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Өнηςι? άπό βιβλίων'

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Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.
Admonitions to study are a recurrent phenomenon in ancient literature. Their frequency might even be taken as evidence to the fact that in reality there was much doubt about the alleged advantages of wisdom from books. Ancient sources show clearly enough that a poor intellectual is not a literary invention of modern times. Also in Antiquity an educated person wanting means to procure necessaries of life was not a fictitious character.

In the collection of ancient anecdotes, the Philogelos, an important role is played by the σχολαστικός, or egghead. Thierfelder translated the Greek word as Kalmäuser, which is a very disputable translation. σχολαστικός has in Greek several meanings. In the Philogelos the scholasticus is a student, a lawyer or an official, according to the sense of the word as terminus technicus in Later Antiquity. Quite often the word indicates simply an intellectual in a general sense. In the text to be discussed below Thierfelder correctly translates the word σχολαστικός as “student”. Usually, however, there is no visible connexion between the specific meaning of the term σχολαστικός and the role of the character in the anecdote. Most frequently the scholasticus seems to be simply an educated individual who in actual fact is an imbecile. Yet, there are exceptions to that rule, as we shall see below.

Anecdote no. 55 of the Philogelos reads as follows:

Σχολαστικός ευτράπελος ἀπορών δαπανημάτων τὰ βιβλία ἐπιπρασκε, καὶ γράφων πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἔλεγε· Ὑγχαιρε ἡμῖν, πάτερ, ἢδη γὰρ ἡμᾶς τὰ βιβλία τρέφει.
“A witty student sold books when short of money and wrote to his father: ‘Congratulate me, father, my books nourish me already’.”

Barry Baldwin’s translation reads:

“A witty young egghead sold books when short of money. He then wrote to his father, ‘Congratulate me, father, I am already making money from my studies’.”

Thierfelder translates the same passage more accurately:

“Ein witziger Student verkaufte, weil er kein Geld hatte, seine Bücher, und in einem Brief an seinen Vater sagte er: “Gratuliere mir, Vater, denn meine Bücher ernähren mich schon!”

Thierfelder says in his commentary: “Obwohl der Witz ohne weiteres verständlich ist, möchte ich annehmen, daß er auf einer Redeweise fußt, in der man einem ungebildeten Vater klarmachte, daß er seinem Sohn lieber teure Studienbücher als einen Acker o.ä. kaufen solle: ‘Diese Bücher werden ihn dereinst (besser) ernähren’ (vgl. Petron. 46.7 f). The excellent editor of the Philogelos seems to be here in error. The idea that the father of the “egghead” is an imbecile does not agree with the gist of most of the scholasticus-jokes of the Philogelos. It is the scholasticus who usually plays the part of an idiot. In the joke under discussion, however, he is witty, ἐγκατάστατος, although behind his superficial brilliancy, there is in reality a lot of intellectual indolence, άμαθία. As a matter of fact he is but an intelligent fainéant.

Scholasticus’ father, on the other hand, is not a sharply outlined character. In those jokes of the Philogelos in which the father appears, the son shows him, according to circumstances, kindness or unkindness, respect and fear or contempt and aggression. Scholasticus asks him questions and is often rebuked. Sometimes he quarrels with his father and heaps abuse upon him in a vulgar way. Usually, the father seems to be more witty than his son, although his wisdom is rather unsophisticated.

That the student’s wit in the anecdote no. 55 is just a jocular reaction to his father’s own platitudinous advice, seems far more probable than Thier-
falders bizarre interpretation, which implies other people giving the scholasticus’ father lessons of commonplace wisdom and advocating the advantages of expense on books.

Andreas Thierfelder and Barry Baldwin are convinced that the joke refers to some stereotype exhortations emphasizing the advantages of study4. Baldwin says that the joke is “a crass version of proverbial expressions”5. Both the editors state that the anecdote is based upon a saying recorded by Petronius. In Petronius’ text a father invites his son to study by telling him: habet haec res panem6. Obviously, it is the father’s own idea to encourage his son to study.

Anyhow, when interpreting the anecdote, we remain in the world of literary convention in which the realities are nothing more than a pretext to tell a joke. The father gives his son a good advice; the son, short of money, sells his books and writes to his father a witty letter with an ironical paraphrase of the father’s (proverbial?) saying. However, behind the literary banality, there is actual ancient life which may be detected in documentary texts.

P. Oxy. III 531 (II century A.D.) is an interesting parallel, which for the sake of convenience is reproduced here in extenso7.

4 “Redeweise” THIERFELDER, op. cit., p. 219.
5 BALDWIN, Philogelos, p. 68.
7 Cf. BL IV.
νωφρά τὰ ἴματα τὰ λευκὰ τὰ δυνάμενα μετὰ τῶν πορφυρῶν φορείσθαι φαινολίων, τὰ ἄλλα μετὰ τῶν μουρσίων φορέσεις.

16 διὰ Ἄνουβᾶ πέμψω σοι καὶ ἀργύρων καὶ ἑπιμηνία καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ζέγγω τῶν ἴσθαι φαινολίων, τοῖς ψαρίοις εξήλλαξας ἡμᾶς, τούτων καὶ τὴν τιμὴν δι᾽ Ἄνουβᾶ πέμψω σοι, μέντοιγε ἑως πρὸς σὲ ἐλθῆ Ἄνουβᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ σου χαλκοῦ τὸ ὑσγείον σου καὶ τῶν σών ἐξοδίασον ἑως πέμψω. Ἑστὶ δὲ τοῦ Τοῦβι μηνός σοι δ θέλεις, Φρούμιῳ (δραχμαί) ἵ, τοῖς περὶ Ἄβασκ(αυτοῦ)

20 καὶ Μύρωνι (δραχμαί) θ, Σεκούνῳ (δραχμαί) ἵβ. πέμψων Φρόνιμου πρὸς Ἀσκληπίαδην ἐμὸι ὁμόματι καὶ λαβήτω παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἀντιφώνησιν ἔγραψα αὐτῷ ἐπιστολήν καὶ πέμψων.

24 περὶ ων θέλεις ἰησοῦν μου. ἔρρωσο, τέκνον. Τοῦβι ἵ.

verso

Ἰέρακι Ἴῳ ὁ Ἀρκηλίῳ ἀπὸ Καρυνλίου πατρός.

“Cornelius to his sweetest son, Hierax, greeting. All our household warmly salutes you and all those with you. Regarding the man about whom you write to me so often, claim nothing until I come to you auspiciously in company with Vestinus and the donkeys. For if gods will I shall arrive quickly after Mecheir is over (cf. BL IV: μετὰ = ἄμα Π), since at present I have urgent affairs on hand. Take care not to offend any of the persons at home, and give your undivided attention to your books, devoting yourself to learning (φιλολογία), and then they will bring you profit. Receive by Onnophras the white robes (himatia) which are to be worn with the purple cloaks, the others you should wear with the myrtle (mulberry)-coloured(?) ones. I shall send you by Anoubas both the money and the monthly supplies and the other pair of scarlet cloaks. You won me over by the dainties, and I will send you the price of these too by Anoubas; until however Anoubas arrives, you must pay for the provisions of yourself and your household out of your own money, until I send you some. For the month of Tubi there is for yourself what you like, for Phronimus 16 drachmae, for Abascanthus and his companions and Myron 9 drachmae, for Secundus 12
drachmae. Send Phronimus to Asclepiades in my name, and let him obtain from him an answer to the letter which I wrote to him, and send it. Let me know what you want. Good-bye, my son. Tubi 16. (Addressed on the verso) To my son Hierax from his father Cornelius.8

Both the texts — the anecdote and the letter seem to be almost two fitting halves of the same reality. “Books will bring you profit” — reads the letter. “I am already making money from them” — answers the witty student from the Philogelos.

Differences between these two situations, however, are evident. Cornelius sent to Hierax also money; the egghead’s father dispatched to his son only his good advice.

In terms of chronology there is no great discrepancy between the two texts. The date of the papyrus is only approximate (palaeographical dating to the second century A.D.). Many of the Philogelos jokes come from the Roman period; one of them is even explicitly dated to Philippus Arabs.

Like in our days the study in a city far away necessitated providing for the same needs: housing, food, payments of various nature, service or self-service in daily life situations, purchase of books and stationery. Conflict with neighbours was often an impending problem.

The father’s decision concerning a man about whom Hierax had already written many times is rather enigmatic. The name of the person involved is not mentioned, probably for the sake of prudence. The settlement of the whole affair had to be delayed until the father’s arrival.

Instructions including advice concerning studies and clothes, financial matters and everyday behaviour show very close relationships between the boy and his parents.

The true student of the Oxyrhynchus text seems to be different from his imaginary counterpart of the Philogelos. He certainly had no financial difficulties. However, he had trouble with his neighbourhood or attendance. The father would like his son to wear warm clothes: he gives him advice to wear himation together with a paenula. That, however, is no wonder in the middle of the month of Tybi which is the first half of January. We do not know where Hierax studied. Even if it was Oxyrhynchus or Hermopolis, the advice was perhaps appropriate. Alexandria in that season was even colder.

Hierax not only received supplies from his parents’ home but also sent there things in return — for which he got his money returned. He dis-

8 The translation is quoted from the original edition of P. Oxy. III 531.
patched to them “dainties”, as the editor translates. Also Preisigke translated the word ὀψάριον in the same way. However, ὀψάριον in later Greek has already the meaning of the modern Greek ψάρι ("fish"). In papyri of the Roman period the word is no more a diminutive of ὄψον ("a meal") and the meaning "fish" may be taken for granted. In P. Oxy. III 531.18 ὀψάριον is therefore a word for fish.

Obviously enough Hierax would not send home (especially to his wealthy family) the same Nile river fish that certainly were common in his home countryside. The father writes to his son ἵξηλλαζας ἡμᾶς (1. 18), which means “you rejoiced us/me”, “you brought us/me change”. The English translation by the editors “you won me over”, which entered the Liddell-Scott-Jones, Dictionary, s.v. ἐξαλλάσσω as a sole basis of the meaning “coax, win over” is not precise. The meaning “bring about a change” agrees much better with the situation described in the papyrus.

It is difficult to say whether ἡμᾶς in the letter refers only to the writer ("me") or to the whole family ("us") but the question is of no real importance.

It would seem that a dispatch of fish from Alexandria (that most probably was the place of the boy’s studies) compared with permanent supplies of money clothes and provisions could only elicit a courtesy reaction of the father. Yet, in the ancient world fish were considered an exquisite kind of food. For that very reason fish became a synonym of a dainty. The high appreciation of fish found expression in prices.

Sea fish in the Egyptian hinterland were probably a rare kind of food. At Oxyrhynchos, situated far away from the sea shore, sea fish were certainly highly appreciated. In P. Oxy. VII 1067. 27-29 of the third century A.D. an Oxyrhynchite writer asks for a sea fish: ἀγόρασόν μοι ὀψαρίον ἐξ τῆς θαλάσσης. Preisigke, explains: “Zukost, aus allerlei Seegetier bereitet” which implies a kind of conserve made from frutti di mare. That results from the interpretation of ὀψαρίον=opsaridion as “dainty”. How-

9 Also in Attic Greek ὄψον designates de facto fish, cf. LSJ Dictionary, s.v. As for the meaning of ὀψάριον e.g. in SB I 1974; P. Lond. II 429.58, p. 314; III 1259.1, p. 239; in P. Oxy. XIV 1656.17 there is no doubt that fish is meant.

ever, there is little doubt that sea fish is actually meant. That was also the
interpretation of the editor.

Also in P. Oxy. VII 1067 the “little sea fish” would be carried by
someone travelling home: (29-30) πέμψοι [δὲ] διὰ ἄνθρωπον πτ[...].

The fish sent home by Hierax were probably dried, salted\textsuperscript{11} or pre-
served in another way (τάριχος, perhaps even τάριχος λεπτός, or superior
quality preserved fish\textsuperscript{12}).


\textsuperscript{12} Cf. P. Got. 3.