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Adam Łajtar

**FROM EGYPT TO PALESTINE:
TWO NOTES ON PUBLISHED TEXTS***

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW boasts in its collection an interesting epitaph of Egyptian origin, probably of early Roman date, commemorating a woman with the name Valeria Thermouthis. The epitaph was first published by Adam Łukaszewicz over twenty years ago¹ and republished by myself several years after its *editio princeps* in the catalogue of Greek inscriptions in the National Museum in Warsaw.² The epitaph informs, using language with some literary pretensions, that the dead woman was enslaved as a prisoner of war at the age of four, remained a slave for 38 years and was freed, together with her two daughters, in the way of ransom by a Roman soldier named Publius Valerius, who is called

* I would like to thank Benedetto BRAVO for discussion and Dorota DZIERZBICKA for correcting my English.

¹ A. ŁUKASZEWICZ, 'Une inscription funéraire grecque d'Égypte au Musée National de Varsovie', *ZPE* 77 (1989), pp. 191–194, pl. VI a (*SEG* XXXIX 1711; *SB* XX 15005). IDEM [in:] A. Sadurska *et alii*, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani – Pologne*, vol. II.1: *Les monuments funéraires: autels, urnes, stèles, divers dans les collections polonaises*, Warsaw 1990, pp. 69–70, no. 73, pl. 40.

² A. ŁAJTAR, A. TWARDECKI, *Catalogue des inscriptions grecques du Musée National de Varsovie* [= *JJP Supplement* II], Warsaw 2003, no. 75.

a 'brother' (ἀδελφός) of Valeria Thermouthis.³ The epitaph ends with an address to the reader stating that everyone must die, and another one to Publius Valerius advising him not to refrain from pleasures in his further life.

Both the *editor princeps* of the inscription and the present writer were of the opinion that Publius Valerius was the husband, even if unofficial – as a Roman soldier he could not have had a wife officially – of Valeria Thermouthis and the father of her daughters. In our opinion, the term ἀδελφός used to describe Publius Valerius' relation to Valeria Thermouthis is an element of familiar language in which ἀδελφός frequently means 'husband'.⁴ This opinion was challenged by Peter van Minnen⁵ and Bernard Boyaval.⁶ They take the term ἀδελφός literally and consider Publius Valerius a biological brother of Valeria Thermouthis. The two authors do not take into consideration the final address of the inscription, however. To my mind, the encouragement of Publius Valerius by Valeria Thermouthis not to refrain from pleasures in his further life can be understood only if he had been her husband. Such an encouragement addressed to a brother loses its weight if not its sense altogether.

Interestingly, this final address finds a parallel in an epitaph of a woman named Taimhotep in hieroglyphics, coming from the Memphite necropolis and dated to the time of Cleopatra VII.⁷ After an extensive

³ The liberation of Valeria Thermouthis apparently took place on her death bed, for she died when she was 42 years old.

⁴ For the use of the terms ἀδελφός in the meaning 'husband' in Greek, see e.g. *LSJ*, s.v. (4), 'a term of affection, applicable by wife to husband'.

⁵ P. VAN MINNEN, 'Prisoners of war and hostages in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *JJP* 30 (2000), pp. 155–163 (p. 157). According to him 'the woman may well have been made prisoner of war during the conquest of Egypt in 30 BC or a little earlier, in the troubles of the late Ptolemaic period, or a little later, in the initial troubles under Roman rule. Her brother eventually joined the Roman army that enslaved her and thus earned money to buy her and her children back to freedom'. The course of events reconstructed by van Minnen seems hardly possible to me for it assumes local recruitment to the Roman army, a phenomenon impossible in the early years of the Empire.

⁶ B. BOYAVAL, *Kentron* 20 (2004), pp. 178–180 (*non vidi*; see *SEG* LV 1771).

⁷ The stele of Taimhotep kept in the British Museum (inv. 147) was frequently described, analyzed and illustrated. From the abundant literature one can cite: R. LEPSIUS, *Auswahl*

invocation of the gods, the epitaph tells the story of Taimhotep, who was born in a Memphite priestly family. Her father gave her as a wife to Psenptah, priest of numerous cults in Memphis including those of Ptah and Osiris. Having had three daughters, the couple was desperate for a son, who finally came into the world thanks to the intervention of Imhotep, the local oracular and healing god. When the boy was ten years old, Taimhotep died and was buried in the Memphite necropolis by her husband, who completed all the necessary rituals.⁸ After this biographical story told in the first person singular, the dead woman addresses her husband with the following words:⁹

O my brother, my husband, friend, high priest! Weary not of drink and food, of drinking deep and loving! Celebrate the holiday, follow your heart day and night, let not care into your heart, value the years spent on earth! The west, it is a land of sleep. Darkness weigh on the dwelling-place, those who are there sleep in their mummy-forms. They wake not to see their brothers, they see not their fathers, their mothers, their hearts forgot their wives, their children. The water of life which has food for all, it is thirst for me; it comes to him who is on earth, I thirst with water beside me! I do not know the place it is in, since (I) came to this valley, give me water that flows! Say to me: 'You are not far from water!' Turn my face to

der wichtigsten Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums, Leipzig 1842, pl. 16; E. A. W. BUDGE, *A Guide to the Egyptian Galleries (Sculpture)*, British Museum, London 1909, cat. no. 1027; P. MUNRO, *Die spätägyptischen Totenstelen*, Glückstadt 1973, p. 165 and fig 217; R. BIANCHI *et alii*, *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies*, Brooklyn 1988, cat. no. 122, pp. 230–231; Susan WALKER, P. HIGGS (eds), *Cleopatra of Egypt: from History to Myth*, London 2001, cat. no. 193, pp. 186–187; E. OTTO, *Die biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit. Ihre geistesgeschichtliche und literarische Bedeutung* [= *Probleme der Ägyptologie* 2], Leiden 1954, pp. 190–194 (German translation); Miriam LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. The Late Period*, vol. III, Berkeley – Los Angeles 2006, pp. 59–65 (English translation with notes); Eva A. E. REYMOND, *From the Records of a Priestly Family of Memphis* [= *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 38], Wiesbaden 1981, vol. I, pp. 165–177 (English translation with notes); M. PANOV, 'Die Stele der Taimhotep', *Lingua Aegyptia* 18 (2010), pp. 169–191. For the person of Taimhotep see *PP IX* 7231a; for her family, J. QUAEGBEUR, 'Contribution à la prosopographie des prêtres memphite à l'époque ptolémaïque', *Ancient Society* 3 (1972), pp. 77–109.

⁸ This passage from the story of Taimhotep resembles the expression *μετὰ τὴν τελευτήν μου τὰ ἱκανὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν* from the Valeria Thermouthis epitaph.

⁹ LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (cit. n. 7), *loc.cit.*

the north wind at the edge of the water, perhaps my heart will then be cooled in its grief! As for death, 'Come' is his name. All those that he calls to him come to him immediately; their hearts afraid through dread of him. Of gods or men no one beholds him, yet great and small are in his hand, none restrains his finger from all his kin. He snatches the son from his mother before the old man who walks by his side; frightened they all plead before him, he turns not his ear to them. He comes not to him who prays for him, he hears not him who praises him, he is not seen that one might give him any gifts. O you all who come to this graveyard, give me incense on the flame, water on every feast of the west!

Except for the difference in length and style, both addresses are very closely related to one another in their contents: the widower who remains in this world receives from his dead wife a *carte blanche* to enjoy himself. Valeria Thermouthis recommends to Publius Valerius quite generally not to refrain from making the most of life (καὶ σύ, ἄδε{δε}λφε, μὴ σεαυτὸν στερέσῃς), Taimhotep lists sensual pleasures that her husband should not deny himself: drinking, eating, physical love, participation in feasts.¹⁰ Interestingly, this *carpe diem* advice is connected in both cases with a statement about the vanity of human life and the necessity to die, though the sequence of the two elements is reversed here and there. Additionally, the statement under consideration assumes a more elaborate form resembling a lament in the Taimhotep epitaph.

The epitaphs of Taimhotep and Valeria Thermouthis are not chronologically distant from one another; the former dates from the last years of Ptolemaic rule, the latter from the beginning of the Roman period. Both are of Egyptian origin, although the exact provenance of the Valeria Thermouthis stele is unknown (probably Lower Egypt). By pointing out these two facts I do not intend to suggest that the two inscriptions are interrelated or depend on one another in any way. They rather express ideas common to different Mediterranean societies and perhaps to the human race as a whole.

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¹⁰ Note that Taimhotep, like Valeria Thermouthis, calls her husband 'brother'.

The Franciscan excavations in Herodion (Israel), carried out in 1962–67 under the direction of Virgilio Corbo, yielded a certain number of inscribed finds, mainly graffiti and ostraca. This material was published by Emmanuele Testa shortly after the end of the excavations.¹¹ Under no. 49 of this publication (pp. 70–74 with fig. 49 [drawing] and photo 25) one finds an ostrakon discovered in an atrium of a bath in the palace of Herod the Great. The text consisting of nine lines in Greek is inscribed in black ink on a sherd that measures 14 x 7 cm and was once part of a large container. The handwriting is semi-cursive in lines 1–7 and becomes more formal, close to epigraphic script, in lines 8–9. It can be dated broadly to the beginning of the Roman imperial period, a date that corresponds to the history of Herodion.¹²

Testa read and translated the text in the following way:

εἰς σαυτόν.
 ὅτε εἰς ἐκώ-
 ν ἰαστὶ τὸ μ-
 4 ἀρτυρ(ε)ῖν ὅτι
 θέλω τῆν εὐ-
 λογίαν δοῦ-
 πε ἄρτι
 8 ποίαν εὐλο-
 γίαν.

(Detto) a te stesso: Se qualcuno di sua volontà, sul modo ionico, asserisce (a proprio) favore: – Desidero l'elogio! – tu subito batti un canto funebre qual elogio.

¹¹ *Herodion. I graffiti e gli ostraka* [= Pubblicazioni dello Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 20], Jerusalem 1972

¹² Located ten or so kilometres south of Jerusalem, the town of Herodion was a foundation of Herod the Great, who built his palace there and chose the place as the eternal abode of his mortal remains. It was the last stronghold of Jews during the Bar Kohba revolt against Roman rule of AD 132–134 and the latter heavily damaged the town after they had seized it.

The accompanying photo shows that this reading is incorrect in several places. Below I present my own reading based on the photo.

εἰς σαυτόν.
 ὅτε ἐνεκω-
 νιάστι τὸ μ-
 4 αρτύριον ὅτι·
 ‘θέλω τὴν εὐ-
 λογίαν δοῦ-
 νε ἄρτι’.
 8 ποίαν εὐλο-
 γίαν;

1. σαυτόν || 2-3. ἐνεκωμιάσθη (?) || 3-4. μαρτύριον || 6-7. δοῦναι

To thyself. When the declaration was praised that: ‘I would like to give a blessing just now’, (I am asking) what blessing?

1. This line contains a kind of title for the rest of the text on the ostrakon. When writing εἰς σαυτόν, literally ‘To thyself’, the author probably addresses himself. In a similar way Marcus Aurelius gave the title εἰς ἑαυτόν for meditations that he wrote, at least theoretically, for himself.

2. Testa thought that ὅτε was used here as an adverb of time (instead of ὅταν) and saw this usage as a Semitism. But ὅτε probably has its normal casual meaning here: ‘seeing that’ or even ‘since, because’.

2-3. ἐνεκωνιάστι is problematic. Apparently it is the third person singular of aorist passive of ἐγκωμιάζω, i.e. ἐνεκωμιάσθη, with the substitution of ‘ἦ’ for ‘ι’, ‘θ’ for ‘τ’ and ‘μ’ for ‘ν’. While the two former phenomena are something of the banal,¹³ that latter one is strange and cannot be explained otherwise than by a mistake of the scribe.¹⁴ Equally problematic is the meaning. At first glance, ἐγκωμιάζω, ‘praise, laud, extol’, hardly constructs with τὸ μαρτύριον, ‘testimony,

¹³ For the substitution of aspirated stops for voiceless ones (and inversely), which occurs quite often in the *koine*, see. F. Th. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* [= *Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità* 55], vol. I: *Phonology*, Milano 1976, pp. 86–98.

¹⁴ ‘ν’ for ‘μ’ is occasionally found in Greek papyri of the Roman and Byzantine periods

proof', even if the latter word has a different, more specific meaning here (cf. commentary to the next two lines). On the other hand, no reasonable alternative can be suggested given the letters at our disposal. The only possibility is to read ἐνεκ(αι)νή(α)στι (= ἐνεκαινίσθη), i.e. the third person singular of aorist passive of ἐγκαινίζω, 'restore, make afresh, consecrate, inaugurate', but the meaning is still more difficult in that case.

3-4. The word μαρτύριον is common in Greek Jewish writings (for the Jewishness of this text see below), showing a wide semantic domain.¹⁵ Apart from the general meaning 'testimony, proof', it may designate the Bible, especially the Torah, as is well illustrated by numerous places in *Leviticus*, especially by 16.13. More specifically, it may denote a witness to something, e.g. an event, and may be an equivalent of a message. In our case μαρτύριον probably refers to the proclamation 'θέλω τὴν εὐλογίαν δοῦναι ἄρτι' quoted in lines 5-7.

4. ὅτι introduces direct speech, as it is often the case in post-classical Greek, including the Greek of the Septuagint and the New Testament.¹⁶

5-7. The expression εὐλογίαν διδόναι seems to have been used only by Jewish (and later Christian) Greek speakers; cf. e.g. *Ecclesiasticus* 50, 20, 3: τότε καταβάς ἐπήρην χεῖρας αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἐκκλησίαν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ δοῦναι εὐλογίαν κυρίου ἐκ χειλέων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ καυχῆσασθαι; *Aprophthegmata patrum (collectio alphabetica)*, PG LXV, p. 92: ὁ δὲ γέρων ἀκούσας οὐκ ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν σύναξιν λέγων ἀφορίσατέ με τοῦ μὴ δοῦναι μοι τὴν εὐλογίαν ἣν ἔπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς; Joannes Chrysostomus, *Synopsis scripturae sacrae*, PG LVI, p. 334: καὶ κελεύει ἐπ' ὄρος Γαριζὶν δοῦναι τὴν εὐλογίαν, καὶ τὴν κατάραν ἐπ' ὄρος Γεβάλ; Theodoretus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, ed. N. Fernández Marcos, A. Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoretus Cyrensis quaestiones in Octateuchum*, Madrid 1979, p. 73: τίνας ἐνεκεν ὁ Ἰσαὰκ τῷ Ἡσαὺ δοῦναι τὴν εὐλογίαν ἠβούλετο; Ephraem Syrus, *Sermo in pulcherrimum Ioseph*, ed. K.G. Phrantzoles, 'Οσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα, vol. VII, Thessalonica 1998, p. 268: τὸν θεόν, τὸν ῥυσάμενον Ἰακώβ ἐκ θλίψεως καὶ εἰπόντα δοῦναι αὐτῷ εὐλογίαν. It shows that the ostracon under discussion must have come into existence in a Jewish milieu, which is quite normal in Herodion.

(see GIGNAC, *Grammar* [cit. n. 13], p. 119) but the phenomenon is so rare that it escapes generalization.

¹⁵ Cf. G. KITTEL, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, s.v. μάρτυς.

¹⁶ For this so-called ὅτι recitativum, see e.g. P. WINTER, 'Oti recitativum in Luke I 25, 61, II 23', *The Harvard Theological Review* 48 (1955), pp. 213-216; S. H. LEVINSOHN, 'Luke's recitative usage of hoti', *Notes on Translation* 70 (1978), pp. 23-36; A. AEJMELAEUS, 'OTI recitativum in Septuagintal Greek' [in:] D. FRAENKEL, U. QUAST, J. W. WEVERS (eds), *Studien zur Septuaginta - Robert Hanhart zu Ehren* [= *Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens* XX], Göttingen 1990, pp. 74-82 (reprinted in: A. AEJMELAEUS, *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators*, Leuven 2007, pp. 31-42).

The question arises what kind of text, exactly, we are dealing with. Testa thought it is a *formula sapienziale* preceded by a sort of title. In my opinion this interpretation is wrong primarily because the reading of the text presented by the *editor princeps* is largely wrong. It seems to me that what is at issue here is a memorandum or a reflection of a pious Jew addressed to himself. It was provoked by the proclamation $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega\ \tau\acute{\eta}\nu\ \epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha\nu\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\iota$, which the author of the memorandum had heard on some occasion and considered it to be somehow important but not clear enough to him, requiring further consideration. The proclamation in question could have been part of a scriptural reading¹⁷ or have been pronounced elsewhere in a gathering, of which the author of the ostrakon text was also a part. An inventive mind may suggest other possible occasions for pronouncing the words $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega\ \tau\acute{\eta}\nu\ \epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha\nu\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\iota$; on my side I refrain from further speculations. I would only like to note that the memorandum is edited in Greek and Greek was obviously also the language of the proclamation that gave rise to the entire ostrakon text. This is yet another testimony to the importance of Hellenic elements among Jews from the entourage of Herod the Great and his beloved foundation, Herodion.

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¹⁷ The proclamation $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega\ \tau\acute{\eta}\nu\ \epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha\nu\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\iota$ is not found in the Septuagint in this form. If the author of the ostrakon text based it on a Scriptural passage, he must have quoted it after a different source than the Septuagint. Another possibility is that he quotes a Septuagint passage, but not exactly.