα πέντε νομισμάτων
 [-ca.?-] πληρωτικὲν ἀποχῇ[v]
 10 [-ca.?-] υτων τρακτευτήν
 [-ca.?- α]υτα κατ[α]λάμπανε ἕως Μεσορ[ή]
 [-ca.?- πα]ράσχω σὲ αὐτὰ μετὰ καλοῦ
 [-ca.?-] μετὰ τῶν πριμικ(ηρίων) αὐθεντῶ[v]
 [-ca.?- προσα]κ[ο]ρεύω εἰ κυρά σου Τωμα

v

- 15 ⲡ ἐπίδ(ος) τῷ δεσπ(ότη) μου τὰ πάντα λαμπρ(οτάτῳ) (καὶ) εὐδοκ(ιμωτάτῳ) . .
 [ἐ]πίδ(ος) τῷ τεσπότι μου τὰ πάντα λα[μπρ- -ca.?-]

r.2 / [εὐχο]μαι **r.3** / ἵνα / ἀφῆς **r.7** / κεφαλαίῳ / τόκῳ **r.8** / νομισμάτων **r.9** /
 πληρωτικὴν **r.11** / καταλάμπανε **r.14** / προσαγορεύω **v.16** / δεσπότη

‘ ... the most distinguished Iustus ... I pray that the all-merciful God ... [I beg (?)] you to let go of me until Thoth ... the village, so that I ... in [somebody’s] place ... until the repayment ... I pay for the Alexandrian? ... x-five solidi ... a payment receipt ... the tractator ... Come here until Mesorē and I will give them to you, if all goes well ... together with our lords the primicerii... I, your lady Toma (?), send greetings. Deliver to my lord the most brilliant and distinguished in all ...’

§36 **1** κῑμιωτάτου: perhaps the author conflated τιμωτάτου with εὐδοκιμωτάτου, thus producing the form εὐδοκιμωτάτου. It seems, however, that he aimed for εὐδοκιμωτάτου. For our context, the honorific epithet is known to be borne by scribes (exceptor, ταχυγράφος, singularius) of the ducal office: e.g. [P.Oxy. 6 942 v](#) (6th–7th cent.) λαμπρ(οτάτῳ) εὐδοκ(ιμωτάτῳ) πά(ντων) φιλ(τάτῳ) ἀδελφ(ῳ) Πετρωνίῳ ἐκ(έπτορι); [P.Berl.Zill. 7.4–5](#) (Oxyrhynchus, 574) Φλαουίῳ Φιλοξένῳ τῷ εὐδοκιμωτάτῳ ταχυγράφῳ τῆς ἡγεμονικῆς | τάξεως ταύτης τῆς Ἀρκάδων ἐπαρχίας; [SB 16 12378.4–7](#) (Hermopolites, 504) Φλ(αουίῳ) [ᾠ]ρουωγίῳ καὶ Ἀδριανῷ υἱοῖ (l. υἱοῖς) Φοι-|βάμ[μ]ω[ν]ος τῶν εὐδοκιμωτάτων σιγγω-|λα[ρί]ων (l. σιγγουλαρίων) τῆς κατὰ τὴν Θηβαΐδαν (l. Θηβαΐδα) ἡγεμωνι-|κ[ῆς] (l. ἡγεμονικῆς) [τά]ξεως; and by notaries, e.g. [P.Lond. 5 1708.167](#) (567/568) ἐπὶ Ἰωάννου τοῦ εὐδοκ(ιμωτάτου) νοταρίου; [P.Köln. 7 317.36](#) (Hermopolites ?, 6th cent.) τὸν] εὐδοκιμώτατ[ον ταβου]λάριον.

§37 Ἰούστου: an εὐδοκιμώτατος Ἰούστος appears as the dioikētēs of the estate of Flavia Maria from Oxyrhynchus ([P.Oxy. 69 4754](#), 572). The date is conceivably fitting for our papyrus, although the limitations of palaeography, in terms of the too broad chronological span it affords, must be noted.

§38 μαλ[.c.3–4]: probably μάλισ[τα]

§39 **2** μὲν τὸν πανελεωνυμῳ[α θεὸν]: Despite assuming a series of spelling and grammatical errors, I restore the verb of this epistolary cliché as εὐχο[μ]εν (l. εὐχομαι), cf. e.g. [P.Iand. 6 103.1–2](#) (6th c.): πρὸ μὲν | πάντων εὐχομε (l. εὐχομαι) τὸν πανελεήμονα θεόν; [P.Wash.Univ. 2 108.1](#) (6th c.):

[εὔχομαι τὸν] παγελεήμονα θεό[ν]. A search for πανελε- in both DDbDP and TLG yields almost exclusively forms of πανελεήμων. The term is so deeply embedded with God as all-merciful that there seem to be no other alternatives. It is reasonable to expect a short formula such as πρὸ μὲν πάντων εὔχομαι τῷ πανελεήμονι Θεῷ περὶ τῆς ὑγείας σου, cf. [P.Oxy. 56 3865.5–8](#) (late 5th c.).

- §40 εὔχο]μεν (l. εὔχομαι): the form of the verb itself occurs three more times in papyrus letters from Late Antiquity: [P.Haun. 2 25.4–5](#) (4th–5th c.) πρὸ με (l. μὲν) πάντων [εὔ]χομεν (l. εὔχομαι) τῷ παντογράτωρ[ι] (l. παντοκράτορι) Θεῷ; [P.Munch. 3 127.2–3](#) (4th c.) πρὸ μὲν πάντων εὔχομέν (l. εὔχομαι) | σαι (σε) ὀλοκληρῖν (l. ὀλοκληρεῖν); [P.Oxy. 56 3864.5–6/36–37](#) (5th c.) πρὸ μ[ὲν] πάντων εὔχομεν (l. εὔχομαι) τῷ πανελεύμονι (l. πανελεήμονι) | θεῷ περὶ τῆς ὀλοκλίας (l. ὀλοκληρίας) ἡμῶν / ἐρρῖσθέ (l. ἐρρῶσθαί) σῦ (l. σε) εὔχομεν (l. εὔχομαι) | πολλῷ (l. πολλοῖς) χρόνης (l. χρόνις). The verb εὔχομαι is seemingly a worthy companion to ἀσπάζομαι, whose active forms (ἀσπάζω, ἀσπάζομεν, ἄσπαζε etc.) in private letters are well-known.¹⁸ The reasons for their formation appear to be more complex than simply the loss of middle voice forms, especially when considering the transitional nature of the middle voice (placed between the active and the passive).¹⁹ A phonetic background may also have contributed to the shift of the very popular duo ἀσπάζομαι / εὔχομαι. The merger of the αι and ε into a single [e] sound resulted in forms such as ἀσπάζομαι and ἀσπάζομε / εὔχομαι and εὔχομε sounding identical, and sometimes developing a movable nu as if it was the first-person plural of an active (ἀσπάζομεν, εὔχομεν).
- §41 4]ν κόμην: likely]υν κόμην or]εν κόμην. Etas do not have a redundant connecting stroke in this text. One potential interpretation is that this could be a misspelled form of the feminine article τὴν with an upsilon (itacized), which is unsurprising given the many spelling problems in this text. Alternatively, it could be]εν instead of ην, cf. πληρωτικέν in line 9 and the way epsilon connects with the nu there.²⁰
- §42 ἐν χώρῃ: the final alpha of the word is not absolutely certain. An alternative possible reading is ἐνχωρῶ, i.e. the text would run ὥστ' ἐνχωρῶ ('so that I permit'). However, I consider ἐν χώρῃ more appropriate than ἐνχωρῶ in the context of assuming someone's financial burdens to meet the payments described in the text. See LSJ s.v. χώρα (4): ἐν χώρῃ τινὸς εἶναι, and cf. Preisigke, WB s.v. χώρα (2).
- §43 6 τὰ Ἀλεκξ[αν-]: For such forms with a reduplication of the kappa sound, see [Gignac 1976: 140](#).
- §44 Presumably this refers to something Alexandrian, which could be solidi on the Alexandrian standard (τὰ Ἀλεξανδρείας). For the syntax, cf. [SB 18 13173.117](#) (629/644) νομισματίων τεσσάρων εὔστ(άθμων) τῷ(ν) Ἀλεξα(νδρείας).
- §45 7 The papyrus has κεφαλωσετωκῶ. Various interpretations are possible, such as τωκῶ (l. τόκῶ?) for the final part. As an alternative approach, one could split τωκῶ into τῷ κῶ[or τῷ κᾶ[, or even propose an Aoristic form of δίδωμι: δωκ. However, a more probable expectation would be a combined reference to the capital and interest, cf. e.g. [P.Cair.Masp. 2 67167.45](#) (566–573) κεφαλαίῳ τε καὶ τόκῳ, while the preceding]των could be the ending of νομισμά]των,²¹ cf. [P.Oxy. 16 1975.7](#) (496) νομισμάτων κεφαλαίου; [P.Oxy. 72 4907.7–8](#) (422) νομίματα | κεφαλαίου; [P.Lond. 1 113 6 c.20–21](#) with BL 9 125 (620/635): ν[όμισ]μα κε-[φ[αλαίου].
- §46 10 τρακτευτήν: = Lat. tractator. These were tax clerks attached to the governor's office or the pagarchy (with a minimum of two per pagarchy). They were responsible for auditing the tax amounts delivered

¹⁸ [Nachtergaele 2023: 68–70](#).

¹⁹ [Horrocks 2020](#); [Lavidas and Papangeli 2007: 108–114](#) furnish plenty of examples of the phenomenon of deponents in Ancient Greek shifting to active in Postclassical/Modern Greek and vice versa.

²⁰ A somewhat difficult scenario would be to read ἐν κόμην (l. κόμη).

²¹ I do not believe that the adverb κεφαλῶς (l. κεφαλαίως) is suitable for the context.

and were accountable to the senior tractatores of the prefecture. For a comprehensive overview of τρακτευταί, see [Zuckerman 2004](#): 123–127. For the most recent discussion of τρακτευταί, see [Stern 2025](#), esp. 78–79. A lexical analysis can be found in [Dickey 2023](#), s.v. τρακτευτής. It is noteworthy that Justinian appears to have attempted to abolish these functionaries at least in certain provinces.²² However, in Egypt, they are consistently attested in papyri throughout the 6th century and into the 7th century.

§47 The text probably reads τὸν (l. τὸν) τρακτευτήν, preceded by a genitive in -ου.

§48 11 α]ὕτᾱ: or τα]ῦτα.

§49 κατ[α]λάμπανε (l. καταλάμβανε): an uncommon phonetic rendition, attested in one more papyrus only, [P.Stras. 6 538.12](#) (281 CE) ἀναλαμπανομένου²³ and 14 λαμπάνει [κ]ατὰ μέρος.

§50 13 πριμικ(ηρίων): On civil primicerii and the various departments (scholae) they could head within the governor's office, see (concisely) [Benaissa 2006](#): 5, n. 8–12. It is reasonable to assume that the term in question refers to the chief of the schola exceptorum (i.e. ταχυγράφων), attached to the provincial administration.²⁴ It is, therefore, not without reason that a tachygraphic text is written on the back of the papyrus, suggesting a case related to the staff of the scribal office.

§51 14 εἰ κυρά σου: The most straightforward way to accommodate this passage is to see it as an inserted greeting by a woman, who is either the author's "lady" (κυρά) or is called Κύρα (leaving Τῶμα to be explained otherwise). According to this version the text reads: προσα]κ[ο]ρεῦω (l. προσαγορεύω) εἰ (l. ἡ) κυρά σου or εἰ (l. ἡ) Κύρα σου. Such "interpolations" in the first person are known from earlier periods (at least), cf. [P.Mert. 2 82.16–21](#) (unknown provenance, late 2nd c. CE): ἄσπα[σαι] τὴν μητέρα σου Ἀθηναίδα καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν Ἀχιλλίωνα καὶ πάντας κατ' ὄνομα. Σαραπάμμων ||ο|| σε ἀσπάζομαι, καὶ Ἱερατική σε ἀσπάζεται and [PSI 7.831.17–24](#) (4th c.) with multiple greetings in both third and first person: Νόνα ἀσπάδεται (l. ἀσπάζεται) | [ὑμᾶς] πολλά. Σιλβανὴ ἀσπάδαιται (l. ἀσπάζεται) ὑμῆς (l. ὑμᾶς). | Ἀννοῦτις καὶ Θεωνίλας καὶ Ἰσχυρίων | ἀσπάδωμαι (l. ἀσπάζομαι) ὑμᾶς. Ἀπίων' ἀσπάδωμαι (l. ἀσπάζομαι) καὶ τὸν αἰπιστάτην (l. ἐπιστάτην) καὶ τὴν συβίων (l. σύμβιον) αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ πεδα (l. παιδία). καὶ ἐγὼ Μίκη | ἀσ[π]άδωμαι (l. ἀσπάζομαι) τὸν αἰπιστάτην (l. ἐπιστάτην) συ (l. σὺν) τοῖς | τέκνυς (l. τέκνοις) καὶ τὴν (l. τῇ) συβίῳ (l. συμβίῳ) αὐτοῦ.

§52 A second scenario, albeit less likely, is to read either εἰκυρά (l. ἐκυράν) or εἰκυρω (l. ἐκυρόν) σου, given the vexing similarity of alpha and omega. In this interpretation, we would be dealing with the terms ἐκυρός - ἐκυρά (father-in-law and mother-in-law from the wife's perspective),²⁵ unique terms, which are not attested in Egypt. Additionally, the text would have to be addressed to a woman, which is not the case.

§53 A third, albeit highly speculative, hypothesis to be considered is that of reading εἰ κυρά σου as the accusative τὴν κυράν σου, assuming that the author committed two errors, both phonetically and morphologically.

²² Just. Nov. 30, cap. 2: Τὸ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐπιτρόπων καὶ τῶν τρακτευτῶν ὄνομα οὐδὲ εἶναι παντελῶς βουλόμεθα, πρὸς τὰ ἔμπροσθεν βλέποντες παραδείγματα καὶ τὴν πολλὴν αὐτῶν ἐπήρειαν ἦν τοῖς ἀθλίοις ἐπὶ τὸν συντελέσιν ('Bearing in mind the example of former times, and the enormous injury inflicted by curatores (epitropoi) and tractatores (trakteutai) upon Our wretched subjects, We do not desire the names of these officials to longer exist.' trans. Scott S.P., *The Civil Law*, XVI, Cincinnati, 1932).

²³ Listed by [Gignac, Grammar I](#), 83.

²⁴ See [Palme 1999 \[2000\]](#): 85–133, esp. 110.

²⁵ Cf. Sch. Basil. XLV 3.2.4: Καίτοι παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι κυρίως ὁ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς πατὴρ ἐκυρός καλεῖται, ἡ δὲ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ ἐκυρά, ὁ δὲ τῆς γαμετῆς πατὴρ πενθερός καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς πενθερά ('and yet Greeks call the husband's father ἐκυρός, and ἐκυρά his mother, while πενθερός the wife's father and πενθερά her mother').

- §54 Τωμα: the feminine name appears to be unique. The relationship between this name and the masculine name Θωμάς remains to be clarified, as does the question of whether it is a form of the name Θωμάς.²⁶ We know of a martyr called Thomais from Alexandria, from a text associated with Daniel of Scētis,²⁶ so the name would not be unprecedented. The mu is dotted because the letter also resembles a nu. The latter is less probable due to the connecting stroke with the alpha, which the nus in the next normally do not have.
- §55 I do not believe that the faint ink traces after the alpha represent something of significance. The image captured with a microscope is unambiguous in one respect: the alpha is extended, which suggests that this is the word's final letter.

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²⁶ Thomais Alexandrina (BHG 2453–2453b), see ☞ **Dahlman 2007**: 130–132.

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