

# Łukaszewicz, Adam

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## Ονησι? από βιβλίων'

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Adam Łukaszewicz

### ΟΝΗΣΙΣ ΑΠΟ ΒΙΒΛΙΩΝ\*

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 necessities 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 εὐτράπελος ἀπορῶν δαπανημάτων τὰ βιβλία  
ἐπίπρασκε· καὶ γράφων πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἔλεγε· Σύγχαيره  
ἡμῖν, πάτερ, ἥδη γὰρ ἡμᾶς τὰ βιβλία τρέφει.

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\* The following article is a version of a paper given in Warsaw on 6th October 1992 during a session dedicated to the memory of Zbigniew Borkowski.

“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’.”<sup>1</sup>

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!”<sup>2</sup>

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 sollte: ‘Diese Bücher werden ihn dereinst (besser) ernähren’ (vgl. Petron. 46.7 f)<sup>3</sup>.”

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, *εὐτράπελος*, although behind his superficial brilliancy, there is in reality a lot of intellectual indolence, *ἀμαθία*. 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-

<sup>1</sup> *The Philogelos or Laughter-Lover*, translated with Introduction and Commentary by B. BALDWIN, London (= *Studies in Classical Philology* X), Amsterdam 1983, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Philogelos. Der Lachfreund*, von Hierokles und Philagrios, griechisch-deutsch, hrsg. von Andreas THIERFELDER, München 1968 (Tusculum), pp. 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> THIERFELDER, *ibidem*, p. 219.

falder's 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 study<sup>4</sup>. Baldwin says that the joke is "a crass version of proverbial expressions"<sup>5</sup>. 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 panem*<sup>6</sup>. 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 extenso*<sup>7</sup>.

Κορνήλιος Ἰέρακι τῷ γλυκυτάτῳ υἱῷ  
χαίρειν.

- ἡδέως σε ἀσπαζόμεθα πάντες οἱ ἐν οἴκῳ καὶ  
4 τοὺς μετ' ἐσοῦ πάντας. περὶ οὗ μοι παλλάκεις  
γράφεις ἀνθρώπου μηδὲν προσποιηθῆς  
ἕως ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ πρὸς σὲ παραγένομαι σὺν Οὐ-  
ηστεινῷ μετὰ καὶ τῶν ὄνων. ἐὰν γὰρ θεοὶ θέλω-  
8 σι τάχιον πρὸς σὲ ἤξω μετὰ τὸν Μεχεῖρ μῆνα  
ἐπεὶ ἐν χερσὶν ἔχω ἐπίξιμα ἔργα. ὄρα μηδε-  
νὶ ἀνθρώπων ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ προσκρο[ύ]σης, ἀλλὰ τοῖς  
βιβλίῳ σου αὐτὸ μόνου πρόσχε[ε] φιλολογῶν  
12 καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῶν ὄνησιμ ἔξεις. κόμι[σ]αι διὰ Ὀν-

<sup>4</sup> "Redeweise" THIERFELDER, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup> BALDWIN, *Philogelos*, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Petronius, *Satyricon* 46.7-8 (edd. K. MÜLLER & W. EHLERS, München 1978, *Tusculum*, p. 88); cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.6.14 (recogn. E.C. MARCHANT, t. II, *Oxonii* 1901).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *BL* IV.

νωφρᾶ τὰ ἱμάτια τὰ λευκὰ τὰ δυ[ν]άμενα  
 μετὰ τῶν πορφυρῶν φορεῖσθαι φαινολίω,ν,  
 τὰ ἄλλα μετὰ τῶν μουρσίνων φορέσεις.  
 16 διὰ Ἄνουβᾶ πέμψω σοι καὶ ἀργύριον καὶ  
 ἐπιμήνια καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ζεῦγος τῶν ὑσγείνων.  
 τοῖς ὄψαρίοις ἐξήλλαξας ἡμᾶς, τούτων καὶ τὴν  
 τιμὴν δι' Ἄνουβᾶ πέμψω σοι, μέντοιγε  
 20 ἕως πρὸς σὲ ἔλθῃ Ἄνουβᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ σοῦ χαλκοῦ τὸ  
 ὀψώνιον σου καὶ τῶν σῶν ἐξοδίασον  
 ἕως πέμψω. ἔστι δὲ τοῦ Τῦβι μηνὸς  
 24 σοὶ ὃ θέλεις, Φρονίμω (δραχμαὶ) ις, τοῖς περὶ Ἀβάσκ(αντου)  
 καὶ Μύρωνι (δραχμαὶ) θ, Σεκούνδω (δραχμαὶ) ιβ. πέμ-  
 ψον Φρόνιμον πρὸς Ἀσκληπιάδην ἐμί  
 ὀνόματι καὶ λαβέτω παρ' αὐτοῦ ἀντιφώνη-  
 σιν ἧς ἔγραψα αὐτῷ ἐπιστολῆς καὶ πέμψον.  
 28 περὶ ᾧ θέλεις δῆλωσόν μοι. ἔρρωσο, τέκνον.  
 Τῦβι ις.

verso

Ἰέρακι [ὑ]λιῶι ἀπὸ Κορηγλί(ο)υ πατρός.

4 παλλάκεις l. πολλάκις 8 παραγένομαι l. παραγένωμαι

"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: μετά = ἅμα?), 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 (φιλολογῶν), 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 Abascantus 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.”<sup>8</sup>

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-

<sup>8</sup> 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 ὀψάρια 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<sup>9</sup>. In *P. Oxy.* III 531.18 ὀψάρια 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 ἐξήλλαξας ἡμᾶς (l. 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. ἐξάλλασσω 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<sup>10</sup>. In *P. Oxy.* VII 1067. 27-29 of the third century A.D. an Oxyrhynchite writer asks for a sea fish: ἀγόρασόν μοι ὀψαρίδιον ἐκ 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 *opsarion=opsaridion* as “dainty”. How-

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Also oysters were eaten in Oxyrhynchus — *P. Oxy.* IV 738 (about A.D. 1). On the transport of oysters, see A.C. ANDREWS, ‘Oysters as a Food in Greece and Rome’, *The Classical Journal* 43, 1948, pp. 298-303; cf. T. DERDA, ‘P. Naqlun inv. 35/88, a Papyrus from the Recently Excavated Monastic Centre in the Fayyum Oasis’ [in:] *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Papyrology (Cairo 2-9 September 1989)*, vol. I, Cairo 1992, pp. 606-607.

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) *πέμψον [δὲ] διὰ ἀνθρώπου π[...]*

The fish sent home by Hierax were probably dried, salted<sup>11</sup> or preserved in another way (*τάριχος*, perhaps even *τάριχος λεπτός*, or superior quality preserved fish<sup>12</sup>).

[Warszawa-Leuven]

Adam ŁUKASZEWICZ

Adam Łukasiewicz

ΤΑΞΙΩΤΗΣ ON THE MOVE  
(GLOSSA AD P. GISS. 50)

*Taxiōtēs* is a generic name applied in Later Antiquity to a large number of lower functionaries. Their usual role as representatives or officials in the service of the prefect is the basis of their appellation of *taxiōtēs*. A distinction must be made between these officials and the earlier persons also called *taxiōtēs*.<sup>1</sup>

In the papyri there are some instances of *taxiōtēs*. As low ranking public servants who were certainly sometimes appointed also with regard to the observance of law, they were certainly not very popular with the common people.

The *taxiōtēs* played the part of assistants of higher officers in various official business circumstances. Their typical function is the role of messenger.

Their mobility on business purposes is attested by papyri. In *P. Oxy.* 259 we have a testimony in a service journey of an officer of the *taxiōtēs* rank. In the case recorded in the travel itinerary (Giss. 50) which dates to IVth century A.D. an official had to make a rather long travel from the Thebaid to Alexandria.

<sup>1</sup> Instances in DuCange, *Gloss. voc. inf. Graec. s. v. Taxiōtēs*, 132ff. and *Recherches sur les Antiquités de la France*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. HENGSTL in his translation of the passage, *Griechische Papyri aus Ägypten*, München 1978, no. 83, p. 212.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *P. Got.* 3.