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The pursuit of papyrological fleas

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.
THE PURSUIT OF PAPYROLOGICAL FLEAS*

"On a d'abord tenté d'esquisser une définition de la papyrologie en tant que science. On a évoqué à ce propos l'histoire des découvertes et des travaux qui ont permis à la papyrologie de se constituer en discipline autonome; on a abordé ensuite divers problèmes relatifs aux limites chronologiques et géographiques de la recherche papyrologique, aux questions linguistiques, au support matériel de l'écriture, et—point d'une importance capitale—à la distinction entre papyrus littéraires et papyrus documentaires. À ce propos, on a insisté sur l'intérêt majeur des papyrus documentaires pour la définition de la discipline. La papyrologie, c'est d'abord et avant tout la publication, l'interprétation et l'étude des documents qui permettent de saisir sur le vif la réalité historique de l'Égypte, monarchie hellénistique et province de l'Empire."

With these words, Professor J. Modrzejewski describes how he introduced a course of his in papyrology. For those of us accustomed to think of papyrology in terms of literary remains as well as of documents, his statements emphasizing the overriding importance of documents may cause dismay. But what he says is nonetheless true, however uncomfortable it is to hear it. Since literary papyri are much less common than documentary, it follows that the latter will be the main concern of the papyrologist.

Decipherment is the prime aim of our discipline, and everything—even the content of the piece in question—becomes of secondary importance. The task is to prepare an edition with as much positivism as feasible, and the papyrologist should proceed with equal detachment to a routine tax receipt and to a hitherto-unknown play of Menander. Only with this detachment, with this objectivity, can he adequately discharge his duties.

What I have said, however, does not imply that papyrology is an historical

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discipline or a branch of the study of ancient law. Some would argue that it is, but these scholars overlook the fact that papyrology must have a philological base. The primary concern is with historical or legal documents, but this does not make the papyrologist an historian or a legal scholar. In order to perform his functions properly, he must be a philologist, intimately involved with the problems of editing texts, with Editionstechnik.

Of course, it is not only with his own texts that a papyrologist deals. In studying the corpus of published papyri, he frequently comes upon pieces which he finds defective for some reason or other. If he is successful at removing the defect, that is, if he can emend the text as edited, then he is performing a function as important as publishing his own papyri.

This notion of the importance of emending, or correcting, previously edited texts emphasizes the philological basis of papyrology. The papyrologist must be a textual critic, and to describe his activities I can do no better than quote some statements made by Professor A. E. Housman in his brilliant paper, The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism: "A textual critic engaged upon his business is not at all like Newton investigating the motions of the planets: he is much more like a dog hunting for fleas. If a dog hunted for fleas on mathematical principles, basing his researches on statistics of area and population, he would never catch a flea except by accident. They require to be treated as individuals; and every problem which presents itself to the textual critic must be regarded as possibly unique."\(^2\)

With these words in mind, I propose to discuss some passages requiring correction among the papyrus documents that have thus far been published. A former teacher of mine, Warren E. Blake, was thinking of Housman when he described textual criticism as "the pursuit of philological fleas." Since papyrology is intimately concerned with textual criticism, I may perhaps be excused for giving my lecture the title "The Pursuit of Papyrological Fleas."

The impetus for my remarks comes from the magisterial treatise of H. C. Youtie, The Textual Criticism of Documentary Papyri: Prolegomena (2nd ed.: BICS Supplement 33, 1974). To this work as well as to Professor Youtie's numerous articles (now conveniently assembled in his Scriptiunculae\(^3\)) I refer those who may wish to pursue the subject in greater detail.

We must remember that it is only when he is confronted by the papyrus itself or by a good photograph of it that the papyrologist is actually engaged in deciphering an autograph manuscript. In the numerous editions of published papyri, we often find only transcripts without photographs, and although these transcripts are supposed accurately to reflect the original, they often resemble the efforts of Byzantine scribes struggling heroically with copying an ancient text.


Particularly satisfying is the experience that comes when one can correct an editor’s transcript without recourse to the original. The editor has transcribed correctly, but his interpretation of what he sees is at fault. To give an example: A scholar once published a fragment of a paramone contract from the Indiana collection (Class. Phil. 43, 1948, 111 = SB VI 9094). In texts of this type, a loan is involved, but the debtor, instead of paying interest, stipulates that a member of his family shall remain in the house of the creditor and serve him for a specified period of time. In line 8 of the Indiana papyrus, the editor reads παντεκοτάην κατ’ ἑγύν, and in his note he writes: “this restoration is questionable, but compare P. Mich.V 355.11 κατά τὸν νόμον πανταχεί. A Michigan text published after the Indiana piece, P. Mich.X 587, allows the critic to improve upon this passage. Also a paramone contract, the Michigan text contains the provision that a female servant whose work will discharge the interest is not permitted to “absent herself night or day from the house of Harmiusis [the creditor] without his knowledge but is to follow him everywhere throughout Egypt (πανταχεί κατ’ Αίγυπτον line 16).” The vigilant critic is immediately struck by the similarity of the phrase πανταχεί κατ’ Αίγυπτον with the phrase πανταχεί κατ’ Αίγυπτον, especially when the latter is stripped of editorial embellishment: πανταχεί κατ’ Αίγυπτον. The last word must obviously be restored as ’Εγύπτον (= Αίγυπτον). The writing of αι as ε is too common to require discussion. Incidentally, we can also correct the phrase κατά τον νόμον πανταχεί, which the editor cited in his note: to make it conform to the pattern of πανταχεί κατ’ Αίγυπτον, we need only change the accent from νόμον to νομόν. One wonders whether the editor of the Indiana papyrus would have hit upon the correct solution if his parallel had been correctly accent ed in its publication.

Here the editor was misled by the parallels. At times, there are no parallels available, and one must transcribe as accurately as one can, in the hope that, if similar passages come to light, his text can then be read. Here I think of P.Hamb.I 30, a contract of loan which contains a stipulation about the period of the loan. In the published transcript, this stipulation has the following reading: ἐπί τε τὸν χρόνον κατ’ αὐτήν ἔφ’ ἐν ἐκείνῃ .α.η... [... χρόνον (lines 18–19). The editor has done his best, but the absence of precise parallels did not permit him to decode the cursive script in which such texts are usually written. We are now more fortunate: two Michigan papyri (X 585 and XII 635) have subsequently been published, both involving loans and both containing phrases highly relevant for our purposes: 585. 15–16 ἐπί τε τὸν κατ’ αὐτήν χρόνον ἔφ’ ἐν ἐκείνῃ δέσον, ἐν χρόνον ἀνακεῖν χρόνον “both for the time stipulated by the contract and for as long as lodging is neces-

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6 Read αὐτήν.
7 Koine for ἄν: see P. Mich. X 585. 16n.

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3 The Journal...
sary”; 635. 14–15 ἐπεί τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ [νῦ ἐὰν] δέον ἡ ἐπενοικεὶν χρόνον “both for the duration of the loan established by the contract and for as long as additional lodging is necessary”. A comparison of the Michigan papyri with that from Hamburg shows that the latter must read ἐπεί τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῆς κεφαλαίου ἔπει ἐπὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτüßеς κεφαλαίου: cf. P. Mich. XII 635. 14n.

Such cases, where correction can be done without seeing the original, are rare. Usually the editor has been unsuccessful in deciphering a passage, and we need access to the papyrus or to an accurate reproduction if our corrections are to carry conviction.

The critic is continually on the lookout for the unusual, the bizarre, the discongruous: anything that is out of the ordinary is suspect and must be tested. Thus when a Wisconsin papyrus, P. Wisc. I 30, appears with the word κάφα (Col. ii 9), a Laconian spelling for the common word σκάφη, we have to test the reading, especially since it is elsewhere attested only in Hesychius (see LSJ); here we recall Martin West’s dictum: “you can always find something in Hesychius”. Now it is true that new words do appear in papyri, and the sands of Egypt have enriched our knowledge of Greco-Roman koine, but alas, a glance at a photograph of the papyrus shows that Laconian influence is not demonstrable in the Wisconsin text. The photo shows a clear, though slightly abraded, sigma in front of the kappa. What follows the phi is by no means clear, but the traces are at least compatible with eta. Therefore, the text offers the common word σκάφη, not—unfortunately for lexicographers—its Laconian equivalent.

Later on in the same papyrus, we come upon a phrase which appears thus in the edition: τύλη οἴδιον ἐσφραγισμένη (Col. ii 18–19) “a closed mattress with sheepswool” (editor’s translation). The editor’s note is illuminating: “οἴδιον is used only once as a diminutive of οἴς by the grammarian Theognostus from the ninth century A.D. (Canones 121). Naturally, we are not dealing here with lambs, but with the wool of young sheep, used to stuff the cushion/mattress.” A similar expression occurs elsewhere in the same text: σάκκος συνέργων ἐσφραγισμένος (Col. iii 1) “a sealed bag with woven materials.” The editor is certainly right when he says that the mattress must be filled with wool and not sheep, but it is doubtful whether οἴδιον can have this extended meaning. An examination of the photograph shows that the reading is by no means as certain as the editor’s transcription suggests. οἴδιον is correctly read, but the preceding letter is raised too high above the line for an ομικρόν and resembles rather a ροῖ. Before this letter is a lacuna sufficient for one letter. I therefore suggest έριδίον as a much more likely reading than οίδίον. The word έριδίον “wool” fits the requirements of meaning and is amply attested.
in the papyri; it is also freely used in the plural (cf. e.g. BGU I 48.12-13 περὶ τῶν ἐρίδιων). 12

As is well known, official documents tend to be written in stereotyped formulas. Unless the scribe simply blunders, he will follow what convention dictates. And the editor had better know what that convention is if he has any hope of disentangling the various series of Verschleifungen which we charitably call handwriting. A papyrus from Bologna, P.Bon.30, had been bothering me for several years. It is an ordinary tax receipt, but its transcription is disquieting. In the edition it appears as follows (lines 3–7):

\[ \text{Διέγραψε} \text{ Παπώς} \text{ Κοαελ( ) Παπνεβτύνι} \]
\[ 5 \text{ Σοκέως ? } \lambdaαξός \text{ ὑπὲρ χωμάτων} \]
\[ \text{δευτ(έρου) (Έτους) Τεβτύνεως} \]
\[ \text{ἀγ(υρίου) (δραχμάς) ἐξ (τετράβολον) (ἡμιαῦτα) (δραχμαί) ἐξ (τετράβολον)} \]

This is a receipt for the dike tax, and a perusal of the other receipts for dike tax quickly shows that the Bologna papyrus presents striking anomalies. The usual arrangement for the first part of the receipt is διέγραψε + tax collector (in dative) + payer (in nominative). The Bologna text places the tax payer before the collector and thus reverses the normal order. It is also surprising that the tax collector, according to the editor's interpretation, is referred to as a stonecutter (λαξός: see footnote 13). Granted that a stonecutter could be impressed into the office of collector, one wonders why his trade, instead of his official position, should be mentioned in his title. Finally, that the name Κοαελ( ) is unattested elsewhere does nothing to relieve one's feelings of uneasiness about the text as edited.

I procured a photograph of the papyrus but for several years could not get beyond the editor's text. The hand is extremely cursive, but repeated examination enabled me to see the writing in such a way as to eliminate the peculiarities mentioned before. I here offer my revision of the passage in question (lines 3–5), followed by a translation and brief commentary:

\[ \text{Διέγραψε} \]
\[ \text{Παπώς και μετ(όχοις) Παπνεβτύνιος} \]
\[ 5 \text{ Σοκέως λαξ(ός) ὑπὲρ χωμάτων, κτλ.} \]

“Papnebtunis son of Sokeus, stonecutter, has paid to Papos and his associates, for the dike tax,” etc.

The name Παπώς is a scribal mistake for the dative Παπώτι; similar confusions exist in other tax receipts and should not disturb us. Egyptian was not an inflected language like Greek, and it regarded prefixes, not suffixes, of prime importance.

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13 Ed.'s note: “1. λαξός.”
14 Read Παπώτι ... Παπνεβτύνις.
Hence names often appear in the nominative when we expect an oblique case; cf. e.g. P.Tebt.II 356.3 δι(ἐγραψεν) Ὄρσης καὶ Ὄριον15 καὶ μετόχοις.

For the editor’s Κολει( ) I have read καὶ μετ(όχοις). The papyrus has ωοῖς. Often καὶ is written as ua., and H. C. Youtie notes editorial confusion of alpha/mu and lambda/tau.16 The μu has a collapsed appearance, but it is basically of the form that occurs elsewhere on the same papyrus. As for the tau, the right side of the crossbar leads directly into a stroke of abbreviation. The shape of the tau may also be paralleled in the same papyrus. A similar, though less cursive, piece of writing appears in a tax receipt from the Brooklyn Museum, which I edited in BASP 4 (1967), pp. 23–26: αοῖς μετόχοις.

I have read Παπνεβτύνιος(ς) for the editor’s Παπνεβτύνι. After the iota the papyrus has a clear dot above the line, and this I interpret as omicron, raised to indicate abbreviation. Since the endings -ις and -ες interchange freely in the papyri,17 the writing of Παπνεβτύνιος for Παπνεβτύνις is readily understandable.

About λαξό(ς) in line 5: the papyrus has λαξό with the omicron raised to signal abbreviation. The editor of the papyrus corrected this to λαξω. That the nominative was intended is clearly demonstrated by a fragmentary receipt on the other side of the papyrus. This receipt, in a different hand from that of P. Bon. 30, was briefly described by the editor and was not transcribed. Although only the ends of lines remain, much of the text can be restored without difficulty. I offer a transcript of it here, with translation and a few notes:

[έτους x Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος
Σεβαστού Γερμανικού Αὐτοκράτορος
[month day διέγ(ραψεν) Παπνεβτύνις Σοκέως] λαξός
5 [αργυρίου δραχμάς τέσσαρας ὀβολοὺς ἐξ, (γίνονται)
(δραχμαὶ) δ (ὁβολαὶ) ζ].

"Year x of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator (month day). Papnebtunis son of Sokeus, stonecutter, has paid to the account of Tebtunis ... four drachmas of silver, six obols, equal 4 dr. 6 ob."

This text presents two anomalies: there is no room for mention of the tax collector and his associates in line 3, and in line 5 we expect the tax to be 6 dr. 4 ob., not 4 dr. 6 ob. As it stands, the receipt could not be considered valid, and so it was turned over and the text published as P. Bon. 30 was inscribed. Despite its defects, the fragment displays λαξό without abbreviation in line 3. This shows that the same person is involved in both receipts, and since it is nominative, it indicates that this

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15 Read Ὄρσητι καὶ Ὄριον.
16 Textual Criticism 68.
18 Read Τεβτυνίος.
person is the taxpayer, not the collector. We therefore can guarantee the resolution of λαξ° in P. Bon. 30 into λαξό(ς), and so we must assume that Παπνεβτύνιο(ς) stands for Παπνεβτύνις. This in turn leads inevitably to the assumption that Παπώτι is to be corrected to Παπώτι.19

At times the editor’s text offers no overt novelties, and it is only accident that compels us to attempt to correct it. Number 3 of the Leiden Ostraca is assigned by the editor to Syene in Upper Egypt and is tentatively dated to 2 September 15 A.D. It takes the following form in the publication:20

Πλάντας καὶ Πανίσκος
ἐπι(της) ήπι(της) πῦλ(ης) Σοή(νης)
Πικώτι καὶ Παπνεβτύνιο(ς) χαίρειν.
Έσχομεν ἦπι(της) περουσ(ίας)
κρ(ιθής) ἡμισὺ. Λῆθ // Θεόθ έ.


When I read this for the first time, I collated it with a published photograph,21 felt somewhat uneasy, but could not make any improvement on the editor’s text. Once again, the hand is extremely cursive, and great caution is necessary in decipherment. Later I came upon another receipt also issued by Plantas and Paniscus: O. Tait Ashm. 68. It was written on 30 March of year 2 of an unspecified emperor, but its editor had assigned it to Septimius Severus (i.e. 193/4 A.D.) and had indicated its provenance as Thebes. In the edition this ostracon appears as follows:

Πλαντας καὶ Πανίσκος άπαιτ(ηης) κρ(ιθής) γενή(ματος)
Χαίρειν "Αρω(υ) Μετεχ(ης) "Αρω(υ) διά Φρεμεύτο(ς) χ(αίρειν).
"Εσχ(ομεν) εἰς πρόσι(εσ'.ν) κρ(ιθής). d. Λῆθ //
Μεσο(ή) λ... σ(εσ)γ(ιλομεζ).22

If the same people are involved as collectors, there are serious discrepancies: obviously one text cannot have been written in Syene in 15 A.D., while the other was drafted in Thebes in 194. I had the opportunity to examine the second ostracon in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and, comparing it with a photograph of the Leiden ostracon, I found that the two receipts were drawn up by the same scribe. My comparison also allowed me to revise the reading of the Leiden ostracon. As I have said, the text is very cursive, but fortunately the Ashmolean piece is some-
what easier to decipher, and it acts as a control on the Leiden text. I here present
my revision of the latter:

Πλαντάς καὶ Πανίσκος
απαιτής γενήματος
Πικώτι ομοίως χαίρειν.
εσχομεν εις πρόσιν
κρής. ήμισυ.

Πλαντας σεσήμωμαι. (2nd. hd.) Πανις σεσημείωμαι.

“Plantas and Paniscus, collectors of barley of the crop of the 31st year, to Pikos
son of Pikos, greeting. We have received as an additional deposit one half artaba
of barley. Year 2, Thoth 5. I, Plantas, have signed. (2nd hd.) I, Paniscus, have
signed.”

Both the Ashmolean ostracon and that from Leiden, as now revised, were drawn
up in the second regnal year of an unnamed emperor, and both record arrears from
the 31st year of another emperor, also unnamed. Only by assigning year 31 to
Commodus (i.e. 190/191 A.D.) and year 2 to Septimius Severus (193/194) can we
reach a satisfactory interpretation of the two ostraca. The only other emperor in
the Roman period to have a 31st year is Augustus (1/2 A.D.). But if year 31 falls
in his reign, we must assign year 2 to Tiberius (15/16), as did the editor of the
Leiden text. This will mean that the arrears were outstanding for 15 years, a sur-
prisingly long period. Further, on paleographical grounds, the writing on the ostraca
corresponds more closely to the extremely rapid style of the late second century
than to that of the early first.

The revised transcription of the Leiden ostracon eliminates the reference
to Syene: what the editor had read as ἐπιτήρηται ίερας πύλης Σοήνης turns
out in fact to be ἀπαιτηταί κρής γενήματος. The provenance of this
text and of the Ashmolean receipt is Thebes, as is shown by the fact that the ἀπαιτηταί
mentioned in both function as independent collectors, according to the regular
practice at Thebes. In Syene, the ἐπιτήρηται always appear as representatives of
the ἐπιτήρηται ίερας πύλης Σοήνης. The designation of the tax as εἰς πρόσθεσιν
also restricts the provenance to Thebes, since this surtax is found only in that city.
But this was not apparent to the original editor, since he mistakenly interpreted
the cursive script and transcribed ὑπέρ παρουσίας instead of εἰς πρόσθεσιν.

These last two examples, the Bologna papyrus and the Leiden ostracon, have
had their text drastically altered. This alteration will cause great discomfort to some.
If transcripts are so defective, then what is the poor non-papyrologist to do? He
may need to make use of published papyri, and in order to make use of them pro-
perly, he must assume that they are accurately transcribed. The last two examples,

23 See ZPE 4 (1969) pp. 193–195 and BL VI 164, as well as the revision subsequently published
as O. Leid. 266, where the dot has been removed from πρόσθεσιν in line 3, and Ιουνίους in line 5,
without indication of a change of hand.
as well as those previously discussed, show that accurate transcripts cannot always
be counted on. Editors are only human, and they make mistakes. This vapid gener-
alization is of little comfort to the non-papyrologist, but it is all that can be offered.
We cannot say a priori that the titans of our discipline, men like Wilcken, Youtie,
Grenfell and Hunt, are necessarily in every case more reliable than the amateur
who dabbles in the art when the spirit moves him. In general, of course, the great
papyrologists have had much more experience than the amateur, and so the overall
performance is better. But we are concerned with particular cases, and each partic-
ular case must be judged on its own merits. Unfortunately, only another papyro-
logist is competent to be the judge, and then not in all circumstances. He may acci-
dentially have just read a text which enables him to correct the edition that he is
now perusing. Or he may have acquired some fact which was not at the disposal
of the previous editor, and this fact allows him to improve upon the text. In the
case of the Bologna papyrus, it was the discovery that λαξός appears on the back
that triggered the decipherment, and in the case of the Leiden ostracon, the fact
that I had found Plantas and Paniscus elsewhere, in a more readable text, permitted
me to make the sweeping revisions which I set forth earlier. To judge from my own
experience, such corrections are the exception, not the rule. Often I have read a pub-
lished text, felt vague feelings of uneasiness about it, but have been unable to find
the reason for the uneasiness. I suspect that the text is wrong, but it may take years
before I know whether my suspicions are justified.

If these generalities have any point, it is to urge caution on the users of papyrus
ditions. As I said a while ago, there is a great deal of similarity between the modern
papyrologist and the Byzantine scribe. Neither the former’s transcript nor the
latter’s apograph can be safely regarded a priori as a faithful reproduction of the
autograph. No one would dream of considering the Palatinus as a totally accurate
record of the ipsissima verba of Lysias. But people tend to be more charitable in
dealing with editions of papyri, perhaps because the editions were produced, not
in the dim cells of some long-forgotten monastery near Constantinople, but in
a well-equipped library, with all that contemporary science can offer. And then,
of course, the modern scholar, with his doctorate and vast learning, is—one feels—
vastly superior to the Byzantine copyist. But—most important—the modern tran-
script of a papyrus is made from the original itself; it ought (such is the implicit
assumption) to be better than the medieval apograph, which is centuries removed
from the original. From what I have said, from the examples which I have adduced,
we must abandon these comforting assumptions: the papyrologist is a scribe, a learn-
ed one perhaps, but all the more dangerous for that reason.

Not wishing to end on tendentious platitudes, I turn to one last example, a pa-
papyrus published as No. 2116 of the Berlin papyri (BGU XI). This is a contract of
loan written in the twelfth year of Tiberius (25/26 A.D.). Most of the contract is
in Greek, but the creditor has used the Latin alphabet for his subscription. For
a papyrologist skilled in Greek, Latin hands can cause acute embarrassment; and
the present case is no exception. In the edition, the lines in question (20–22) are tentatively deciphered in the following way:

20 Cosmus [ . . . . . . . . . . . . ]
   ]edtur..· ca[s· s[]facta [          
   ]s· hebde[.]. gat..t.d.a]

The large number of dots eloquently testifies to the editor’s feeling of despair in grappling with the text. In his note, he gives a more complete transcript, proposed by Professor Marichal: line 21 consjedans ca[u]as tractat[as; line 22 hebdemega-
tocto dra[chmas.

When I read this text, with Marichal’s supplements, it occurred to me that since line 22 is obviously nothing other than Greek written in Latin characters, the rest of the passage is likely to have been similarly composed. When I tested this hypothesis on the photograph of the papyrus included in the edition, I was able to arrive at a transcription considerably different from those previously advanced:

20 Cosmus [ . . . . . . . . . . . . ]
   [ ca. 10 letters d]edanica tas procim[enas argy-
   ][riou drachma]s· hebdemecoonto dio*[.

   “I Cosmus ... have lent the aforesaid seventy-two drachmas of silver ...”

A close parallel is furnished by a Greek papyrus from the Cornell collection (P. Corn. 6.15–17): ‘Ηρ[άκ]λείος ‘Ηρακλείου δεδανικα τάς προκιμένας αργυρίου δραχμάς τεσσαρακοσίας ὀγδόηκοντα, κτλ.

Other examples of Greek written in the Latin script exist,25 and so the revision that I have proposed for the Berlin papyrus should occasion no surprise.26

This final example serves yet again to emphasize the need for caution in using papyrus editions. It also, I hope, gives some idea of the excitement involved in the process of the criticism of documentary papyri. Every printed edition is full of similar specimens, which tax the critic’s ability and effectively underscore the philological basis of papyrology. This example, like the others before it, should be convincing proof of the importance of textual criticism in the study of papyri. The papyrologist can succeed in his dual role of editor and critic only if he is continually aware that his discipline is only secondarily historical. It is primarily philological, and only if we thus regard it can we ever hope to function adequately as papyrolo-
gists.

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24 ι. έβδομήκοντα δόλια.
25 E.g. P. Oxy. II 244.16 epid[e]doca and P. Tebt. II 586v. enecoisis (= ἐνοίκησις).