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**P. MERT. II 81:
ON ORACULAR INQUIRY AND SHADY BUSINESS**

RE-EDITION WITH A NEW TRANSLATION*

THE PRESENT PAPER ATTEMPTS TO ELUCIDATE some interesting aspects of *P. Mert.* II 81, offering corrections to the text of the original edition, especially now that the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin has courteously uploaded high-resolution photographs (Fig. 1). The first editor, Brinley R. Rees, in his introduction to the edition, had noted that the papyrus was either a palimpsest or had been wrapped before the ink was thoroughly dry, as indicated by frequent stains or traces/imprints of letters. It is now more certain than ever that the papyrus is a palimpsest, as clearly evidenced by the last four lines: the beginning of the erased original text is placed around 2 cm to the left compared to the current lines. Additionally, there are two lines present after the end of our text, and some visible letters do not appear to be traces from the newer writing.

The papyrus contains a letter from Epoeiris to Demetrios, whom she calls 'son', but as line 41 allows us to understand, where Epoeiris states that 'she is very grateful' to Demetrios' mother (ἐὐχαριστῶ σου τῇ μητρὶ πολλά),

* I greatly appreciate the comments offered by the anonymous reviewer on some aspects of this paper. The snippets included here come from the original digital image of the papyrus, which was processed with Hierax software and accessed via the Chester Beatty Library website (https://cblo1.intranda.com/viewer/image/MP_81/1/). They are reproduced under a CC BY 4.0 licence. The translations of the Greek passages are mine.

omitting her name, it is most likely a term to express affection, and therefore the actual relationship between the sender and the recipient remains unclear. Reasonably, however, we can argue that there is an age difference. On the contrary, I gather that the mention of Demetrios' brother refers to a genuine brother, as it is not part of some introductory expression, often formal, or conclusion, but of the narrative of events. What is more, the brother's name is not explicitly stated.¹

Epoeris, using the figure of prebutter, preempts criticism by Demetrios of any neglect of their communication, the last apparently taking place three months before. She mentions something very interesting from a socio-cultural point of view, that every week (the 'Egyptian' week, a period of ten days: *διὰ δέκα ἡμερῶν ἐκάστοτε*) she consults an oracle about him. From the now restored text in lines 24–25 (*ἐπορεύθη καὶ ἐμαντευσάμην*), it becomes clear that Epoeris actually visited a sanctuary herself to receive an oracle. The text thus demonstrates how people from various social backgrounds sought oracular guidance on practical matters of everyday life and that this practice was deeply rooted in local religious traditions.

The ten consecutive days sound like an overstatement to enhance the effectiveness of Epoeris' reply. As certain parallels show, it is a way of referring to incessant efforts. For what we know, this certainly was not an incubation ritual, which could include some days of fasting and preparation to the 'meeting' with the god.² A week of oracular rituals is improbable as one of the interpretations of this unusual phrase as the god did not appear to Epoeris in a dream but she was provided with an oracular response.³

¹ On the use of kinship terms, I refer to the classic DICKEY 2004.

² In a semi-fictional tale, cited by Frankfurter 1998: 168–169, Thessalos of Tralles (1st cent. CE), in his travel south to Diospolis, describes being prepared for an incubation oracle through a three-day fast. Afterward, he was placed in a chamber where he received an 'auspicious theophany' from the god Asclepius. While this story is stylised like a Graeco-Roman novel, Frankfurter suggests it likely reflects genuine aspects of ritual practice, especially the use of ritual fasting and chamber incubation as part of oracular preparation.

³ On the topic of women's participation in consulting oracles, see DUNAND 2024. The interested person would write questions on papyrus, which priests delivered to the gods and returned with responses, often through a lottery system involving positive and negative slips, with the lot drawn signifying the 'God's will', but perhaps also orally.

Without explicitly revealing the main reason for her letter, she repeatedly uses the term *πράγμα*, that is the thing/affair/issue/matter, possibly because the recipient is familiar with the issue, but also perhaps because it is a sensitive ‘family affair’ that should not be brought accidentally out into the open. The recipient’s personal matter concerns a priest to whom there seems to be a debt. There is no direct reference to it so it can only be conjectured. In the absence of the recipient, his brother went to find the priest to resolve the matter, and from what we infer from the incomplete and still fragmentary text (despite the new readings presented here), in this attempt he went too far by resorting to threats, resulting in Epoeiris’ reproach of his actions. Subsequently, she apparently met the priest and asked him what he wanted to give, and he replied that he would give nothing more than what was agreed with Demetrios. This shows that the priest had entered into an agreement with Demetrios and very likely owed him money.

In what follows, the anonymous conservator⁴ made a not readily noticeable mistake, resulting in some confusion. The fragment located in the middle of lines 23–26 was placed upside down (Fig. 2). By turning it around one clearly sees the error, while now the reading has become easier. One can clearly discern *μῆλλ* in line 25, whereas before, the section seemed absolutely incomprehensible.

From the new arrangement of the fragment we learn that Epoeiris went and consulted an oracle on whether the issue is going to be settled (*εἰ μῆλλει ἀπαρτίζεσθαι*), to which the god plausibly replied that the issue is going to be settled eventually (*ἀπαρτίζεταί ποτε*). She then urges Demetrios to come up for a few days to settle his issue. Unfortunately, the text at this point has many gaps, and all we can extract from the most readable part of it is that Epoeiris instructs Demetrios to do two things before he travels to Rome: the first we miss, the second has to do with her family apparently. In the end she advises him to take care of himself and avoid bad company. This is followed by the standard greetings from other family members and the standard expression of farewell, along with a postscript from a Dionysios, who sends special greetings.

⁴ Merton’s collection obscure origins (acquired ‘from various sources between 1924 and 1949’) do not reveal who was entrusted with the task of mounting the papyri in glass.

In my opinion, from a structural standpoint, lines 41 and 42 were not originally part of the letter but were both added as postscripts. Immediately after the farewell phrase ἄσπασαι τοὺς ἐν οἴκῳ πάντες, the standard expression ἐρρῶσθαί σε εὖχομαι appears, typically written in a two-narrow-lines format as if framed. The sender, however, felt that she had to add something, so the sentence expressing gratitude to the recipient's mother appears compressed and almost without an interlinear space between lines 40–41, while once the text reaches εὖχομαι, due to lack of space, she was forced to truncate the adverbial expression πολλά to πολυ, creating an abbreviation (Fig. 3).

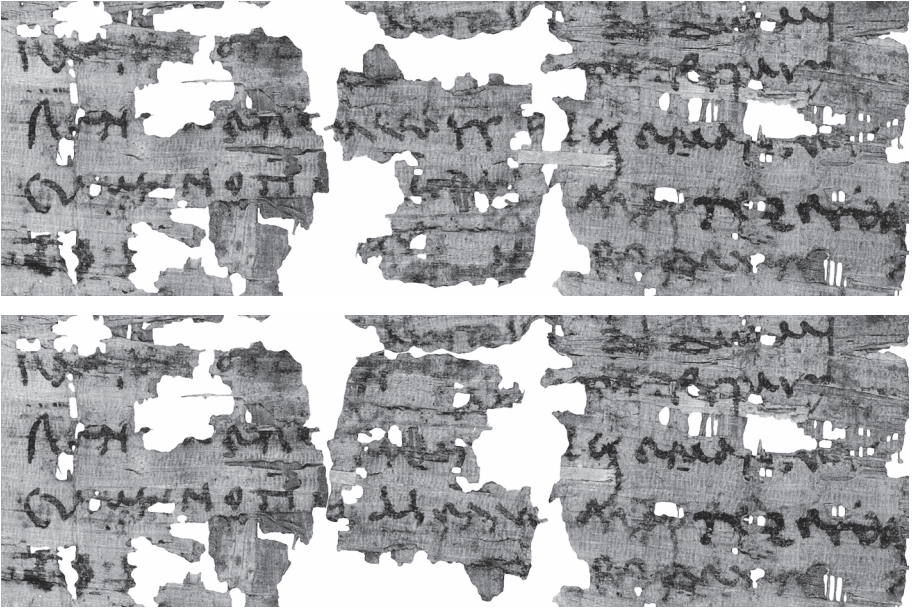


Fig. 1. Current (upper) and reconstructed (lower) arrangement of lines 23–26

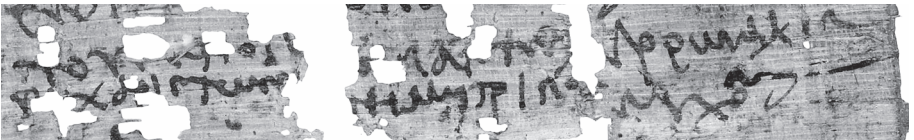


Fig. 2. Detail of lines 40–41

P. Merton II 81

40.5 × 17.9 cm

unknown provenance
2nd cent. CE?

- Ἐποήρις Δημητρίῳ τῷ ν[ι]ῶ· χαίρειν.
 πρὸ τῶν ὄλων εὐχ[ο]μαί σε ὑγιαίν[ε]ι[ν]. μή
 με δόξης ἡμεληκέναι περὶ σου· διὰ
 4 γὰρ δέκα ἡμερῶν ἐκάστοτε μαντεύ-
 ομαι περὶ σου. εὐροῦσα οὖν τὰ καί-
 ρια μὴ χρησιμεύοντά σοι ἐν τῇ
 τριμήνῳ τ[α]ύτῃ, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔγρα-
 8 ψά σοι. ἔγραψάς μοι περὶ τοῦ 'πράγματ(ος)' [ἱερέ-
 ως καὶ] 'τοῦ ἱερέως· συ[ν]έβαλεν 'οὖν' αὐτῷ ὁ ἀδελ-
 φός σου περὶ τοῦ 'του'. [πράγματος ὁ οὖν]
 καὶ λείαν αὐτὸ ὕψωσεν, ὥστε
 12 τὸν ἱερέα λέγειν, ὅτι οὐκέ-
 τι αὐτὸ θεο[c. 4-5]λε[.]αι. μετὰ
 τὸ οὖν ἀποδ[έ]ξασθαι τοῦ .ερ[.]ου
 ἐπηρέασεν [c. 3].ος αὐτῷ. καὶ λείαν
 16 ἐμεμφάμην αὐτόν, ὅτι συνέ-
 βαλες [αὐτὸς] ἀνθρώπῳ περὶ πρά-
 γματος καὶ οὐς οὐκέτι αὐ-
 τὸ ημε ...[...].ρ..... θῆναι. λέ-
 20 γουσα πάλιν αὐτῷ ὅτι τί βούλει
 σὺ διδόναι; (?)[...] λέγων ὅτι ὁ ὠμολο-
 γημένον τ[ῷ Δ]ημητρίῳ δίδωμι,
 πλεῖον οὐδ[έ]ν vac.? ἀλ[λ]ὰ οὐ πέπανται
 24 πάντα. ἐπο[ρ]εύθη[ν] καὶ ἐμαντεν-
 σάμην ὅτι εἰ μέλλε[ι] ἀπαρτίζεσθαι
 το π[ρᾶγμα? ...] ὁ θ[ε]ὸς δὲ λέγει
 ὅ[τι ἀ]παρτί[ζετα]ί ποτε ..ουπ..
 28 ειτ[...]. vac.? ἐὰν οὖν.... η ὅτι [..υ]
 δ[υ]νήσῃ ἀναβῆναι πρὸς ὀλίγας
 ἡ[μέρας ...] ἀπαρτίσαι σοῦ τὸ πρᾶ-
 γμα[...]. γὰρ[...].αι
 32 ὅτι δεῖ [αδ] σ[.....].αι πρῶ[τ]ον

- καὶ ἀπλ... [...] ἡμᾶς, π[ρ]ὶν ἢ πο[ρ]εὺθῃ-
ναί σε εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην· ἐὰν οὖν
ἀναπλε[ύσ]ης, εὐρήσεις πότε μέλ-
36 λεις ἀν[έρχ]εσθαι. μεθ' ὧν δὲ ἐσθί-
εις καὶ πεί[ν]εις, [...] φυλάσσου σεαυ-
τὸν ἀπ' αὐτῶν. *vac.* ἀσπάζονται
σε οἱ ἐν οἴ[κ]ῳ πάντες· ἄσπασα[ι]
40 τοὺς ἐν οἴκῳ πάντες. ἐρρωσθαί σε
εὐχαριστῶ σο[υ] τῇ μητρὶ πολλ(ά). εὐχομ(α)ι
Διονύσιος ἀσπάζομαι πολλά.

1. [Δ]ημητρίῳ ed. pr. | νί[ω]ι vel νίῳ || 9. συ[ν]έβαλεν: λεν corr. ex λων, corr. ex συ[ν]ε
βαλ[λ] ed. pr. || 11. I. λίαν | ὑψωσεν pap. || 12-13. οὐκ ἔτι ed. pr. || 13. θεοῖς με[λ]ε[τ]αι ed.
pr. || 14. ἀποδ[ε]ξασθαι / ἀποδ[ε]ξασθαι (I. ἀποδεῖξασθαι) vel ἀποδ[ε]ξασθαι: ...[.]ξασθαι
ed. pr. || 15. εγ. ρ... [π]ρὸς αὐτὸν ed. pr. | I. λίαν || 16. ἔμεμψαι (I. ἔμεμψε) [τ]ὸν ed. pr. ||
17. αὐτὸς ἢ αὐ[τῷ] ed. pr. || 18-19. [σ]ε[αυ]τὸν οὐκ ἔπ' αὐτοῖς α. ed. pr. || 19. εἶναι ed. pr. ||
20. τι β... ed. pr. || 21-22. ὁ ὠμολογημένος [...] λόγον ed. pr. || 23. πλαστὸν ed. pr. | οὐδ[ε]ν ed.
pr. | [...] ε. . ἐπ' αὐτὰς ed. pr. | 24. επ... vs .. ed. pr. || 25. μ[ε]... δει[κ]ναι ἀπαρτερεσθαι (I. ἀπ-
αρτίζεσθαι) || 26. το[ιούτῳ] αὐ[τῷ] ed. pr. || 27. ο[ὐ] παρ... ὅτε ed. pr. | ἀπαρτίζεται:
I. ἀπαρτεῖται || 28. εἰ[πε]ν ed. pr. | εαυτοῦ ἡμῶν τι ed. pr. || 29. δ[ι]... ἡεκεῖνα καινὰ πρὸς αὐτὰς
ed. pr. || 30. ἡ[μεῖς]... v. τ. αι ed. pr. || 32. δεῖδω ed. pr. || 33. εἰλέ[σθαι] (I. ἐλέσθαι) ἢ με[λ]ε[ν]ιν
ed. pr. || 37. I. πίνεις | [...] ed. pr. || 40. I. πάντας || 41. πολ(λά) ed. pr. || 42. Διονύσιου ed. pr.

Epoeris to her son Demetrios, greetings. Before anything else, I hope you are well. Do not consider that I have neglected you. For I have been consulting the oracle about you each and every week. So, since I found out that the current circumstances are not to your advantage in this quarter, for this reason I did not write to you. You wrote to me about the affair of the priest. So, your brother confronted him concerning this and raised the issue too much, so that the priest said that 'the god ... it anymore'. So, after ... he railed against him, and I criticised him for confronting the man about the matter and ... this no longer ... me telling him again 'what do you want to give?' ... him saying that 'what is agreed on with Demetrios. I am giving nothing more'. But not everything has ceased. I went and consulted the oracle asking if the issue was going to be settled. The god says that 'it shall be settled eventually (?)' ... if then ... that you will be able to come upriver for a few days to settle your

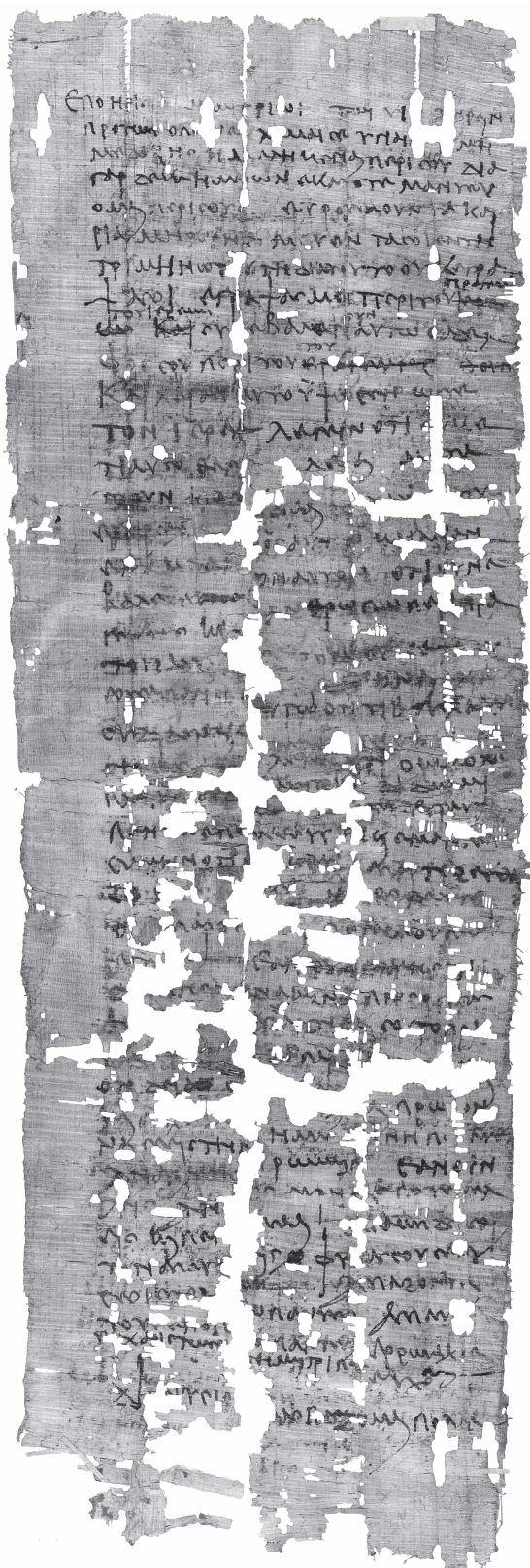


Fig. 3. *P. Mert. II 8r*: letter of Epoeiris to Demetrios

issue ... that you must ... us before you travel to Rome. If you sail upriver, you will find out. When are you going to come up? As for the people you eat and drink with, watch out for them. Everyone at home send their hugs, you too give our hugs to everyone at home. I am very thankful to your mother. I wish you farewell.

*(P.S.) Dionysios, I send my greetings.*⁵

1. Ἐποήρις (TM Nam 2976): to the Greek attestations of this Egyptian theophoric name (*ḥp.t-wrt*) now add *P. Count.* 38 (Arsinoites, 254–231 BCE), fr. 1, l. 17, albeit restored, [Ἐπ]όηρις, as well as the variants Ἐπογηρις (*P. Count.* 18 [Arsinoites or Herakleopolites, 243–217 BCE], l. 67), and Ἐφγηρις (*P. Count.* 19 [Arsinoites?, 3rd cent. BCE], l. 39); see also the compound Σε]νεποήρις in *SB XII* 10860 (Arsinoites, 232 BCE), l. 184 (cf. the name Ποήριος in l. 101).

υἱ[ω]ι: Judging by the available space, it is possible that the papyrus had υἱω without the *iota* adscript. Otherwise, the *omega* should have been squeezed in the narrow space.

3–4. διὰ γὰρ δέκα ἡμερῶν ἐκάστοτε: The expression could be literal but overall it evokes an impression of exaggeration.⁶ This is a warranted conclusion as in a comparable text, the private letter *P. Oxy. Hels.* 48 (2nd–3rd cent. CE), the sender begins with a prolepsis, stating (ll. 3–5) ἐγὼ ἐκάστοτε ἡμέρας τὰ περι σοῦ ἐξετάζων οὐ διαλείπω τῆς σωτηρίας σου ἔνεκεν, which the editor translates as ‘on no occasion have I ceased to inquire about your help’, and then in the commentary to line 3 goes to explain that ἐκάστοτε ἡμέρας means ‘continuously’. It is true that the prepositional phrase with διὰ + days in the genitive could literally indicate the period of time during which Epōeris was consulting the oracle, but it is an unconvincing argument in the light of the absence of any proof of such long oracular inquiry procedures. See the frequently occurring expression διὰ παντός (‘for ever’), in fact a shortened version of διὰ παντός τοῦ χρόνου (‘throughout the time’, e.g. *Hdt.* 9.13), or *C. Pap. Gr.* 1 (Alexandria, 13 BCE), l. 6: παραβαλεῖ δὲ ἡ Διδύμη πρὸς [τὴν Ἰσιδώραν] κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀεὶ διὰ ἡμερῶν τεσσάρων ἄγρουσα [καὶ τὸ παιδίον πρὸς τὸ] ἐπιθεωρεῖσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, ‘Didyma shall visit Isidora every month regularly on four separate days bringing the child to be inspected by her’. However, worth comparing are cases such as *P. Oxy.* LVI 3864 (5th cent. CE), ll. 10–11: ἀπήλθαμεν εἰς Χαιρέου διὰ δεκαεπτὰ ἡμερῶν, ‘we travelled to Chaireou

⁵ A previous translation with a few remarks can be found in BAGNALL & CRIBIORE 2006: 383–384. It does not reflect, however, the current state of the text.

⁶ I owe this idea to W. Graham Claytor, who pointed out that number ten could be used as a magnification of the efforts compared to English ‘a thousand times’.

in seventeen days'; *BGU* III 816 (Arsinoites, 3rd cent. CE), ll. 11–13: *εὐχαριστῶ* (l. *εὐχαριστῶ*) *Ἀπάτι Εὐαγγέλου* (l. *Εὐαγγέλω*) *πολλά, ὅτι διὰ ἡμερῶν καταβένι* (l. *καταβαίνει*) *πρὸς ἐμέ*, 'I am grateful to Apa Euangelos that he is coming down to me in (a few) days'; *P. Euphrates* 17 (Syria Coele, c. 232–256 CE), ll. 19–21: *ἐὰν θ[ε]ῶς θέλῃ, πέμπω σ[ε]* (l. *σοι*) [...]. *δι[ὰ ἡ]μ[ε]ρῶν ὀλίγων ἂ ὀφίλω σ[ε]*, 'I am sending you what I owe you in a few days, God willing'; *P. Harr.* I 103 (Oxyrhynchites, 2nd cent. CE?), ll. 5–8: *ἐφθάκαμεν ἔρρωμένοι εἰς Ὁξυρηνχίτην* (l. *Ὁξυρηνχίτην*) *διὰ ἡμερῶν δέκα*, 'we arrived safely to the Oxyrhynchite nome within ten days'. In these examples, rendering the prepositional phrase with 'throughout' seems inappropriate. Therefore, I assume that the expression *διὰ δέκα ἡμερῶν ἐκάστοτε* is just an exaggerated way to say that Epöeris has not ceased consulting the oracle (lit. 'within ten days each and every time').

4–5. *μαντεύομαι*: Since the time of the first publication, new occurrences of the verb have been attested: *P. Louvre* III 200 (Nikopolis?, 2nd cent. CE), ll. 18–19: *κ[αί] μάντευσε* (l. *μάντευσαι*) [*θ*] *τὸν θεὸν περὶ ἐμοῦ, ὃ ἐὰν βούλῃ*, 'ask the god for an oracle about me, whatever you wish'; *P. Sarap.* 83a = *SB* VI 9134 (Hermopolites, 90–133 CE), ll. 14–16: *μάντευσαι οὖν τὸν θεόν [ὅπ]ότε δυνάμεθα σπεῖραι ἐν Ψώθι*, 'ask the god for an oracle on when we may sow in Psobthis'; *P. Hamb.* III 227 (unknown provenance, 3rd cent. CE), ll. 11–13, in a figurative sense: *οὐ γὰρ ἐμαντευόμην, εἰ σοὶ θέλεις τὸ κέρμα τοῦτο ἢ τι ἀγορασθῇ*, 'for I could not guess whether you want this cash for you or that something is to be bought'.

9. *συ[ν]έβαλεν*: The original edition had opted for a deletion of a *lambda* in *συ[ν]έβαλ[λ]*. However, the ink traces and the ductus do not suggest a second *lambda*, and the correction was likely made from an *omega* (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Detail of line 9

The scribe seems to have initially intended to use a temporal participle *συμβαλὼν*, but perhaps was entangled between thoughts writing *συνεβαλὼν* with an internal augment, which made him reconsider the structure of his sentence. Perhaps he had initially a participle in mind, *συμβαλὼν*, but started writing an aoristic form with an augment *συνεβαλω*, and then decided to switch his syntax into a verb.

13. *θεο[]λε[]αι*: The edition reads *θεο[]λε[]αι*. There are serious challenges in accepting this reading. The horizontal ink trace (stroke) following a vertical stroke after the *epsilon* in *θε* could presumably belong to the previously erased text, whose line runs just under and partly covering the current line. This could be also true for the said vertical stroke, hence the subsequent letter could

be interpreted as an *omicron* lacking its lower part ($\theta\epsilon\omicron$). An *iota*, however, is very dubious (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Detail of line 13

Given the restored mention of the god in line 26 ($\delta\theta[\epsilon]\delta\varsigma\delta\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota$), one may argue for a reading in the nominative $\theta\epsilon\delta[s]$ followed by a verb ending in $-\lambda\epsilon[\tau]αι$, e.g. $[\beta\omicron\upsilon]\lambda\epsilon[\tau]αι$. The entire sentence would then read: $\omega\varsigma\tau\epsilon\tau\omicron\nu\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\alpha\lambda\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu,\omega\tau\iota\omicron\upsilon\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\tau\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\theta\epsilon\delta[s]\beta\omicron\upsilon]\lambda\epsilon[\tau]αι$, ‘resulting in the priest saying that the god does not want this anymore’. The question remains open and other possibilities regarding the response of the priest are equally imaginable, such as the aorist infinitive of the verb $\epsilon\kappa\pi\lambda\epsilon\kappa\omega$ ($[\epsilon\kappa\pi]\lambda\epsilon[\xi]αι$), meaning ‘to resolve,’ a common topos in letters from the Roman period,⁷ or $[\delta\phi\epsilon\iota]\lambda\epsilon[\tau]αι$ ($\omicron\upsilon\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\tau\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\ldots\delta\phi\epsilon\iota\lambda\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$, ‘this is not owed anymore’).

17. $[[\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma]]$: As the image shows, the entire word $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ not $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega$ is deleted. Note the final *sigma*’s top stroke (Fig. 6).

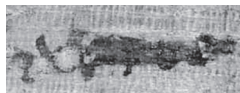


Fig. 6. Detail of line 17

19. $\eta\mu\epsilon\ldots[\ldots]\rho\ldots\theta\eta\gamma\alpha\iota$: I suspect that here we have the future expression in reported speech $\eta\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\rho\tau\iota\sigma\theta\eta\gamma\alpha\iota$. This construction appears as a replacement and a workaround of the passive future infinitive $\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\rho\tau\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$, as argued by Markopoulos 2009: 47–59.⁸ This would mirror the future expression in line 25 $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\epsilon[\iota]\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\rho\tau\iota\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$. Alas, the traces do not allow for a clear reading.

20. The traces after $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota$ appear to be remnants of the previously deleted text.

⁷ E.g. *P. Tēbt.* II 315 (2nd cent. CE), ll. 27–29: $\pi\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho[\alpha]\upsilon\tau\omicron[v]\pi\rho\acute{o}[s]\sigma\epsilon\epsilon\lambda\theta\acute{\iota}\nu$ (l. $\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$) $\epsilon\gamma\omega\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\pi\omicron\iota[\eta\sigma]\omega\epsilon\kappa\pi\lambda\epsilon\chi\alpha\iota\sigma\epsilon$, ‘for before he comes to you, I will have him get you out of trouble’.

⁸ He notes that, despite the fact that the present infinitive remained aspectually neutral and compatible with future reference, in prose, the choice of aorist appears to become more frequent in later periods, notably in the lower registers of Hellenistic and Roman papyri, where speakers were often less familiar with classical patterns, seeking to mark perfective aspect with greater explicitness. According to him, the attested cases mark the beginning of a more general tendency towards using the aorist infinitive with $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\omega$ for future-referring constructions, a trend that becomes especially clear in late antique and early medieval Greek.

21. It is unclear whether the ink trace after *διδόναι* belongs to a letter of the current text or to the previous one before it was washed off.

25. εἰ μέλλε[ι] ἀπαρτίζεσθαι τοῦ π[ράγμα: This echoes oracular questions such as *P. Oxy.* XXXI 2613 (2nd cent. CE), ll. 3–7: δέετέ (l. δέεταί) σου Ἀρσινόη εἰ μέλλω συνβιοῦν (l. συμβιοῦν) Δωρίωνι τῇ ια δός μοι τοῦ[τ]ο, ‘Arsinoe is pleading with you (to tell her) if I am going to get married with Dorion on the 11th. Give me a response’; *SB* XII 11227 (Soknopaïou Nesos, 2nd cent. CE): κυρίῳ Σοκνοπαίῳ καὶ Ἀμμωνι ἀνικήτη· δότε μοι κληδόνα ἢν ἡμῖς (l. ἡμεῖς) θέλεται (l. θέλετε), ἢ (l. εἰ) μέλλω μένιν (l. μένιν) ἐν τῇ πρακτορίᾳ καὶ [ο]ῦ μεθίσταμαι (l. μεθίσταμαι). τοῦτό μοι[ι] ἐξένενκε (l. ἐξένεγκε), ‘To Lord Soknopaios and Ammon the Invincible. Give me any sign you wish whether I am going to remain in the office of tax collector and not be removed. Issue this to me’.

26. ὁ θ[ε]ὸς δὲ λέγει: Despite the interference of ink traces from the previous text, the *ος* ending and the round contours of the theta together with its horizontal cross stroke are convincingly visible (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Detail of line 26

The phrase can be also considered formulaic for an oracle’s reply, the most common alongside *ἔχρησεν*: *IG* II² 4969 (Attica, mid-4th cent. BCE), l. 1; *FD* III 3, 342 (Delphi, not earlier than 2nd cent. BCE), l. 1 *et sim.*; *ἐθέσπισεν*: *SEG* XV 517 (Paros, c. mid-3rd cent. BCE), l. 19; *ἀνείλεν*: *SEG* XXI 519 (Acharnai, after the mid-4th cent. BCE), l. 5). See, e.g., *I. Kibyra* 97 (Kibyra, 2nd–3rd cent. CE), l. 1: θεὸς [λέγει]. βραχὺ περίμεινον, καιρὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστ[ι] σοι, ‘And the god [says]: “wait for a while; for the circumstances are not favourable to you”’; *TAM* II 947 V/VI, l. 2 (Olympos, Lycia, imperial period), l. 1: θεὸς λέγει. βοηθὸν ἔξ[ι]ς (l. ἔξ[ι]ς) μετὰ Τύχης τὸν Πύθιον, ‘The god says: “together with Tyche, Pythios shall be your assistant”’; *I. Delphinion*, 132 (Miletos, 6th–5th cent. BCE) l. 2: θεὸς εἶπεν, ‘The god said’. Frequent is certainly its use in a Christian context: e.g. *Did. Comm. in Ecc.* 5–6.173: καὶ ὁ θεὸς λ[έ]γει διδ[όν]αι τέκνα, ‘and it is God who commands that children be granted’.

Undoubtedly, the question of oracles is a much broader subject than this note permits, yet the use of the verb *λέγει* has perhaps further implications: was the oracle issued to Epheeris in writing or was it in fact a spoken one? The issue of ‘voiced’ oracles is discussed in the authoritative work of Frankfurter 1998: 145–197, n. 1. An updated overview is offered by Tallet 2012: 401–406, who provides evidence-based especially on observations made by Dunand 1997 on the chapel in Deir-el-Bahari and Quaegebeur 1995 on the chapel in the temple of Shenhur attesting the existence of holes in the walls and *cellae* not accessible to the worshippers, from where

the hidden priests would ‘announce’ the god’s answer as if spoken by the god himself. In this regard, the present papyrus could be another hint at this practice. Otherwise, it is a mere figurative way, by which Epoeis conveys the god’s words.

27. $\theta[\tau\iota\acute{\alpha}]παρτ\iota\iota[\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha]\iota$: The beginning of the line contains vestiges of the previous text (resembling a large letter *eta*) with a somewhat confusing result. If one looks, however, at the beginning of the next two lines the first letter of line 27 very likely aligns well with the beginnings of those lines. I have presumed that the future expression would be expressed here in a present tense form⁹ as the expected passive future form $\acute{\alpha}παρτισθ\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ would be too long for the gap, and a theoretical middle voice $\acute{\alpha}παρτι\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\iota$ is slightly shorter than the gap requires as well as inappropriate in an undoubtedly passive construction.

28. It is hard to establish whether part of the text after $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$ is deliberately crossed off or this is a clumsy attempt to overwrite the previously erased text. At any rate, the conditional clause featuring $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$ requires a verb in subjunctive. Here, the verb presumably ends in $-\eta$ (for $-\eta\eta$) just before $\theta\tau\iota$. Following intuition and sense, the verb must relate to speaking in order to introduce the $\theta\tau\iota$ clause containing direct speech, so the reading $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\eta$ is possible but with a high degree of doubt due to the uncertainty in the disentanglement of the previous text from the new one.¹⁰ My best guess would be that text has $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu\ \omicron\delta\upsilon\nu\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\eta\ \theta\tau\iota$ etc., but between the alleged $\omicron\delta\upsilon\nu$ and $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\eta$ there appears to be something more, a lunar form with a possible horizontal stroke in the middle, hence an *epsilon* or *sigma*. Perhaps $\kappa\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\eta$ should be entertained as an idea, yet again it is unclear what it erased and what is not. After $\theta\tau\iota$, the faded letters likely belong to the previous text. If so, the sentence could convey the oracle’s/god’s words.

29. $\delta[v]\nu\acute{\eta}\sigma\eta$, ‘you will be able’, as the god’s response speaking about the future is the preferable reading, green-lighting Demetrios’ travel. The space between the *delta* and the tip of the letter which I take for a *nu* may indeed appear too wide for inserting merely an *upsilon* and a part of the *nu*, thus leaving other possibilities open (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Detail of line 29

⁹ For a description of the use of the present indicative with future implications, see LUCAS 2014: 172, with further literature.

¹⁰ $\mu\acute{\eta}$ is not entirely impossible but less likely as it appears predominantly in the shape of a ligature with a minuscule *eta* in our text ($\Delta\eta\mu\eta\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\omega\varsigma$, $\mathcal{P}\acute{\omega}\mu\eta\nu$, $\mu\eta\tau\rho\acute{\iota}$); see, however, $\epsilon\mu\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\nu$ in ll. 24–25, where a capital *eta* is employed.

Alternatively, the passage could be tentatively read as ὅτι ἐν δ[ὲ πο]ιήση[ς] (l. ποιήσεις) ἀναβῆναι, ‘please come upriver’, but this all sounds more like wishful thinking although imaginable.

29–30. ἀναβῆναι πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας: Epoeris’ request to Demetrios for coming by for a few days comes naturally as the affair with the priest needs to be settled. For πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας, see, e.g., *P. Oxy.* XXXI 2595 (3rd cent. CE), ll. 5–6: καλῶς ποιήσεις ἐλθὼν πρὸς ἡμᾶς πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας, ‘please come to us for a few days’; *P. Flor.* II 150 (Theadelphia, 267 CE), ll. 4–5: ὥστε εἰς τὴν Ταυρεῖνου (l. Ταυρίνου) πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας πατήσαι τὰ ἐν τῷ αἰγιαλῷ θέρη, ‘so that they [sc. the cattle] thresh the corn on the shore at Taurinou for a few days’.

31–32. The section where ἡμᾶς is in line 33, with a curved thin, slanting stroke above the *sigma*, should be probably moved further up to align with the tip of the long stroke of the *rho* of γάρ in line 31 (Fig. 9).

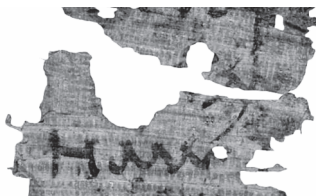


Fig. 9. Detail of lines 31–32

33. καὶ ἀπλ...[.] ἡμᾶς, π[ρ]ὶν ἢ πο[ρ]ευσθῆναι σε εἰς τὴν Πώμην: The correction of μέ[νε]ν to πρὶν delivers a different picture of the events. No dilemmas are being presented to Demetrios, but he is asked to do something first and then to do another thing in connection with the family of Epoeris (ἡμᾶς probably governing a lost infinitive). I suppose another request to visit is concealed in the lost part of the text. All these should be done before Demetrios travels to Rome.

42. Διονύσιος: The original edition had Διονύσιο[ν], which seemed as naturally complementing the greetings sent by Epoeris. However, palaeographical considerations challenge this reading (with an otherwise restored ending). Given that the right fragment requires approximation with the left as is the case with previous lines too, one observes a slightly curvy slanting stroke ending on the tip of the upright stroke, with which the *alpha* of ἀσπάζομαι starts (Fig. 10). This sort of ligature does not suit a *nu* + *alpha* combination, but a *sigma* + *alpha*, for which it is worth to compare σα in λέγουσα (ll. 19–20; Fig. 11).



Fig. 10. Detail of line 42



Fig. 11. Detail of line 43

The resulting reading Διονύσιος ἀσπάζομαι πολλά could imply that Dionysios belongs to the household of Epoeris. The construction one would expect is a third-person verb as an indirect greeting, see, e.g., *BGU* I 276 (Arsinoites, 2nd–3rd cent. CE), ll. 25–26: ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς πάντες (l. πάντας) κατ’ ὄνομ(α) καὶ Ὠριγ[ε]νης ὑμᾶς ἀσπάζετε (l. ἀσπάζεται) πάντες (l. πάντας), ‘I give my hugs to each and every one of you, and Horigenes give his hugs to all of you too’. However, it is often the case that a greeting is inserted in the first person as more immediate, see, e.g., *P. Mert.* II 82 (unknown provenance, late 2nd cent. CE), ll. 16–21: ἄσπα[σαι] τὴν μητέρα σου Ἀθηναΐδα καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν Ἀχιλλίωνα καὶ πάντας κατ’ ὄνομα. Σαραπάμμων [ο] σε ἀσπάζομαι, καὶ Ἱερατική σε ἀσπάζεται, ‘give a hug to your mother Athenais and to our brother Achillion, and to each and every one of you. I, Sarapammon, give my hugs to you, and Hieratike gives her hugs to you too’. Sarri (2018: 128–129, n. 480, with more examples of such practice) postulates that such sentences are the words of the writer of the letter. In this plausible scenario, Dionysios could have assisted Epoeris in writing the letter, and therefore, he is less likely to be Demetrios’ brother as his behaviour was painted somewhat negatively by Epoeris.

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ΕΥΓΡΑΦΙΟΝ
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UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
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CHAIR OF ROMAN LAW AND THE LAW OF ANTIQUITY



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Abstract: The article presents a new edition and translation of *P. Mert. II 81*, offering textual corrections based on available high-resolution images. The palimpsest document is a letter from Epoeiris to Demetrios (whom she calls ‘son’, most likely in an affectionate, non-literal sense) discussing a dispute involving a priest. Epoeiris relates she has been engaging in persistent oracular consultations seeking divine guidance for Demetrios, which demonstrates how oracles were used in everyday decision-making in Roman Egypt. The letter provides insights into kinship terminology, social relationships, and ritual practices. The newly restored text clarifies episodes of family negotiation, possibly personal debt, and the handling of sensitive affairs through temple oracles.

Keywords: oracular inquiry, Roman Egypt, private letters, kinship terminology, documentary papyri, palimpsest, family relationships.

Lajos BERKES & Anton KISTOL

Jesus’s reply to Abgar and a tax receipt:

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Abstract: The article presents the first edition of two Coptic ostraca held in the collection of the Dnipro Museum: one contains a fragmentary copy

of Jesus' apocryphal letter to Abgar and the other is a tax receipt from Djeme, dated to 717 AD.

Keywords: Dnipro Museum, Coptic ostraca, Egypt, apocrypha, tax receipt.

Jelle BRUNING

<i>Seven Arabic slave sale contracts on papyrus</i>	29
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Abstract: Annotated editions and translations of seven Arabic slave sale contracts on papyrus dating from the late ninth and early tenth centuries CE. Six of these documents belong to the Arabic Papyrus, Parchment and Paper Collection of the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library; one document is kept in the Egyptian National Library (its *editio princeps* has been published as *P. Cair. Arab.* II 124).

Keywords: slavery, slave trade, sale contracts, Egypt, Arabic papyri.

Katarzyna DE LELLIS-DANYS, Grzegorz OCHALA,

✉ Aleksandra PAWLIKOWSKA-GWIAZDA

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Abstract: First editions and re-editions of six Coptic and Copto-Greek ostraca from the collections of the Warsaw National Museum and the University of Warsaw. Five objects come from the Polish-French excavations at Edfu (Egypt) in 1930s, one from the Polish works at Faras (Nubia), and one is most likely of Middle-Egyptian provenance. The pieces from Edfu represent the well-known types of texts on potsherds known from other publications of the material from this site. They include receipts and accounts connected with deliveries of wine and crops. The text from Middle Egypt is an addition to the collection some 170 ostraca of the so-called *etmoulon* type. The ostrakon from Faras is the only literary text in the lot, preserving the beginning of Psalm 1. The edited ostraca are also studied from the perspective of their materiality, presenting the characteristics of vessel forms and fabrics used for their production.

Keywords: Coptic and Copto-Greek ostraca, Edfu, Faras, Middle Egypt, *etmoulon* ostraca, wine, literary ostraca, Psalms, materiality.

Giulio IOVINE

<i>Fragmentary legal document(s?) from the archive of Ammon scholasticus (P. Duke inv. 190-193 and 195)</i>	111
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Abstract: Edition, translation and commentary to some scattered fragments from the Duke University papyri collection (P. Duke inv. 190-193 and 195), which are part of the so-called archive of Ammon *scholasticus* (1st half of 4th

cent. CE) and may cover a single occurrence, a petition or records of court proceedings, referring an individual pretending to be a priest to escape his liturgies.

Keywords: archive of Ammon, late antique Egypt, Egyptian priesthood, petition, court proceedings.

Adam ŁUKASZEWICZ

An inscription from Hermopolis 145

Abstract: Hermopolis was an important cultic and administrative centre of Graeco-Roman Egypt. During three seasons (1987–1990) a Polish-Egyptian archaeological expedition directed by Marek Barański carried out excavations in the city's Great Basilica. The inscription under discussion is one of the results of these excavations.

Keywords: Hermopolis, archaeological works, Greek inscription, Hermes.

Gabriella MESSERI

Conto di vino (SB XII 10892 verso) 155

Abstract: First edition of a wine account extending over six columns. Columns i–iv (iv is lost) record the sale of vintage wine and columns v–vi payments to the parties involved (intermediaries, administrators, camel drivers, and donkey drivers) made with the profits from the sale of wine. The vineyards are located in the area of Karanis. The account was most likely written in 194 CE using the back of the land administration register SB XII 10892 edited by Anna Świderek in *JJP* 16/17 (1971) and republished by the author *JJP* LIV (2024).

Keywords: wine account, wine production, wine prices, land transport, Karanis (Arsinoites).

Radosław MIŚKIEWICZ

Diocles' Law (Dem. 24.42) and the problem of the validity of laws in Athens in the late fifth century BCE 179

Abstract: The article examines the significance of Diocles' Law (Dem. 24.42) for the growing problem of (in)validity of laws in the Athenian legal order in the late fifth century BCE. Diocles' Law should be understood as part of the broader set of vital principles that constituted an 'evolving law reform' aimed at consolidating laws and strengthening the rule of law and democracy after deep constitutional crises. This study reconstructs the factual and legal background to which specific clauses of Diocles' Law refer (sections 2.1–2.4; ἐν δημοκρατία, κυρίου εἶναι, the archonship of Eucleides, ἀναγεγραμμένοι).

More broadly, it outlines the challenges the Athenians faced at that time, and the measures they took to address them, arising not only from the two oligarchic coups d'état, but also from mounting problems in their legal, constitutional, and judicial order. The article also argues that an analysis of Greek legal language – and its manoeuvrings as seen in Andocides' *On the Mysteries* – confirms that issues of the validity (κυρίως εἶναι) of laws must be distinguished from those concerning their application (χρησθαι). Even though the latter also played a role at the time, especially due to the *caesura* marked by the archonship of Eucleides (403/2), the central argument is that Diocles' Law was enacted to impose order specifically on the validity of laws at a very particular historical moment. This law was relevant retrospectively to 'the scrutiny of the laws', with the vital involvement of ἀναγραφεῖς τῶν νόμων from the beginning of their work in 410, and, more broadly, to future law-making. In addition (section 3), the article eventually identifies the principle of 'legal certainty', which underpinned the introduction of Diocles' Law, and formed a key part of Athenian legal culture at the end of the fifth century BCE.

Keywords: Diocles' Law; validity of law; application of law; classical Athens, law reform, law-making, the scrutiny of the laws, legal certainty, law consolidation.

Anna PLISECKA

The stick and the carrot: Notes on P. Col. VI 123, ll. 6–8 237

Abstract: The article formulates a hypothesis that the penalties referred to in lines 6–8 of *P. Col. VI 123* (Alexandria, 200 CE) are related to two edicts copied in *P. Oxy. XLVII 3364* (Oxyrhynchus, 209 CE), ll. 1–9, in which Septimius Severus and Caracalla ordered the population to return to their homeland. In these edicts, penalties were imposed both on the fugitives and on their protectors, but additionally, as an incentive to follow the imperial order, a period of amnesty was announced. Similar amnesty is mentioned also in the Columbia papyrus.

Keywords: ἀπόκριμα, ἰδία, imperial edict, amnesty, petition.

Jakub URBANIK

The purpose of P. Dionysia (P. Oxy. II 237) and its mysterious beginning 251

Abstract: This article presents a new hypothesis regarding the function the so-called *Petition of Dionysia* (*P. Oxy. II 237* = *P. Dionysia*). The study re-examines the papyrus' structure and its procedural context, focusing on its newly deciphered mysterious beginning (col. i) by Constantinos Balamoshev. The findings suggest that *P. Dionysia* be not the original petition but rather a copy, possibly official, produced during its administrative processing. I conjecture that the document represents a late procedural stage, possibly including the governor's final decision and subsequent requests for execution.

Keywords: Dionysia, juristic papyrology, Roman administration of justice, court/judicial procedure, Roman Egypt, local law, Reichsrecht, Volksrecht.

Joanna WEGNER

Clerical authority in late antique Egypt: A papyrological perspective 283

Abstract: Papyrological sources from late antique Egypt attest to a variety of non-religious contexts in which clergy below the episcopal level – mainly presbyters and deacons – exercised authority in rural settlements. These contexts include formal and informal representation of village communities, mediation in conflict, and policing of the morals. While these phenomena have already drawn the attention of scholars, they were often viewed strictly as an outcrop of the religious authority wielded by the clergy. The present contribution is an attempt to nuance this perspective by taking into consideration the diverse socio-economic factors which contributed to the social standing of the clergy. It uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, with its subsequent reiterations, as the main theoretical framework and builds on the concepts of capital accumulation and convertibility between social fields in order to arrive at a multifaceted analysis of the clerics' position as fully integrated members of rural societies.

Keywords: late antiquity, Greek and Coptic papyri, clergy, institutional church, authority, field theory, forms of capital.

Marzena WOJTCZAK & Jakub URBANIK

To sell or to have sold? Hypotheke-praxis and dikaia time in P. Budge 311

Abstract: A tiny archive composed of the famous Coptic arbitration protocol *P. Budge* and three associated Greek documents, a settlement of claims, a sale, and a loosely connected marriage document, bring forward a fascinating controversy of the tormented times between the Persian and the Arab conquests of Egypt. Its settlement testifies to the operative force of law, legal awareness of its users, and dispute-resolution strategies in an environment of intrinsic legal plurality. A new text edition, providing an in-depth study of this material, delving into the dispute resolution method, rhetorics, and proper reconstruction of the events, is presently in the works. Before it is published, we would like to present here an aspect of this matter, closely connected to the very origin of the dispute, viz. our hypothesis on the nature of the security provided by the borrower, the widow Thekla, to her creditors, the consorts Philemon and Thekla. This central matter of the *P. Budge* controversy witnesses the profound legal awareness of its parties. Operating within the legal framework provided by Roman law, and without attempts to transgress it, the law-users of seventh-century Edfu managed to bend and form it to serve best their needs, creating a flexible form of security,

fitting the circumstances of Thekla-the-Widow and the creditors couple. It is amazing to see how, even at the dusk of its domination of Egypt, the Roman legal *forma mentis* was so strongly present in this inherently plural society.

Keywords: Edfu, arbitration, late antique Egypt, securities, *hypotheke-praxis*, *dikaia time*, legal practice, *apotage*, *hypothekimaia asphaleia*.

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