

Agata Deptuła

**THE POWER OF WORDS:
INSIGHTS FROM TWO GREEK MAGICAL OSTRACA
FROM THE CITADEL OF DONGOLA***

IN THE FALL OF 2024, sixty years had passed since the Polish archaeological mission from the University of Warsaw commenced its work at the site of Dongola in Sudan. The selection of this location was not accidental. Following the significant discoveries at Faras – one of the major centres of Nobadia, one of the three medieval Nubian kingdoms, excavated during the UNESCO Nubian Salvage Campaign – Professor Kazimierz Michałowski decided to focus on another seat of power. He chose the capital of the central Nubian kingdom, Makuria, as the next target site for exploration. From 1964 until the onset of armed conflict in Sudan in 2023, the Polish mission conducted annual excavations at Dongola. For over five first decades, their efforts primarily concentrated on the monumental remnants of Christian architecture, particularly the churches located near the citadel and the monastery on Kom H.¹

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¹ The successive directors of the mission at Dongola were: Antoni Ostrasz (1964–1966), Stefan Jakobielski (1966–2006), Włodzimierz Godlewski (2006–2017), and Artur Obłuski (since 2018).

Between 2018 and 2023, excavations were carried out under the ERC Starting Grant UMMA: *Urban Metamorphosis of the Community of a Medieval African Capital City*, led by Artur Obłuski. This project primarily examined the Funj period and the transition between Christianity and Islam. During these years, the residential buildings of the centrally located citadel and its immediate surroundings, dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were investigated, however in some areas also earlier architecture was uncovered.² In most cases, these earlier structures were later adapted or overbuilt by the local Funj community. During the investigated period, Arabic was the primary written language of communication, and most of the discovered documents were recorded in this language. Among them are various types of documents, private letters, and magical texts, all of which are now being studied by Tomasz Barański in the framework of his doctoral dissertation.

Among the later material, artifacts from the Christian period mostly came from secondary contexts. Notable among these finds are two ostraca inscribed in Greek, discovered during the excavations at the citadel. Both seem to have been incidentally incorporated into secondary contexts, found alongside other pottery fragments, which constitute the largest share of the finds. There is no indication that they were still attributed any magical properties during the Funj period. Since they lack their original context, it is very difficult to determine their exact date. Palaeographic criteria are also of little help. Both texts are written in sloping pointed majuscules, commonly used in medieval Nubia for literary or sub-literary texts. The handwriting is rather skilled and practiced, indicating that they were created by individuals experienced in writing such texts. These findings can only be broadly dated to the late Christian period (11th–14th centuries).

*

² Among others, the centrally located Great Church of Jesus or the chapel of King David, publication of new discoveries is now being prepared by the UMMA team.

1. Amulet invoking Virgin Mary (?)

The ostrakon was discovered by Tomasz Borowski in 2021 in the surface layer (1360) accumulated in the western part of the citadel above zone 1.3. The text is inscribed on the outer side of a fragment of a wheel-made *qadus*, made of Nile clay.³ Only the central part of the sherd is preserved, with the upper and lower margins intact. It is inscribed with five lines written across the ribs in black ink in sloping pointed majuscules, with letters approximately 1 cm in height. Due to the state of preservation, it is difficult to draw any further conclusions about the palaeography. Text is extremely faded and some parts readable only after enhancing the image with Dstretch.

Inv. no. 5405 (Fig. 1)

7 × 5.5 cm

Dongola, 11th–14th cent.

[---]ϚτοϙϙϙϚτοϙϙ[---]
 [---]ΓΙΛΛΥΧΝΗϚΟΦΩ[---]
 [---]· ΔΔΔΔΔΔΔ[---]
 4 [---]ϙϙϙϙωωωω[---]
 [---]ΠΙΣΤΡΕΨΟ[---]

[† ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς] (καὶ) τοῦ υἱοῦ (καὶ) τοῦ ἁγίου
 πνεύματος]

[c. 15 ἁ]γία λυχνὴ σοφω[---]
 [c. 16]· ΔΔΔΔΔΔΔ [εεεεεεε]
 4 [ηηηηηηη ιιιιι οοο]ϙϙϙϙ ωωωω[ωωω ---]
 [c. 15 ἐ]πίστρεψο[ν ---]

2. λυχνία

[† In the name of the father], the son, and the holy [spirit ---] holy lamp-
 stand [---] aaaaaaa [eeeeeee ēēēēēēē iiiiii ooo]oooo ôôôô[ôôô ---] persuade
 [---]

³ Information provided by the mission's ceramologist Katarzyna De Lellis-Danys (personal communication).



Fig. 1. Inv. no. 5405: ostrakon with an amulet
(photo M. Reklajtis; © PCMA UW)

2. Although the letters are quite clear and readable, identifying the text presents certain challenges. Firstly, the form *λυχνή* is unattested, and it is most probable that the author intended the noun *λυχνία* 'lampstand'; (see Lampe, *s.v.*). The combination of this noun with the adjective 'holy' may suggest that the entire phrase functions as an epithet for a divine figure to whom the request in the amulet is addressed. This terminology seems to be rooted in literary traditions and the Virgin Mary seems to be the most obvious candidate. Although the exact phrase does not appear elsewhere in relation to Mary, various sources draw comparisons between her and a lampstand, both in patristic literature (e.g. Cyr., *hom. div.* II [PG LXXVII: 1033]) and especially in hymns (Eustratiades 1930: 43–44). She is referred to, among others, as ἡ χρυσή λυχνία, 'gold lampstand' (*AHG, passim*),⁴ *λυχνία ἄσβεστος*, 'unchangeable lampstand' (Joseph the Hymnographer,

⁴ *Analecta hymnica graeca e codicibus eruta Italiae inferioris*, 12 vols., ed. A. DEBIASI GONZATO & G. SCHIRÒ, Rome 1966–1980.

Theotocia ex parectica [PG CV: 1368]), φωτοφόρος λυχνία, ‘light-bearing lampstand’ (AHG I: 322), and λυχνία λαμπαδηφόρε, ‘torch-bearing lampstand’ (AHG II: 288). However, none of these epithets combines with any form connected with the adjective for σοφός, ‘wise’. Preserved letters suggests at least two interpretative possibilities: we may be seeing a unique epithet for Mary, such as λυχνία σοφωτάτη, ‘the wisest lampstand’, or a construction where the form serves as a descriptor of the ‘lampstand’, for instance λυχνία σοφῶν, ‘lampstand of the wise’.

3–4. It seems that the sequence includes successive vowels, each repeated seven times (for commentary on vowels in a magical context, see below); however, it appears that the *upsilon* is omitted.

5. Only several letters are visible, most probably a form of the Greek verb ἐπιστρέφω, ‘make to return, win over, persuade, convert’ (Lampe, *s.v.*). Without context, it is not clear whether it was part of purely magical or literary text, for example fragment of a Psalm (e.g. Ps. 6:5; 7:8; 79:4, 8, 15, 20; 84:5; 89:134; 114:7; 125:4).

On the preserved fragment of the amulet, we can identify the following constituent elements of the text:

- invocation of the Holy Trinity in Greek;
- most probably a call upon a divine being to whom the plea is directed;
- sequence of vowels, meant to imbue the text with its magical properties;
- presumably the specific entreaty or supplication.

Since only a small portion of the text is preserved, interpreting the entire ostrakon must remain speculative to a certain extent. Nonetheless, it is highly likely that the text was created as an amulet intended to protect or bring some benefits to its owner. This is primarily evidenced by the sequence of vowels in lines three and four, a characteristic feature of magical texts not only in medieval Nubia, but also in Christian Egypt (De Bruyn 2017) and in the wider Greco-Egyptian tradition (Frankfurter 1994; Frankfurter 2019). It was customary to write each vowel in groups of seven to enhance their power. Most likely, the ostrakon contains the nearly complete sequence of vowels, each repeated seven times, as indicated by the repetition of the *alpha* in line three. The absence of the *upsilon* here is intriguing. Given the fragmentary state of the text, it is difficult to determine whether *upsilon* was entirely omitted or perhaps appeared elsewhere.

The invocation of the Holy Trinity, rooted in liturgical formulae, was frequently adapted for use in secular documents and private correspondence throughout Christianity. Such invocations also appear in magical texts, with examples suggesting their popularity in Ethiopia (Worrell 1910). Various references to the Trinity are also sporadically attested in the openings of Coptic magical texts (e.g. *BKU* I 8; *BKU* III 389; *Pap. Copt. Mag.* I 25 and 26; Bodleian MS Copt. c (P) 4). In medieval Nubia, however, the complete Trinitarian formula was a defining feature and was commonly used as an opening for incantations (Łajtar & van der Vliet 2011; Łajtar 2014).

The combination of the sequence of vowels and the opening formula clearly demonstrates the magical nature of the sherd. The interpretation of lines 2 and 5, on the other hand, poses greater challenges. Text in both lines appears to draw on distinct literary inspirations, as suggested by the preserved fragments, with no known parallels in either Nubia or Egypt. This aligns with the broader practice of composing magical texts by incorporating biblical fragments (Sanzo 2014) or prayers and hymn-like passages (van der Vliet 2019). The text of line 5 appears to stem from homiletic or hymnographic traditions rather than being derived directly from the Holy Scripture.

The Virgin Mary seems to have played a central role in this amulet, even though she is not a commonly encountered figure on magical ostraca in Nubia, where archangels are far more frequently encountered in such contexts. Nevertheless, she seems to hold a significant role in the region in incantations aimed at providing protection beyond death. Prayers in which she is one of the central figures can be found, for instance, on funerary shrouds, such as the one discovered in Qasr Ibrim and published by Giovanni Ruffini. The author also notes other similar artifacts likewise refer to the Virgin (Ruffini 2015: 57).

Mary, in the context of life after death, is also alluded to in several prayers found in the crypt of Archbishop Georgios in Dongola (Łajtar & van der Vliet 2017). This collection of texts of ritual power constitutes a *phylakterion* intended to ensure peace for the soul of the deceased. Among the texts inscribed on the wall of the tomb is a particularly popular prayer *ad Bartos*, associated with Mary and believed to possess protective power.

This prayer is also known from Coptic sources, such as P. Heid. inv. 685. The codex, titled by its editor *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels*, functions as a manual for practitioners of magic and opens with this very prayer (Meyer 1996). What is particularly intriguing is that the prayer found in the crypt of Archbishop Georgios is the only known occurrence of this text in the Greek language. Moreover, Georgios was further protected by additional prayers, including two more in Coptic addressed to the Virgin.

The role of Mary in magical texts is well documented in Egypt, which is likely connected to the role her cult played in this region. According to Theodore de Bruyn (2017: 214–218), she is the saint most frequently invoked in amulets. Petitions can be directed straight to her, or she can serve as an intercessor between the supplicant and Christ. Some of the incantations invoking Mary's intercession are associated with women's health (e.g. *P. Oxy.* VIII 1151, *Pap. Graec. Mag.* Vb 6 & XVb, *BKU* I 18). Although there is a lack of analogous amulets from Nubia, it is known that her intervention in women's matters was considered beneficial. The most compelling evidence for this can be found in the south-west annex of the monastery on Kom H in Dongola (Łajtar & van Gerven Oei 2018). The iconography of wall paintings covering the walls of the building clearly indicates that the complex was dedicated to Mary, with a particular emphasis on her role as the mother of God (Martens-Czarnecka 2011). Furthermore, her role as a protector and supporter of women is especially evident in the case of two inscriptions on the walls, where she is referred to as the 'loosener of labour' (van Gerven Oei 2017). In another one she is invoked as an intermediary in prayer to God for a successful childbirth (Łajtar & van Gerven Oei 2018: 76–77).

All of these findings suggest that the Virgin Mary played a significant role as an advocate for women in childbirth but may have also fulfilled a protective function. It is very probable, therefore, that she was the intended recipient of magical amulets for various occasions.

In the last line, where the actual incantation was expected, only a fragment of the verb remains; this can be reconstructed as an imperative aorist in the second person singular form (see above). This fragment could potentially be a citation from a Psalm, patristic work, or prayer,

although there is no evidence that such literary texts were used in incantations. The verb ἐπιστρέφω appears once in the *Papyri Graecae magicae* collection, specifically in an erotic spell: ἐπίστρεψον τήν ψυχὴν τῆς δεῖνα εἰς ἐμέ τὸν δεῖνα, ἵνα με φιλή, ‘turn the soul of NN (f.) to me, so that she would love me’ (*Pap. Graec. Mag.* IV 1804–1809). A similar intention may underlie the amulet from Dongola, where Mary was invoked to grant the amulet’s possessor favour with a beloved person. Nonetheless, given the small amount of surviving text, we cannot draw any far-reaching conclusions.

It is also worth noting that in magical formulas, besides the aforementioned compound verb, other forms of στρέφω appear with various prefixes. For instance, ἐκστρέφω occurs as part of a love spell (*Pap. Graec. Mag.* IV 1540–1545), καταστρέφω features in an incantation aimed at harming an enemy (*Pap. Graec. Mag.* IV 2208–2210), and ἀποστρέφω is also used in formulas warding off undesirable factors – whether related to weather (Kotansky 1994: no. 11, l. 3), health (*Pap. Graec. Mag.* XVIIa), or more abstract threats (*Pap. Graec. Mag.* V 119–121).

2. Amulet with Psalm 90:7 and 11

The ostrakon was unearthed in 2021 in an area overseen by Maciej Wyzgoł, in layer 1853 within the open space U244, located east of the ruins of the large Makurian building (B.VI), which had already fallen into disrepair by the time U244 was in use. The layer, consisting mostly of sand, was associated with abandonment, and according to a 14C sample, can be dated to the fourteenth century. There is no evidence to suggest that the ostrakon was originally located there, indicating that it is rather a secondary context.

The text is inscribed along the ribs on the outer side of a sherd from a wheel-made amphora or transport jar. It is written in Greek in a neat and skilful hand, using sloping-pointed majuscules, with letter height oscillating between half and one centimetre. Both side margins are preserved, but the top and bottom of the sherd are broken off, and we do not know how much text is missing at the beginning and the end.

Inv. no. 6995 (Fig. 2)

11.9 × 4.8 cm

Dongola, 11th–14th cent.

ΕΙΤΑΙ ΕΚΤΩΝ ΚΛΙΤΩ[.]ΣΟΥΧ[α. 6]
 ΑΙΜΥΡΙΑΣ ΕΚΔΕΞΙΟΝΣΟΥ ΠΡΟΣ ΔΕΘ
 ΥΚΕΓΓΥ· ΕΤΙ ΤΟΥΣΑΓΓΛΟΣ ΔΥΤ
 4 ΟΥΝΤΕΛΙΤΑΙ ΠΕΡΙΣΟΥΤΟΥΔΙ
vac. ΔΦΥ[.]ΞΑΣΘΑΙ ΕΝΠΑΣ

[----- ΠΕΣ-]
 εἶται ἐκ τῶν κλίτῳ[ν] σου χ[ιλιάς κ-]
 αἱ μυριάς ἐκ δεξιῶν σου, πρὸς <σέ> δὲ ο-
 ὑκ ἐγγύ· ὅτι τοὺς ἀγγέλο(ι)ς αὐτ-
 4 οὐ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ δι-
vac. ἀφν[λ]άξασθαι ἐν πάσ-
 [αἰς ταῖς ὁδοῖς σου ---]

1. δεξιῶν || 2. ἐγγιέ || 3. τοῖς || 4. ἐντελεῖται

[---] *At your sides, a thousand will fall, and ten thousand at your right, but it will not come near to you. Because he will command his angels concerning you to guard (you) in all your ways* [---].

1. The text employs the plural form τῶν κλίτων instead of the singular τοῦ κλίτου, possibly due to the plural form δεξιῶν used further in the same sentence. This variant is not attested and seems to be a simple mistake, either made by the scribe or present in the text from which he was copying.

5. The active form of the aorist infinitive διαφυλάξαι is replaced by the middle form διαφυλάξασθαι, a change that is difficult to explain, especially since the middle form is neither attested nor necessary in this context.

The ostrakon contains two verses from Psalm 90, though not consecutive ones. The text mostly aligns with the standard Septuagint version, according to the Rahlfs edition, with only minor differences that seem to be grammatical or orthographical errors rather than textual variants. The precise function of this ostrakon cannot be definitively determined. Since



Fig. 2. Inv. no. 6995: Ostracon with Psalm 90:7 and 11
(photo M. Reklajtis; © PCMA UW)

its beginning and end have not survived, and there are no distinctive elements like *voces magicae*, ring letters, or magical drawings, the text cannot be absolutely identified as magical. However, there is a category of biblical texts commonly believed to have protective effects, including Gospel incipits and certain psalms, especially Psalm 90 (De Bruyn 2017: 149; Sanzo 2014).

Psalm 90 is often interpreted as an expression of trust in God's protective power against malevolent forces and hazards. It was used in Jewish contexts to expel demons and later became part of Christian magical practices.⁵ In the case of this ostracon, the omission of the middle verses does not weaken its protective nature; on the contrary, the two selected verses form a coherent whole, emphasise that, despite surrounding dangers, those who dwell under God's protection will be shielded from harm. It seems that the omission of verses 8–10 is neither accidental nor a scribal

⁵ For more on the apotropaic power of Psalm 90, see SANZO 2014: 40–47, 106–119.

error, but rather an intentional choice to give the text a specific form. Verse eleventh, in particular, seems to hold significant protective power due to its reference to the intervention of God through angelic powers: 'For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways'. Archangels, especially Michael, were regarded by the Nubians as protectors of people, and their names were imbued with apotropaic qualities (Łaptaś 2019). This may have influenced the selection of this fragment. Interestingly, an ostrakon, likely of a magical nature, too, containing Psalm 90, specifically lines 7–11 without any omissions, was also found in Meinarti (Ruffini 2012).

The analysis of amulets containing Psalm 90 has shown that in some instances they indeed omit verses. There are at least two examples of omitting part of verses 7 and 8 (*P. Oxy.* XVI 1928 and *P. Vindob.* G 348) and verses eight and nine (*P. Gen.* I 6 and *BKT* VIII 13), although there is no consistent pattern in the omission, and other examples could also be listed (see Sanzo 2014: 43–45).

While the content of the text preserved on the ostrakon suggests that it was an amulet, other possibilities cannot be ruled out. It might have been an aide-memoire for private use or during liturgy, or even a writing exercise. Nonetheless, the omission of part of the text in the middle makes these alternatives less likely.

*

The study of Nubian magical and apotropaic practices encounters significant challenges, largely due to the absence of specialised literary sources or incantation manuals. Scholars examining materials from the Middle Nile Valley rely primarily on fragmented and often obscure amulet texts, frequently lacking direct parallels, which makes deciphering and comprehensive analysis difficult. Only a limited number of these texts have been published (Łajtar & van der Vliet 2011; Ruffini 2012). While Qasr Ibrim has yielded the largest collection of Christian amulets, most remain unexamined, referenced only in excavation reports. Additional finds, including those from Kulubnarti (Adams & Adams 1998), Gebel Adda (Łajtar 2014), and Dongola (Deptuła & Barański, forthcoming), are documented within

broader studies. Despite this dispersed, varied, and sparsely published material, some general patterns in composing ritual texts with apotropaic powers are observable. Primarily, aside from the folded paper amulets from Qasr Ibrim, the majority of these artifacts are inscribed on reused potsherds, allowing them to be easily worn on the body or kept within a household, which aligns also with contemporary Egyptian traditions.

In Nubia, we also find similar formulations of incantations as well as full sets of visual and acoustic devices believed to amplify the magical potency of texts. These include *voces magicae*, ring letters, magical drawings, strings of vowels, and *nomina sacra* (Deptuła & Barański, forthcoming). While certain elements might suggest local practices, it is evident, even from the two presented ostraca, that apotropaic texts in this region are not an isolated native phenomenon but are, rather, part of broader Greco-Egyptian traditions. These traditions grew out of earlier Pharaonic practices and were also influenced by Mesopotamian and Jewish customs.

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Lajos BERKES

Tax issues and riot in the hippodrome over magicians:

A new edition of the Byzantine papyrus letter SB XXVI 16519 1

Abstract: This is a revised edition of the Byzantine papyrus letter SB XXVI 16519 (P. Berol. 25706), which addresses matters pertaining to taxation and a riot that occurred within the context of circus races. The new readings allow for the identification of a cohort of magicians as the cause of the unrest, whom the crowd probably believed to have employed magical incantations with the intention of influencing the outcome of the race.

Keywords: papyrus, letter, Egypt, late antiquity, taxation, magic, law.

Agata DEPTUŁA

The power of words: Insights from two Greek magical ostraca

from the citadel of Dongola 19

Abstract: The article presents the *editio princeps* of two Greek ostraca discovered at Old Dongola during excavations conducted by the Polish archaeological mission of the University of Warsaw. The ostraca were found at the citadel in secondary contexts of a much later date, alongside other pottery fragments. Based on their script and context, they are broadly dated to the late Christian period (11th–14th centuries). Certain characteristic features allowed the identification of these ostraca as amulets. This edition offers a closer examination of the texts and provides insights into magical practices in medieval Nubia.

Keywords: medieval Nubia, ostraca, amulet, magic.

Jean-Luc FOURNET

Une demande de transfert d'imposition (epistalma) à Copenhague 33

Abstract: Édition d'un papyrus de la Bibliothèque royale de Copenhague (P. Copenhagen Royal Library Udst. 32), remarquablement conservé, livrant un *epistalma* (demande de transfert d'imposition à la suite d'une mutation foncière) appartenant au dossier de Flavius Magistôr (Hermopolis, 622). Il présente l'intérêt d'être le dernier *epistalma* connu et, à ce titre, d'éclairer l'évolution formelle et diplomatique qu'a subi ce genre, dont plus de 30 exemples ont survécu. Une liste des *epistalmata* papyrologiques, avec leurs principales caractéristiques diplomatiques et formulaires, est donnée en annexe.

Keywords: *epistalma*, Flavius Magistôr, Hermopolis, monastère de la Méta-noia, fiscalité.

Nikolaos KOLVERIS

Once again on homologia: The papyrological documentation revisited 81

Abstract: This article contributes to the ongoing discussion of the complex issue of *ὁμολογία* in ancient Greek law by examining it as a bilateral process that produces legally binding agreement. I argue that this process is reflected in legal documents preserved in papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt. Specifically, I demonstrate that the content of these documents aligns fully with the essence of the Athenian law on contracts, *ὅσα ἂν τις ἐκὼν ἕτερος ἐτέρῳ ὁμολογήσῃ κύρια εἶναι*, thereby highlighting the continuity and preservation of this Athenian legal principle in shaping legal transactions in Graeco-Roman Egypt.

Keywords: *homologia*, consensus, legal documents, contracts, papyri, Graeco-Roman Egypt, ancient Greek law.

Lorenzo LIVORSI

A new constitution of Gratian 105

Abstract: The article offers an edition and commentary of a previously unknown constitution of Gratian, discovered on the final folio of Arras, Médiathèque Municipale MS 644 (CGM 572). Although severely abridged and difficult to read, this newly identified document addresses the status of formerly abandoned children (*expositi*) who have been taken in within an ecclesiastical context. It establishes that the biological father – or, in the case of slaves, the original master – can no longer reclaim them. This law is best understood within the broader context of late antique legislation on *expositi*, while early Christian sources illuminate the historical circumstances that may have prompted such legislation. Finally, the hypothesis that this law may have originated from the *Theodosian Code* is examined. An appendix highlights the utility of prose rhythm in establishing the text.

Keywords: Gratian, *expositi*, Church and society, *Theodosian Code*, *Collectio Quyesnelliana*.

Gabriella MESSERI

SB XII 10892, riedizione 139

Abstract: The present article provides a new edition of *SB XII 10892*, a register of the land administration, plausibly from Karanis and presumably dated to 188/9 CE. It contains the description of cadastral parcels numbered in succession, including land 'once belonging to the Jews' and land 'once belonging to the Hellenes', which, having become the property of the State following confiscation, are gradually assigned on a five-year lease to δημόσιοι γεωργοί and to farmers' collectives. The papyrus was edited for the first time by Anna Świderek in 1971, but a series of abbreviations recurring in the record of each parcel remained unresolved, affecting the understanding of the purpose of the register. The administrative registers published in large numbers in the last fifty years allow us to satisfactorily resolve all the abbreviations that remained unclear, gaining full understanding of the contents of the register. The reading of other doubtful or incorrectly deciphered points has also been improved, prompting a re-edition of the entire text. The register is written on the recto, while the back was later used for a wine account which will be published separately in another contribution.

Keywords: Roman Egypt, land administration, Jews, Hellenes, numbered *sphragides*, abbreviation system.

Maria NOWAK

Circulation of imperial legislation in Egypt between 324 and 525:

Catalogue and commentary 177

Abstract: This article offers a list and commentary to imperial laws preserved on papyrus between Constantine the Great and Justinian. The aim of the presented work was to collect both constitutions and secondary witnesses, that is mentions of law, if they could be indeed identified as a piece of legislation. The work is divided into sections grouping the material according to its genre and type. The initial section of the catalogue contains fragments that have been categorised as legal literature, encompassing excerpts from the Theodosian Code, literature pertaining to the Codex Theodosianus, and other compilations of imperial legislation. The second section consists of the documentary papyri, which are divided into three parts: generally binding laws, rescripts, and references.

The collation of a compendium of papyrological witnesses of imperial laws permitted the drawing of some general conclusions regarding the scope of the use of these constitutions in Egypt. One of these is dedicated to the circulation of the Theodosian Code. The recent publication of new fragments

of the Theodosian Code, coupled with analysis of their provenance, has allowed a more optimistic assessment of the Code circulation than was previously proposed.

A further conclusion is reached regarding the process of communicating general laws and obtaining imperial rescripts in the province. The papyrological evidence provides a comprehensive reconstruction of the chain of communication, extending from the emperor to the praetorian prefect, governor, strategos, and lower officials otherwise known thanks to the C.Th. and the Code of Justinian. The rescripts, when collected, reflect the changes undergone between the Tetrarchy and Justinian's reign, demonstrating that there were no discrepancies between the theory and practice of their application. The interpretation of these sources in their respective contexts, such as the archives and scribal traditions to which they belonged, facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the dissemination of laws among the subjects of Roman emperors.

Keywords: Imperial law, constitutions, late antiquity, Egypt, *Theodosian Code*, papyrology.

Paul SCHUBERT

Greek contracts from Egypt: When do they turn Byzantine?

217

Abstract: This article is focused on the shift from the so-called 'Roman' to the 'Byzantine' period in the perspective of papyrologists: is there a clear sign of a change in the way scribes prepare their documents between the late third and early fourth century? This view is challenged on the basis of a survey of a specific category of documents, namely contracts (Greek deeds of private law). From a typological perspective, there are gradual changes from the third till the early sixth century, but the real change seems to take place in the fifth century, shortly before Justinian's lawyers formalise what could be observed among Greek papyri from Egypt in the preceding centuries..

Keywords: periodisation, Roman Egypt, Byzantine Egypt, typology, Justinian, contract.