

Jakub Urbanik

THE PURPOSE OF *P. DIONYSIA* (*P. OXY. II 237*) AND ITS MYSTERIOUS BEGINNING*

1. PROLOGUE

THE OBJECT OF THE PRESENT STUDY is to present a hypothesis on the function of one of the most celebrated and researched papyri of Roman Egypt, the so-called *Petition of Dionysia*, *P. Oxy. II 237* – hereinafter referred to as *P. Dionysia*.¹ I am presenting these results ahead of the

*The ideas here presented are fruit of the research financed by the Opus 14 research project granted by the Polish National Centre for Research, no. 2017/27/B/HS3/01350: *How to Apply Law in Egypt? A Practical Guide for the Roman Judge: A Case-study of P. Oxy. II 237 and Other Papyrological Evidence on Legal Pluralism in the Roman Times*. I have profited much from the discussions we have been having in our research team, as well as from the critiques of the first presentations of this hypothesis at various scientific fora including the 30th Papyrological Congress in Paris in 2022, and the 76th session of Société internationale Fernand De Visscher pour l'histoire des droits de l'antiquité in Helsinki 2023. The re-publication of *P. Oxy. II 237*, which we would like to refer to as *P. Dionysia*, is scheduled to the early 2026.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Derek Scally (Berlin), who has corrected my English, and to the anonymous reviewer, who has saved me from a few patent errors.

The translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

¹ Citing all the relevant literature on this piece would be impossible, and futile in this place. Let me just then limit to the most recent ones, also published in this *Journal*; see thus, with references to the earlier studies: ALONSO 2023a; KREUZSALER 2008; KREUZSALER & URBANIK 2008; PLATSCHEK 2015; DOLGANOV 2019; URBANIK 2016 and 2024. What calls for attention, however, is that since its publication, the study of *P. Oxy. II 237* has

imminent publication of the new edition of the papyrus, fruit of the joint effort of the team composed of José Luis Alonso, Constantinos Balamoshev, and myself, in hope for the critique of the Readership, which would allow their revision in the book.

*

One the most spectacular results of our work is the recovery of the apparent beginning of the petition of Dionysia, *viz.* the address to the reigning prefect, Pomponius Faustianus.² This discovery, however, poses even more questions than before about the aim of the document, traditionally interpreted as the Dionysia's *libellus* to the prefect of Egypt. Such reading was already slightly problematic before, since the hitherto canonical text lacked the typical signature of the petitioner (unless one assumed it to have been placed in column ix, left unpublished, too, by Grenfell and Hunt). We have a confirmation now that this cannot have been the case. The placement of the address, located in lines 5–6 of column i, of which at least twenty-five lines are missing, obviously does not correspond to the beginning of the original page, the place in which one would naturally expect a petition to start. The matter would be even more complex, if we assumed that the scroll continued beyond what is now marked as column i, yet in all likelihood it was not the case (see further, pp. 256–257).

What was the original form of *P. Dionysia* then? Was its function primary, or secondary, that is was the papyrus proper used in a judicial procedure, or was the extant text posteriorly copied for some reason? The latter is possible, yet seemingly less likely. It is hard to imagine that someone would have wanted to keep such a long text, filled with details irrel-

been quite fragmented: various authors have dedicated their attention to selected aspects of intricate story the papyrus presents us with – and I have not been immune to this tendency.

² The newly established text, the reading of which is mostly due to C. Balamoshev's skill, is available online at <www.dionysia.wpia.uw.edu.pl>. The relevant lines (transcribed by Balamoshev) are:

- [25–28 ll. missing]
- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 5 | [±? |]εστ[±5] Πομπωνίω |
| 6 | [Φαυστιανῶ ἐπάρχῳ Αἰγύπτου ±? |] παρὰ Διο[νυ]σίας [X]αμρήμ[ο]νος τοῦ |
| 7 | [Φανίου μητροῦς ±? |] ἡγ[εμῶ]ν κύριε [...].εἰν ἐν |

evant for anyone who was not personally involved in the matter; making such a copy, fashioned in all probability by a professional scribe, would be too absorbing and costly.

It is unlikely, too, that Dionysia's plea was part of a collection of cases – and so that the hypothetical preceding lines reported another instance, unrelated to this of Dionysia herself but thematically connected to her legal troubles. Such compendia were concocted perhaps for educational purposes or in preparation of legal argument for a trial, or both.³ Yet, *P. Dionysia* is in fact dissimilar to this genre of texts, since the assemblages of this type report only the essentials of each case. Frequently they are limited to the mere decision of the judge, sometimes preceded by the most relevant parts of the trial-minutes. Our own document presents us with perfect specimens of such. At least two excerpts from the proceedings in front of Flavius Titianus and Paconius Felix cited by Dionysia may have originated from such a compilation (see col. vii, ll. 19–29 and 29–38, respectively).

It is thus preferable to discard these hypotheses and imagine that *P. Dionysia* was rather used in the actual dispute of Dionysia. Being filed with an authority, it ended up as part of a *tomos synkollesimos* (at the end of this article, I will return to the problem of whose *tomos* it may have been, see p. 277). If this was the case, we can immediately rule out one self-imposing solution for the missing lines, *viz.* that the space before the address to Pomponius Faustinus would have been occupied by a different text unrelated to Dionysia's petition. Such a thing simply did not happen, each of the documents had its own life before being glued to the others.

2. THE OTHER END OF *P. DIONYSIA*

Before I turn to the issue of the missing lines, let me begin from the other end, as the proper identification of the content of the mysterious column i (and, in conclusion, an attempt at ascertaining the function of *P. Dionysia*

³ See URBANIK 2023: 145–147 for a brief description of such papyri, and more detailed commentary on *P. Oxy.* XLII 3015 (after 117 CE), one of the best examples of the genre.

as a whole) depends also on assumptions as to how our text possibly terminated.

Let us recall that the plea was reused to create a copy of the fifth book of *Iliad* (published as *P. Oxy.* II 223). The book-maker re-sized the scroll, cutting off its upper and lower margins, probably previously damaged.⁴ This process has deprived us of the few first and last lines of each column of the claim. The text of *Iliad* begins on the verso of the badly preserved column ix of *P. Dionysia*. The copyist of Homer started the writing probably leaving an empty space before to provide some extra protection for the book. As we know, to no avail. The beginning of the Homeric poem was damaged and then repaired. A strip of a papyrus was glued to the disrupted first column of *Iliad*, and there the missing incipits of the verses were added (in a visibly different hand, somewhat less trained than the original one). The *kollesis* was left unused, it was simply too difficult to write on the thick, uneven surface of the gluing. In the process even the end of the petition deteriorated still further: only about half of the original column (14 cm) has been preserved, from which the most used part was cut off, and the adjacent part was partially covered by the repair slip (c. 4.5 cm). Additionally, the papyrus cracked alongside the line of gluing.

The state of deterioration of the original column ix may suggest that it was the most external part of the roll – which, of course, is logical, given the fact that the text of *Iliad*'s book V commenced there. If *P. Dionysia* eventually turned to form part of a *tomos synkollesimos*, it may have been placed at one of the latter extremities. Even if the reconstruction of column ix is only approximate, it seems, given the usual dimensions of the columns of the recto and verso, their intercolumnia, and the added slip, that the original book text started in the space corresponding precisely to this column.⁵ It would be extremely fortuitous to have the book-support cut exactly (or almost) at the place in which the recto text begun. It may be assumed with a certain degree of security that the *P. Dionysia* did end

⁴ See the introductions of GRENFELL & HUNT to *P. Oxy.* II 223 and 237, as well as, in much more detail, *P. Dionysia*, chapter 'Materiality of Text'.

⁵ See much more condensed similar argumentation by GRENFELL & HUNT 1899: 151, who thus tend to assume that the petition ended indeed with col. ix.

in its last preserved part, which – let us recall – bears her legal evidence. This data may be further corroborated by the legal evidence syllabus Dionysia provides (col. vii, ll. 14–18). She listed the legal matters in the exact same order in which the legal evidence was later provided. The content reconstruction of column ix seems to exhaust the plan of legal arguments she drew. Moreover, in its 41st line there is a snake-shaped symbol which could denote the end of the evidence cited.⁶

This legal syllabus is followed by the *petitum* (ll. 18–19: ‘So that because of it all he will now once for ever stop troubling the prefecture, as you yourself have wished in your letter’), which is immediately tailed with the marker of the magistrate’s endorsement in an abbreviated form (σ[ε]ση(μείωμαι)), typical for a copy. This element, among others, strengthens exclusion of the possibility that *P. Dionysia* preserves a draft (more on this mark of endorsement, below, pp. 276–277). There lacks the usual signature of the petitioner, which one would expect to have been fitted between these two elements. The preceding columns from i, l. 1 to vii, l. 19 must have borne the petition proper: the previously published columns iv–vii, and the now restored columns i–iii bring about the recount of the controversy, citations from the documents exchanged between the parties, and the judicial authorities, and the internal communications between various grades of the officials.

The Greek of the text is practically flawless (minus the phonetic variants typical of the second-century *koine* of the papyri), with practically no abbreviations, and the hand, seemingly, of a professional scribe.

It becomes obvious that *P. Dionysia* cannot have been the original petition, but it must represent a posterior documentary stage of the dispute,

⁶ GRENFELL & HUNT 1899: 151 signalise (weakly, given their observations on the relation between the recto and the verso, which had led them to assume that *P. Dionysia* had originally 9 columns, see above, n. 4) that the papyrus might have had another, tenth column, since Dionysia in her *elenchus instrumentorum* mentions among the material she appended judgments of *archidikastai* as well (see col. vii, l. 14). Yet, no such judgment has been clearly preserved. They state that column ix seemingly did not contain any decision of an *archidikastes*. This, however, does not necessarily have to be the case: one could imagine that an *archidikastes* was involved in the case reported in ll. 24–30. The prefect mentioned there, Annius Syriacus, does not seem to appear in his judicial function.

perhaps even one of the ultimate ones (I will come back to this point later, pp. 267–277). The high standard of its redaction prompts us to believe it was rather an official copy, and not a private one (made for instance for the home archive or as collectible item within a *vademecum* of legal texts, see above, p. 253). It must have been thus produced in the administrative procedure in which the plea was being proceeded.

3. BACK TO THE BEGINNING

It is now time to return to the apparent first column of the petition. The extant text traditionally identified as the relicts of column i of the claim, and measuring about 8 cm, corresponds to the largely preserved column xii of the epos on the verso (12 cm wide, which constitutes about $\frac{4}{5}$ of the average column width on the verso, i.e. 15–17 cm, plus inter-columnar space). Since the columns of Dionysia's petition are unusually wide (between 21 and 23 cm plus inter-columnar space, each line fits about ninety letters), this portion of the plea would have been enough to place one and a half of the columns of *Iliad*. Column xiii of the epos is not extant, and the scraps containing column xiv do not bear similarities to *P. Dionysia* on their recto. Given that writing on a *kollesis* would be extremely impractical, it would be natural to conclude that Homer was then copied on a different text of the *tomos*, to which our petition had been glued (in the order of the *tomos*, it would be a text preceding the one of Dionysia, which, as just explained, most likely terminated the *tomos*). This junction was susceptible to destruction, and so this may explain why column xiii, which commenced there, has gone missing. Alternatively, one could assume that a larger portion of the beginning of Dionysia's petition had disappeared. I find it, however, far less likely. If the petition had been larger even by just one column, it would have provided support for columns xiv and xv of *Iliad*'s book V. Discarding such a nice support for the literary text would not have been reasonable (unless, that is, Dionysia's plea had suffered quite some destruction before; I find it again less likely, since the surviving portion of the papyrus seems to be fairly well-kept).

For the reasons above explained, it is thus probable that: (1) the original text was indeed not longer than nine columns, and (2) the remnants of column i bear the actual beginning of the text.

And so, the mystery remains, why on earth what seems to be the regular start of a petition was only placed in two-thirds of the first column's height. A further complication ensues from the apparently unusually lengthy address to the prefect. If we assume that it begins with *Πομπωνίῳ* at the end of line 5, and terminates with *παρὰ Διο[νυ]σίας* [X]αιρήμ[ο]νος τοῦ at the end of line 6, we have c. sixty-five letters to fill. Of these only twenty are covered by the almost certain reconstruction [*Φαυστιανῶ ἐπάρχῳ Αἰγύπτου* ±?]. In this epoch the address to the magistrate (be it the prefect, as in our case, or any subordinate in the judicial ladder: *archidikastes*, *dioiketes*, supervisor of the privy purse, *epistrategos*) was still minimal in the case of texts following the hypomnematic format. It was basically limited to the name of the official and his title, followed by the descriptors of the petitioner: their name (usually only the father's name), and the place of origin, finally terminated by the salutation.⁷ Sporadically, an honorific title appeared, yet it is quite rare, becoming current only about five–six decades later; it also typically complemented *hegemon*, as the form address, and not *eparchos*.⁸ It is thus unlikely to have been

⁷ Suffice it to recall just a few contemporary examples: *P. Lips.* II 145 (Ptolemais Euergetis, 189 CE) I^o, ll. 1–2: [...]οι Τινηίῳ Δημητρίῳ ἐπάρχῳ [Α]ἰγύπτου [παρὰ] Ἀντωνίου Δόμνου τοῦ καὶ Φιλαντινίδου Ἀντωνίου; *P. Strash.* IV 198 (unknown provenance, 181–183 CE), ll. 1–2: Δεκίμῳ? vac. ? Οὐετ[ουρίῳ Μακρίνῳ ἐπάρχῳ Αἰγύπτου παρ]ὰ Κολοσσίωνος; *P. Berl. Frisk* 3 = *SB V* 7517 (Ptolemais Euergetis, 211–212 CE), ll. 1–2: Α[ὐ]ρηλίῳ Βαίβίῳ Ἰουγκεῖ[νῳ ἐπάρχῳ Αἰ]γύπτου παρὰ Στοτορήτεως υἱοῦ Σ[α]τύρου Στοτορήτ[ε]ως γεωργ(οῦ) τῆς Ἀρ[σιν(οειτῶν)] π[όλ(εως)]. One exact parallel, also directed to Pomponius Faustinus, is reconstructed, yet, with the extreme probability: *P. Amb.* II 79 (Hermopolis, 186–187 CE), l. 1: [*Πομπωνίῳ Φαυστιανῶ* ἐ]πάρχῳ [*Αἰγύπτου* -c. ?-]. Seemingly a unicum, *P. Oxy.* XXII 2342 (102 CE) adds 'lord' after the name, yet in conjunction with a *hegemon*, not an *eparchos* (l. 1: Γαίῳ Μινικίῳ Ἰτάλῳ τῶι [κ]υρίῳ ἡγεμόνι). See an overview of the prefectural titlature by BASTIANINI 1988: 387–390.

⁸ Perhaps the only securely dated roughly contemporary example thereof is *P. Oxy.* LXV 4481 (179 CE), l. 1: Τίτῳ Πακτουμῆγῳ Μάγνῳ τῶ λαμπροτάτῳ ἡγεμόνι vac. (on this text, see below, p. 277 and n. 17). The following attestation of *λαμπροτάτος* in the address is only half a century later: *P. Vindob. Tandem* 2 (Antinoopolis, 238–244 CE). In fact, the use of 'illustrious' is more frequent in reported speech informing about a petition being filed with the

used by Dionysia (and even if it would only take a small fraction of the space we need to fill in).

Our own text provides a parallel of the petition beginning with the plea of Chairemon cited in extenso in lines 12–19 of column vi. There even the addressee and the word of salutation are omitted, the petitioner is only described further by his personal title (the ex-gymnasiarch), serving as the identification marker. In the instance of Dionysia this naturally cannot have been the case; one could perhaps expect a longer filiation marking in her place (with *papponikon*), and perhaps a mention of her husband Horion's assistance (which is not certain anyhow, since his appearance in the preserved sections of our document was minimal, and always indirect). At any rate, it really helps solving the issue – such complements would be placed after the initial address to the prefect.

In what follows, I will try to solve this double problem, starting with a conjecture about the content of the missing lines. A solution to the second, lesser, enigma, could substantiate the idea of the goal of *P. Dionysia* as a whole – so I shall come back to this issue further on.

If the 'beginning' of the *Petition of Dionysia* is to be found somewhat before where the original text started, we need to look for analogous phenomena in papyri. This, as we know, poses one grand difficulty: there are no real parallels to *P. Dionysia*. Still, some notable similarities among petitions on their traverse through the administrative *iter* could be traced in the papyrological corpus. Processing petitions in Roman Egypt produced a *matryoshka* structure of entreaties. The original, endorsed by the authority to which it was addressed, would be then served to the official indicated in their superior's endorsement as competent to deal with the matter. Oftentimes, additional documents were appended: proofs of the claims, or – as in our case – legal evidence excerpted from previous judgments (especially of prefects and *epistrategoï*), prefectural edicts, legal opinions, finally, imperial edicts and rescripts. I shall now look at some of these

prefect (as in our text col. vi, l. 14, or vii, l. 6, in reference to the governing Pomponius Faustinus). Another honorific collocation, yet not reserved for the prefect, *διασημοτάτος*, is used in a similar way (see col. vii, l. 6, referred to the former prefect Rufus), paving its way to the direct speech only in the 240s CE, the earliest in the non-Egyptian *P. Euphr.* 1 (Appadana, 245 CE), followed by *P. Oxy.* XII 1468 (256–258 CE); further BASTIANINI 1988: 389–390.

instances, seeking clues on the structure of *P. Dionysia*. Given its uniqueness, any hypothesis would always be doomed to remain a conjecture. In what follows I will present and analyse several suggestions on what may have been the content of column i's missing portion.

3.1. Legal evidence?

Let me start with a tempting idea suggested by the document's apparent trial use and the use of legal evidence served to the judicial authority.⁹ Some other petitions present the legal evidence even before the official start of the entreaty with an address to the official.

Among several texts so structured there is another Oxyrhynchite text, *P. Oxy.* XLVII 3364 (209 CE), whereby Herakleides¹⁰ provides first the imperial rescripts of Severus and Caracalla and only then turns to his request to the prefect Subatianus Aquila. Similarly, in *P. Flor.* III 382 = *P. Flor.* I 57 = *W. Cbr.* 143 (Hermopolites, 223 CE), the plea proper (which only starts in line 27 of the papyrus) is preceded by no less than six imperial constitutions of the same emperors. They are to support the protest of Aurelius Heron directed to the prefect Marcus Aedininius Iulianus¹¹ against continued

⁹ An in-depth discussion of the function of this usage would deviate us too much from the topic of this essay. Its primary goal is to inform the judge about the applicable law, since – contrary to our modern perspective – *iura non novit curia*. The 'precedents' are not aimed to bind the judge, the way they operate under modern common law (see KATZOFF 1972: 290–292, with references to the earlier scholarship, see also 257–268, where he meticulously describes the content of Dionysia's precedents known back then). They rather, as ALONSO 2023b: 253 (§§ 65–66) has put forward, provide also some legal certainty about the possible outcome of the trial, in the legal environment where the magistrate should decide the case guided by his intuition of equity and thus is allowed to ignore or rather circumvent the prior norms. See also URBANIK 2024: 12–13.

¹⁰ THOMAS 1975: 201–221 and THOMAS 2003: 201–206. In a funny coincidence, Herakleides' parents were Chairemon and Dionysia, but, given the commonness of these names, no kin-relation should be hazarded.

¹¹ The petition was originally addressed to Septimus Arrianus, the *dioiketes*: the address was crossed and then the name of the prefect written. Again, a possible 'mistake' in the address allows for even more letters to fill in the missing lines (even if, strictly speaking, this hypothesis goes against one of the famous laws of Youtie).

imposition of a liturgy, notwithstanding his old age and blindness, as well as liturgical liability on behalf of his already adult son. The prefect endorsed the petition at the end (col. ii, ll. 92–94), commanding the *strategos* to follow the tenor of the imperial constitutions.

Such a structure cannot have been the case with *P. Dionysia*. The legal evidence in our papyrus comes only after the *petitum*, just like in the case of many other earlier and contemporary petitions, and even if they invoke imperial law. An instructive *comparandum* is *P. Würzb.* 9 (Arsinoites, joined reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus). In this petition of an Antinoite to be exempted from a liturgy, particularly rich legal material comes after the badly preserved *petitum*. It starts with the imperial grants in chronological order: first comes the original privilege of Hadrian, thereafter its confirmation by Antonius Pius is reported, and another one by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The section concludes with two individual decisions of the prefect Petronius Mamertinus and one by the *epi-strategos* Statilius Maximus, who upheld the tenor of the imperial grants.

In fact, shifting the location of the imperial law citation to the prominent beginning of the entreaty seems to have come about only with the reign of Severus and Caracalla (the only petitions following this pattern use their constitutions). Its popularisation may be connected to the imperial journey to Egypt in 199–200 CE.¹²

For these reasons this format most probably could not provide a good parallel for *Dionysia*, unless we imagine that her legal evidence was divided, just like in the case of *P. Oxy.* LXVII 4593 (206/211 CE), another protest against an appointment to a second liturgy, contemporary to the one already being carried out by the petitioner. This feature by N.N. son of Eudaimon is opened by an *apokrima* of the emperors, originally posted in the in the portico of the Serapeum at Memphis;¹³ there follows the peti-

¹² See *SHA* 17.4. There are numerous judicial decisions of these emperors recorded for the time of their advent to the Nile country; see J. D. THOMAS, in COLES *et alii* 2001: 170–171 (introduction to *P. Oxy.* LXVII 4593), with update of the lists of such documents, as well as CORIAT 1997: tables on 27–29 and 123–125.

¹³ See *P. Oxy.* LXVII 4593, l. 4 n. for this unusual publication place. Thomas points out that the emperors were not necessarily in Memphis, but that their Alexandrian decision was simply republished in several important places of the *chora*. Contra CORIAT 1997: 625.

tion proper to Subatianus Aquila (line 5 serves solely for the address to the prefect), which ends with excerpts from a trial before Quintus Maecius Laetus (in office 200–203 CE). While formulating his plea the petitioner refers to the imperial constitution cited ‘above’ and the minutes appended ‘below’.¹⁴

This would be a tempting solution, especially since Dionysia, in her legal syllabus, suggests that she would refer to the imperial law,¹⁵ but the extant document has no direct mention of it. Sadly, I would think it is implausible. The imperial decision regarding security of the written agreements registered in the archives is clearly referred to in the course of proceedings before Marcus Petronius Mamertinus (col. viii, l. 43 – ix, l. 18, in l. 6), where a royal *apokrima* directed to this prefect is generically evoked. Thus, we can put away the hypothesis of the imperial legislation being cited before the petition proper, also because, as we have proven, Dionysia structured her material thematically. In her *elenchus instrumentorum* the imperial law was mentioned in the section devoted to the registration of the marriage contracts – thus it would concord with the place in which we have identified a royal judgment cited.

3.2. A double copy?

The clues given by the petitions under administrative proceeding seem to be much more promising. In a seminal article published three decades ago, Rudolf Haensch comprehensively describes the way the petitions were processed in the Roman Egypt (Haensch 1994). The pleas were

¹⁴ As plausibly reconstructed by the editor in ll. 10–11: ... προτάξας ὁδὴν τὰ θεῖα (l. θεῖα) περὶ [τούτου διατεταγμένα ὑπὸ τῶν κυρίων] ἡμῶν Ἀ[ὐτοκράτορον καὶ ὑποτάξας τὸν γενόμενον περὶ τοῦ[.....], ‘having attached above divine constitution on that matter of our Lords the Emperors, and attached below the [decision] on that matter ...’.

¹⁵ See col. vii, ll 17–18: δὴ καὶ ὅτι τὰς συγγραφὰς πα[ρα]τίθεσθαι τοῖς βιβλιοφυλακίοις νόμιμον καὶ τὰς ἐκ τούτων γεινομένας κατοχὰς πάντες ἡγεμόνες καὶ αὐτοκράτορες κυρίας [εἶν]αι καὶ βεβαίως τετελέχασιν (...), ‘also that it is legitimate to have written agreements registered with the record archives and that all prefects and emperors have willed to be valid and secured’.

served to the competent authority, in judicial cases to the prefect or one of the highest judicial officials, *epistrategoi*, the supervisor of the privy purse, or the chief justice of Alexandria. The entreaty then was examined cursorily and if found convincing, endorsed to be investigated by a lower official, usually a *strategos*, either to complete the query and issue a decision following the instructions of the higher authority or to refer it back to it, with the findings established at the lower level. In many instances the word of positive endorsement was limited to a laconic *apodos*, 'give back', and one had to understand that the prefect or *epistrategos* fully shared the request for treatment voiced by the petitioner. Haensch's study proves that since the reign of Antoninus Pius, a copy was left in the archive of the addressee and glued among similar ones to form a *tomos*, the original instead marked with an endorsement and signature (*hypo-graphē*), was given to the petitioner to be served further to the lower judicial officer (Haensch 1994: 492). A description of such an *iter* is also provided by our text: col. vi, ll. 35–36: 'As Chairemon brought this letter of yours and on the 3rd of Epeiph gave it to Harpokration, the royal scribe'. In some cases, there are proofs that the petitions filed during one station of the judicial circuit were treated and endorsed jointly.¹⁶

Around the time of Dionysia, a new procedure was developed. The original of the petition was deposited with the authority, and once endorsed, publicly displayed (often in a freely accessible temple), together with other requests dealt with by the prefect.¹⁷ The petitioner then had

¹⁶ See HAENSCH 1994: 490–492; for the joint processing – 'Sammelsubscriptio' – see HAENSCH 1994: 492–498, this procedure according to Haensch is not evidenced after 171 CE (p. 498), so it could be safely excluded for *P. Dionysia*, too.

¹⁷ HAENSCH 1994: 499–504. See Thomas's introduction to *P. Oxy.* LXV 4481 (179 CE), supplemented by his introduction to *P. Oxy.* LXXIII 4961 (223 CE), for an in-depth study with a list of such documents and an overview of the earlier scholarship, among which the most important are the introduction of Bastianini to *P. Horak* 13 (unknown provenance, 177/8 CE): an authenticated copy, sadly only fragmentarily preserved, of a petition to the prefect T. Pactumeius Magnus; and Hunt's introduction to *P. Oxy.* XVII 2131 (207 CE). Other examples (listed by Bastianini and Thomas): *BGU* II 525 + III 970 = *M. Chr.* 242 (Karanis?, 177 CE), an authenticated copy of the petition of Tapetheus daughter of Ptolemaios to the prefect Titus Pactumeius Magnus claiming return of her dowry after her husband's death (both *BGU* II 525 and III 970 are written in the same hand, which shows that

a double-copy thereof made, which, authenticated, was then served to the authority back at home. The inner text was folded and sealed by the witnesses, which was to prevent falsification. Such texts start with a prescript informing about the copy being made from a request entered into the prefectural archive (with a reference to the sheet of the *tomos*), and the place of its publication, as well as of the prefectural endorsement (ὑπογραφή, Lat. *subscriptio*). A good example thereof, also because of the striking similarity to the case of Dionysia, is provided by *P. Oxy.* LXXIII 4961 (223 CE). This plea of Aurelia Diogenis against her father is even more tempting as a parallel, since the original petition starts only in line 9 of the preserved text. Lines 1–3 are taken by the informatory prescript, corresponding to the just described format (this time the endorsed petition was published in the treasury building). The following lines (4–8) bring about norms relevant for the case, reported by the petitioner for the judge’s information. They are: an imperial decision of Severus and Caracalla in the case of Eudaimon, a prefect’s judgement, and an edict of the same emperors published in Alexandria. All boil down to a statement that a preliminary judgement (*subscriptio*) obtained in virtue of false facts is not a *praeiudicium* (binding decision), and thus may be ignored in the following procedure.

Yet, even a superficial analysis of *P. Oxy.* LXXIII 4961 and its counterparts (all dated to the same half a century to which also *P. Dionysia* belongs) shows that this method only *prima facie* could solve the enigma of the missing lines. Unlike these authenticated petitions, *P. Dionysia* cannot have been a double copy. According to Haensch, this method became standard only about twenty years after the affair of Dionysia, in 207 CE.

they once belonged to the same document); *P. Oxy.* LXV 4481 (179 CE), an authenticated copy of the petition of Apion aka Pausirion to the same prefect (on this text see further, p. 277). The petitioner complains about his wife Ta... aka Sarapous, who had appropriated some of his things and did not want to appear in front of the *epistrategos* (notably, the authentication notice only follows the text of the petition, and thereafter there is the order to the *epistrategos*); *P. Oxy.* XVII 2131, a copy of a petition to the prefect of Subatianus Aquila fromn Totoës, protesting his undue appointment to a liturgy (there is a prefectural endorsement ordering the *epistrategos* to deal with the matter); *BGU XI* 2061 (Arsinoites, 210 CE), another authenticated copy of a petition to the same prefect authored by a farmer Tate, which similarly includes an endorsement for the *epistrategos* to take care of the case; and very likely the fragmentary *P. Stras.* IV 235 (199/211 CE).

The three prior instances, dated to 178–179 CE, constitute the first attempts of this new treatment announcing the change that would only take place later, and clearly are not evidence for a stringent rule of procedure. Another fact speaks for this assumption: all the doubly copied petitions are written *transversa charta*, while *P. Dionysia* follows the usual way of writing, it also has the legal evidence after the main body of the petition and not before it. Ultimately, *P. Dionysia* is simply too long to be copied conveniently twice for the purpose of authentication. Thus, this hypothesis may be safely discarded.

3.3. Endorsement by superscription

Let us thus proceed to other options. In some cases, the petitioners started writing their petition in the middle of the papyrus sheet leaving some space at the upper part for an official's endorsement. A good example of such practice, contemporary to our document is provided by *P. Köln XIV 572* = *SB XII 10972* (Oxyrhynchos, 182 or 183 CE), where a request to appoint a guardian directed to the strategos was preceded¹⁸ by the space reserved for the official decision (amounting to as many as 16 lines of the text).¹⁹ This place was then filled in by the acting *strategos*, the royal scribe Perikles, who commanded the city scribe to appoint a guardian 'at his own risk'. The text was later glued to form a part of a *tomos synkollesimos* of the bureau of the *strategos*.

¹⁸ Original, partial, edition in LEWIS 1970. In *P. Köln XIV 572*, Klaus Maresch published the lower fragment preserved in the Cologne collection and described the applied procedure.

¹⁹ A similar situation could have occurred, according to the editor, Dieter Hagedorn, in the case of a petition for a tutor *ad actum*, *P. Hamb. IV 280* (Herakleopolites?, 3rd cent. CE), and a very fragmentary *SB XXVI 16428* (HAGEDORN 2001). Both applications were addressed to an *exegetes*. Hagedorn points out yet another instance of a similar procedure in the archive of Petaus in the case of requests to buy land classified as *ὑπόλογος*. See, especially, *P. Petaus 20* (185 CE), where the royal scribe Kollanthos transmitted the letter of Apollonios, the *strategos* of the meris of Herakleides, to the village scribe in Ptolemais Hormou. The *strategos*' letter enclosed the petition of Rufus, who was willing to buy the land. His original application had most probably an empty space left for the *strategos*' endorsement.

Similarly, in an instance of the much posterior *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2849 (296 CE), the original petition of Aurelia Apollonia to be exempted from the duty to deliver two oxen for the reparation of the canals was written so as to leave some space for the answer of the authority. The benevolent response of the *πρωτοστάται* could hardly fit in the slip left empty, and thus it was written in smaller and somewhat squeezed characters (see *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2849, ll. 1–7 n., as well as Youtie 1976a).

Neither case presents us with ideal pieces of comparison for the plea of Dionysia. In both, the space taken by the official response is much smaller than the one we would hypothetically have at our disposal in *P. Dionysia* (respectively, ll. 1–16 and 1–7). The lines of both texts are also far shorter than the ones of our text. These two petitions are also addressed to lower rank official, and there are no extant original examples in this format in petitions addressed to the prefect, even if one cannot exclude such possibility.²⁰ Still, they do give us some idea what the missing lines might have – at least partially – contained. In fact, such procedure could be reconstructed from the narrative of Dionysia in column vi, where she reminds the prefect that he had already dismissed the claims of her father. Pomponius Faustinus countersigned the petition of Chairemon writing to Isidoros, *strategos* of Oxyrhynchos. This missive, cited in lines 32–35 of column vi, may have well been added above the entreaty of Chairemon.

This may be further corroborated by instances indirectly confirming superscription of the endorsement in the case of higher officials. Such composition is evidenced by *P. Gen.* II 109 v^o = *P. Leit.* 5a = *SB VIII* 10197 (Theadelphia, 180–181 CE). It starts with a fragmentarily preserved decision of the *epistrategos* T. Claudius Xenophon addressed to the acting *strategos* in response to a petition in a liturgical matter presented by Agath(...), Ptolemaios, and Nilos. What follows is a copy of the petition proper. For our aims it does not matter that the whole text was written by one hand (elegant,

²⁰ Sadly, only four legible lines are left from the letter written by the prefect Tettius Africanus (in office 80/1 – 12 February 82 CE) to the otherwise unknown *strategos* of the Oxyrhynchites, Pomponius (*P. Oxy.* LXXXV 5497), mentioning someone, son of Nikoboulos, the former gymnasiarch. One could hazard that it could have been an endorsing pre-script added to the original petition served to the prefecture.

most likely of a trained-official scribe): it still presents us with a pattern of a text preceding the original plea. Likewise, the request of Apollonarian aka Aristandra, *P. Oxy.* VI 899 (200 CE), analysed in detail on the following pages, proves indirectly that a *dioiketes* answered her entreaties superscribing both of her petitions.

One could imagine that the prefect's endorsement was more complex than the ones we have extant in the examples just presented. That becomes likelier, if we consider what its content may have been. A clue to that is given by the end of the supplicatory part of our document, namely by the *petitum* of Dionysia, and its immediately preceding letter of the acting *strategos* Harpokration. Harpokration acting for Isidoros did not know how to deal with the claim for *apospasis*,²¹ having found no instruction in this respect neither in the epistle of Rufus nor the one of Faus-tianus. Accordingly, he gave Dionysia a leave to address the prefect again in this matter (col. vii, ll. 6–8), so once new instructions be given, he (or some other *strategos*-ranked official) may pronounce the final judgment. This *petitum* – the very last one of our petition – is reported in lines 8–13 of column vii and followed by the syllabus of the legal evidence. The answer of the prefect must have thus responded to the previously undealt matters and could be longer and more complex than usual, possibly involving an order to ignore the local law.

This reconstruction still seems not to be enough to fill the space we have at our disposal, even if we imagined an empty line separating the petition proper from the prefectural 'sacred' letter,²² part of the address

²¹ Note that this term never appears in our documentation but is rather a modern rendering of the right of the father to take his unwilling daughter away from her husband. I use it here for convenience: see further *P. Dionysia*, 'Legal commentary'. More on the issue, most recently, URBANIK 2016: 1063–1067 with the discussion of the earlier scholarship on the subject.

²² See, e.g., *P. Wisc.* I 33 (after 8 September 147 CE): this petition to a prefect cites an earlier one sent to the same official. Both lines 1 and 9 are written in slightly larger and spaced letters, centred and separated from the body of the petitions by spaces above and below. Another, later example could be *SB XVIII* 13260 (Herakleopolites, 328 CE), where the address to a *logistes* is written in a separate line, and the petition to him is separated from the earlier one addressed to a prefect, cited below. This practice of page-setting is also quite typical for petitions to lower officials asking them to execute prefectural decisions.

being spaced or/and not filling the whole very long line.²³ The situation would not improve even if the prefect's endorsement were to be written with larger, elegant letters.²⁴ The earliest case of such 'chancery' lettering is testified in *SB* I 4639 (Alexandria, 209 CE).²⁵ The order of the prefect Subatianus Aquila to Theon, the *strategos* of Arsinoites, to release a certain Niger from forced labour in an alabaster mine is written in elegant letters thrice as high as the remaining ones in the document. This is not so likely in our case: the prefectural command is not an endorsement but an independent text, written by a secretary and then signed by the prefect by a simple ἐρρῶσθαί σε βούλομαι (l. 6).

3.4. Endorsed petition forwarded further for execution?

Thus, we need to look further. And some *matryoshka* petitions provide us with some ideas to additionally cover the remaining free lines. The original entreaty, endorsed by the higher official, was then presented to the lower one, who had been entrusted with the resolution of the case. This happened through a new entreaty requesting the execution. There is no need to present all such documents, just a few will suffice here, providing us with quite telling examples.

SB XIV 12087 = (partially) *P. Oslo* II 18 (Youtie 1976b) is, according to the editor, Herbert C. Youtie, a private copy of a document submitted to the *strategos* (it lacks the subscription of the addressee).²⁶ Ptolemaios son of Diodoros requests that Harpokration, *strategos* of the division of Polemon and Themistes, executes the 'sacred subscription' of *epistrategos* Vedius

²³ As stated above, the lines of Dionysia's plea are extremely long. This phenomenon, albeit rare, is not completely unparalleled: see, e.g., *SB* XIV 12087 = (partially) *P. Oslo* II 18 (Theadelphia, 162 CE) or *SB* XVIII 13260, where the lines range c. 90 letters.

²⁴ In words of LEWIS 1963: 14.

²⁵ First published by ZUCKER 1910; see MESSERI & PINTAUDI 2000: 73 (= *BL* XII 179). It is worth checking the picture of this specimen available at <<https://berlpap.smb.museum/00467/>> (accessed 30 November 2025).

²⁶ It does, though, include the signature of the petitioner.

Faustus appended to his original petition, in which Ptolemaios complained he was unjustly subjected to the poll tax on account of his adult son who resided elsewhere. But there is more. Ptolemaios first wanted to address the *epistrategos*, but the official was away, so he turned to the *iuridicus* Herennius Philotas. The latter subscribed the petition redirecting the matter to the *epistrategos*. Finally, this one, appropriately approached by our petitioner, endorsed the matter to be decided by the *strategos*, to whom *SB XIV 12087* was directed. Let us also notice that the document cited a piece of legal evidence: excerpts from the minutes of Munatius in a case a decade earlier than the petition. Only after this piece there came the petitioner's signature. I will come back to this noteworthy feature in a moment. What also calls our attention are exceptionally long lines (c. 90 letters) of this document – more or less the same as in the case of Petition of Dionysia.

I do not claim that the case of Dionysia would be first treated by some other judge (especially since its content might have been at least partially reserved to the prefectural jurisdiction),²⁷ but this ping-pong between the magistrates allows one to imagine that the introductory brief to the *strategos* may have been much more complex than just a mere request to follow the prefectural command.

Such an enquiry to a lower official may have also included a cursory overview of the actions taken to date. That was the case in *P. Mich.* VI 426 (Karani, 199/200 CE), a petition of Gemellus aka Horion son of Gaius Apolinarius Niger (the same appears in *P. Mich.* VI 423, 424, and 425) to the *epistrategos* Arrius Victor. The petitioner (notably claiming his eye-sight to be heavily impaired), asked for a confirmation of his exemption from a liturgy unduly imposed on him by the elders of the village of Karani. In the mis-sive, he recalled his disability and high status, Antinoite citizenship, as well as special privileges granted (he could wear a chlamys at meetings of the *boule*), but also the apparent scheming of the elders and their mistake in his

²⁷ See, *P. Dionysia*, 'Legal commentary', and earlier, in detail, JÖRDENS 2011: 327–356; JÖRDENS 2016: 93–98, discussing *SB XII 10929* (? , 133–137 CE). This papyrus preserves an edict of the prefect M. Petronius Mamertinus publishing apparently an imperial constitution on the reserved jurisdiction of the prefect, which would cover also the cases between parents and children (ll. 25–26).

proper appellation.²⁸ At the end of the preserved text (l. 24) he copied the sacred response of Alfenus Apolinarius, procurator *a censibus Augusti*,²⁹ which most probably was written above his original plea to the official.

Another instance presenting the same processing is *SB XIV 11707* (unknown provenance, 212 CE), a petition of Dionysios son of Serenos to Horion, royal scribe of the Oxyrhynchite, acting *strategos*. The petitioner recounted the matter in a longer narrative (in no less than 25 fairly long lines of c. 50 letters), only then to report his original petition to the prefect, and his 'holy' *hypographe* (not extant). The matter discussed there seems to be procedural: it involved *hybris* suffered by the petitioner from a possible defendant, laws and prefectural judgements were vaguely and generically invoked to support his plea. Dionysios informed the office of the *strategos* that the prefect commanded by a 'sacred letter' the *strategia* to take the necessary steps.

The other roughly contemporary parallel is provided by the famous petition of Apollonarian aka Aristandra, *P. Oxy. VI 899* (200 CE). Even if more than a half of it has been lost, its content could be plausibly reconstructed (see Grenfell & Hunt 1908: 225), making it one of the pieces with most *matryoshkas*. It was doubtlessly a request to the *strategos* to carry out the instructions of the higher authority. Apollonarian claimed that she was unduly forced to lease and cultivate public land, a task from which women were to be exempted. This was the content of the original petition to the *dioiketes* (which is also the beginning of the surviving fragment of the papyrus). The plea included also legal evidence consisting of the minutes of the *epistrategos* Parmenion from August/September 154 CE (Thomas 1972: 188 [no. 43]), in which, in turn, an edict of Tiberius Iulius Alexander³⁰ and

²⁸ See ll. 11–12: ὡς Ὁρον Ἀπολιναρίου ἀνύπαρκτον ὄνομα ὃ καὶ ἀγνοῶ, 'Horos, son of Apolinarius, a fictitious name which I do not know'.

²⁹ The identification by REA 1968: 370–374. The 'sacred' denomination of Apolinarius' letter denotes, according to Rea (p. 372), his belonging to the imperial household; see, most recently with additional confirmation, JÖRDENS 2024: 239 n. 40.

³⁰ It is worth noting by the way that the papyrus presents the prohibition of Tiberius Iulius Alexander as exclusively referring to women in the context of γεωργία. The most famous known edict of this official, also issued in the second year of Galba's reign, generally prohibited coercion to rent public land and to undertake the collection of taxes (see

judgements of the prefect Valerius Eudaimon and of the *epistrategos* Corelianus were evoked (the last ones just generically, as confirming the general rule of female exemption). The original signature of the woman followed immediately the legal evidence. This petition was endorsed by the *dioiketes*, by a letter added **above** the petition, but also by a ἐσημύω[σ]ᾶ[μην] in line 32.³¹ The same structure was followed in the ‘outer-doll’, Apolloniarion’s second petition in lines 46–47, where the woman’s second plea ends, we have her signature and again *dioiketes*’ approval.³²

After the first petition the *strategos* was ordered to carry out the decision favourable to the petitioner. We learn from Apolloniarion’s narrative that he commanded the village scribes to remove her from the list of the cultivators. Yet, there seemed not to be a final satisfactory solution for the woman, since she petitioned the *dioiketes* again, citing her own first missive and his endorsement as well as recounting the actions of the acting *strategos* (his letter to the village scribe to hold an enquiry of the case was also fully cited). This second petition was also considered approvingly by the addressee, who endorsed for a final decision of the new *strategos*: And this was the final, outer, shell of our *matryoshka*: the request to the present *strategos* to finally release Apolloniarion from undue duties. As we can see, this is – albeit much shorter – a wonderful piece of comparison.

Perhaps yet another block could be added to this Jenga tower, in the hope that the whole structure will not fall into pieces. The endorsed plea, copied and addressed to the *strategos* may have been forwarded further by him for execution or further examination by (a) lower ranking official(s). *P. Dionysia* records such instance, too. The *strategos* Isidoros redirects a copy of the endorsed petition of Dionysia to the keepers of the registry archive, asking them to conduct investigation about the *katoché* (col. v,

OGIS 669, ll. 10–15: τελωνεία, μίσθωσις οὐσιακῇ). Unless *P. Oxy.* VI 899 refers to another act of the same prefect, perhaps a later one – such was the idea of CHALON 1964: 68 n. 79 and 104–105 – we would have yet another example of a very selective ‘citation’ of the legal material by the petitioner.

³¹ Ἀπολλ[ων]άριον ἢ καὶ Ἀριστάνδρα ἐπιδέδωκα. ἐσημύω[σ]ᾶ[μην], ‘I, Apolloniarion also known as Aristandra submitted. I have signed’.

³² Ἀ[π]ολλωνά[ρ]ιον ἢ καὶ Ἀριστάνδρα ἐπιδέδωκα. (ἔτους) η Τϋβι α[.]. ἐσ]ημωσάμην, ‘I, Apolloniarion also known as Aristandra have submitted. Year 8, Tybi 1[?]. I have signed’.

ll. 17–19). The *bibliophylakes*, having made a report, sent it back to Isidoros, and he dispatched the results back the prefect (col. v, ll. 28–29). Such further examination, however, does not seem so likely in this case. As we learn from the whole context there is hardly anything more that the *strategos* or his aides had still to investigate in this matter (let us keep in mind that in his final missive to the prefect, Harpokration explains he had no instructions how to proceed with the claim for *apospasis*).

And thus, we may imagine that the petition was to be served to the other party, summoning Chairemon for the final act of this court family drama. There are several occurrences of such *modus operandi*, even if posterior to *P. Dionysia*. *P. Ryl.* II 117 = *FIRA* III 181 (Hermopolis Magna, 269 CE) starts with a letter of the *strategos* Aurelios Tyrannios commanding the *hyperetes*³³ to serve the petition he had received from Aurelia Tinuthis aka Theodora to the *kosmetes* Aurelios Eudaimon. Clearly, the instruction was written in an empty space left by the petitioning party above their entreaty.³⁴ After the body of the petition there comes a signature for the illiterate woman, and for her assisting husband, and finally the acknowledgment of the addressee.

Three other texts have similar format. Much later than *P. Dionysia*, they are worth mentioning as illustrative examples.

P. Oxy. XVIII 2187 (304 CE),³⁵ preserves a petition to a *logistes*, whose name has not been preserved, asking him to execute the endorsed application to the prefect, to summon the defendant, and to conduct the trial. The petitioner, Septimius Aristion, had prepared the missive, filling the date in line 1, then leaving a space for the *logistes*' instruction before

³³ On the function of this official, see now STRASSI 1997; earlier: MODRZEJEWSKI & KUPISZEWSKI 1957–1958.

³⁴ By this petition, addressed directly to the *strategos*, the woman gave up the inheritance of her deceased brother in lieu of the payment of the debts he had taken from the mighty *kosmetes* Eudaimon. She asks that a copy may be served to her opponent. We may thus see that the petitioner ordered a professional scribe to prepare the petition in double; both signed for her and her assisting husband by Aurelios Kopreas. One was filed in the archive of the *strategos*, the other, endorsed, was then transmitted further, and perhaps returned to the petitioner being subscribed by the addressee. On the legal aspects, see further SOLAZZI 1925.

³⁵ See further, with literature, SESTON 1947.

reproducing his correspondence with the prefect (which included also instances of legal evidence). He implored the official that in accordance with the prefect's leave his sister-in-law, Thaesis, be served a copy of the summons and appear in the court to settle a case resulting possibly from guardianship Arrius provided for his now deceased niece. Notably, the narrative in the plea to the *logistes* is very detailed, it occupies extremely long (over 180 letters!) lines 5–14 of the text. In three lines between the date and the petition proper, the *logistes*, represented by his deputy Eutolmios, ordered the *hyperetes* Sotas to act accordingly (σῆσθι μὲν(είωμαι) ends line 3, before the date of the endorsement in line 4). This part was obviously written later; the letters are large and more spaced than the body of the petition. From Sotas' note on the verso we know that the mission was only half-accomplished: the summons was served, but Thaesis refused to accept them.

SB XX 14587 (Oxyrhynchos, 308 CE)³⁶ presents us with a petition of Aurelia Thaesis to a *logistes* to carry out prefectural approval of her appended entreaty in a hereditary matter. The prefect's decision in this case as well as a mention of the collocation of the original petition in his *tomos* was added after the woman's supplication. The *logistes* ordered a *hyperetes* to execute the request in a missive added above the body of the original petition. The endorsement of the *logistes* in line 6 (σῆ[σθι] μὲν(είωμαι)) was added not immediately within his own letter, but in an empty space following the address of the petition directed to him.

Another order of a *logistes* to a *hyperetes* opens SB XVIII 13260 (Herakleopolites, 328 CE).³⁷ The aide is to bring to his presence the defen-

³⁶ Published in SIJPESTEIJN & Worp 1990. Let us also notice this papyrus' very long lines (above 125 letters per line!) and the page-setting of the text visually separating each of the sections of the document.

³⁷ KOENEN & SIJPESTEIJN 1987. The editors assume it also formed part of a *tomos synkollesimos*. In the context of our document, it is also interesting to observe that this papyrus was fashioned in a very transparent manner: see the photo at <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1513>> (accessed 1 December 2025). Each section of the document starts in a new line, the part added by the *logistes* (ll. 1–4) was written in smaller letters to fit into the space left. There is a larger empty space left before the marking of the copy (l. 11), the lines of the text are also rather long, comprising of c. 95 letters.

dants sued in the attached petition to the prefect. This petition, unlike the previous example, was preceded by a copied endorsement of the prefect Septimius Zenius³⁸ and was served to the *logistes* by Aurelia Asklepias. The signature of this woman closes the text.

The *matryoshka*-format of our document may be confirmed by a possible solution to the second enigma presented at the beginning: the unusual length of the purported address in lines 5–6 of column i. The prefect's name in line 5 could have completed not the original address of Dionysia's petition, but rather her prescript to the lower official, in which she informed of the petition being sent to the prefecture and received back with endorsement. The termination of line 6 (and its likely following in the reconstructed beginning of line 7) would in turn belong to the address of that original *libellus*.³⁹ A good parallel – albeit too long – of such formulation is provided by the already discussed *SB XIV 12087*, even if in this case the official who decided the case was not the prefect but the *epistrategos*.⁴⁰ Another rough *comparandum* could be provided by *P. Lips. II 145 r°* (Ptolemais Euergetis, 189 CE); there, however, the petitioner approaches the prefect appending a prior petition addressed to a deputy *doiketes*, in which they had ‘explained the whole matter’.⁴¹

³⁸ The prefectural approval – asking the *logistes* to examine the defendants – was again added above the petition proper, its copy mentions the place in which the original was archived, as well as reports, indirectly, the Latin signature of the magistrate.

³⁹ This is the hypothesis put forward by J. L. Alonso.

⁴⁰ II. 2–4: (...) οὐδ' ἀνέτεινα βιβλιδίου τῷ κρατίστῳ ἐπιστρατήγῳ Ο[ὕηδ]ίῳ Φαύστῳ καὶ ἡ[ς] ἔ]σχον ἐπὶ σέ ἱερὰς ὑπογραφῆς καὶ ἡς ἔσχον ἡγεμονικῆς κρίσεως περὶ ὁμοίου πράγματος ἀντίγραφον ὑπέταξα πρὸς τὸ ἀπαρενόχλητόν με γενέσθαι. ἔστι δέ· Οὕηδίῳ Φαύστῳ τῷ κρατίστῳ ἐπιστρ[ατήγῳ] παρὰ Πτολεμαίου [Δ]ιοδώρου (...), ‘I have appended a copy of the petition that I submitted to the most excellent *epistrategos*, Vedius Faustus, and of his sacred subscription which I received for transmission to you, and of the prefect's judgment that I obtained concerning a like matter, so that I may be free of harassment. The copy follows: “To Vedius Faustus, the most excellent *epistrategos*, from Ptolemaios, son of Diodoros ...” (transl. APIS).

⁴¹ II. 8–13: οὐδ' ἀνέτεινα τῷ κ[ρ]ατίστῳ [Ιουλίῳ Λι]κιννιανῷ διαδεχομένῳ καὶ τὰ κ[ατ]ὰ τὴν διοίκησιν [βιβλιδί]ον ὃ πάντα [τὰ τ]οῦ πρ[ό]αγ[μα]τος ἐγγέγραπται καὶ ἡς [οὗτος κ]ατὰ τὸ ἀκόλουθον [ἐγρ]αψεν ἐπιστολῆς [τῷ τ]ῆς Ἡρακλεΐ[δου μερίδος] τοῦ Ἀρσινοεΐτου νο[μο]ῦ στρατηγῷ τὰ ἀντ[ί]γραφα ὑποτάξας, ‘I have appended a copy of the petition to the most

Before I conclude, we still need to deal with the much-abraded traces, missed by the original editors, in line 19 of column vii, occupying a *spatium* between Dionysia's *petitum* and her first piece of legal evidence.⁴² They likely stand for *σεσημ(είωμαι)*. If we interpret this abbreviation correctly, it should represent the endorsement of the request by an official. The question is who this authority was. Also, placement of this putative signature raises doubts. Likewise, its *ductus*, seemingly different than the *σεσημ(είωμαι)* in line 29, opens a question whether it was put down by the same hand as the scribe of the document.

Normally, such authorisation comes immediately after the request, and the request would technically end with the legal evidence, and then be followed by the signature of the petitioner with the date. Such is the case of the *matryoshka* petition of Apollonarion alias Aristandra, *P. Oxy.* VI 899, discussed above (pp. 269–271). A similar setting could be observed also in *BGU VII 1574* (Philadelphia, after 31 July 176 CE). In this plea, Lucius Ignatius Casianus requests a *strategos* to transmit his counter-claim to his opponent Marcus Valerius Turbo (again we face here the *matryoshka*-structure, the letter of an *archidikastes* to the *strategos* cites the text of Ignatius' request to present his *ἀντίρρησις*). The text was endorsed by *σεσημ(είωμαι)*,⁴³ which is followed by a note of a *hyperetes* about the delivery to the other litigating party.⁴⁴

excellent Iulius Licinnianus, deputy *dioketes*, in which the whole matter has been described and of the letter he has in reference to it written to the *strategos* of the meris of Herakleides of the Arsinoite nome'). On the contrary, *P. Diog.* 17 (Arsinoites, later 2nd cent. – 3rd cent. CE), which forwards a copy of a petition with the prefectural endorsement, cannot provide a good parallel, since it documents the later system of processing the petitions and informs about the placement of the original in the prefectural *tomos* (see HAENSCH 1994 discussed above, n. 17). It could be thus dated rather to the third century CE, and not to the second/third century as suggested by the editor.

⁴² The new reading is again due to C. Balamoshev's careful autopsy of the original, with the use of a microscope.

⁴³ Despitest the Viereck and Zucker's tentative assumption, *σεσημ(είωμαι)* – written according to them in the same hand as the body of the document – cannot render the signature of Ignatius to the petition to the *archidikastes*, but rather the latter's endorsement. 'I have signed' is reserved for the officials and never used by the private petitioner.

⁴⁴ ll. 23–24: -c. 11-] (ἐτους) 15 Αὐρηλίου Ἀντωνίνου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου Μεσορή. σεσημ(είωμαι). (m. 2) Ἄρειος ὑπηρέτης [... μεταδέδω[κ]α ἐνώπιον. (m. 3) (ἐτους) 15 Αὐληρίου

Let us notice that the endorsement beneath the petition in both cases just discussed does not exclude a written instruction added by the authority above the *libellus*. In *P. Oxy.* VI 899, the first petition of Apollonarian (ll. 2–32), with a copy of the short endorsement by the *dioiketes* in line 32, was immediately preceded by his ‘letter’.⁴⁵ The second petition, endorsed cursively in line 47,⁴⁶ must have also had a similar longer instruction written above: it is mentioned in line 47, where Apollonarian sums up what she presents to the *strategos* for the further proceeding.⁴⁷ Likewise, *BGU* VII 1574 has in lines 5–7 the letter of the *archidikastes* of the Arsinoites to the *strategos*, and then also very likely his short endorsement in line 23.

If, as in the case of Apollonarian and Ignatianus, it was the addressee of the petition who undersigned it, we would expect the prefect’s approval in this place of *P. Dionysia*. Given the particularly lengthy material, the chancery might have been tempted to have a double endorsement: in the form of a letter-instruction for the *strategos*, preceding the petition proper, and again after the *petitum*, as if approving the whole body of the petition.

Normally, however, the governors’ consent to a petition, as far as we know, is not rendered by *σεσημ(είωμαι)*. This is rather reserved for the

Ἀντωνίνου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου Φαμ(ενώθ), ‘Year 16 of Aurelius Antoninus Caesar, the Lord, in Mesore. I have signed. Areios sar, the Lord, in Mesore. I have signed. I, Areios *hyperetes* have conveyed in person’.

⁴⁵ It clearly results from lines 38–39: the acting *strategos* transmitting these documents further lists them (βιβλειδίων δοθέντων μοι ὑπὸ Ἀπολλωναρίου τῇ[s] καὶ Ἀριστάνδρας ᾧ ἀν-εἰλημπτὰ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ κρα[τίστου] δι[ο]ικητοῦ, ‘the petition presented to me by Apollonarian also called Aristandra, to which is joined a letter of his highness the dioecetes’ [transl. Grenfell & Hunt]).

⁴⁶ It is puzzling that this line notes actually two endorsements: [ἐσ]ημειωσάμ(ην). Ἀὐφίδιος Ἀμμώνιος ἐσημ(ειωσάμην). The editors assume that the first one was the one of the *dioiketes* and are mystified by the second endorsement of Auphidios Ammonios, whose identity they are unable to ascertain. Indeed, the role of this official does not result clearly from the preserved text. One could hazard a guess, perhaps, that he was the *dioiketes*, and that the double signature was a scribal error?

⁴⁷ ἕως τοῦτου τ[ὸ] βιβλειδ[ι]ον καὶ ἡ ἀναγρ[α]φή καὶ ἡ ἐπιστολή, ‘Thus far the petition, the list, and the letter’ (transl. Grenfell & Hunt); see GRENFELL & HUNT 1908: 225 for the reconstructed scheme of the petition.

lower officials, especially the *strategoi* (see, contrariwise, a specimen of the prefect's endorsement for the *strategos*, transmitted by our own petition col. ii, l. 16: τὰ [ἀ]κρόλοῦθα πράξ[αι ἔρρ(ωσο)]). Still, it may be used by the prefect to authenticate the trial minutes. Our own document provides evidence for such usage in the same column vii, in line 29, where Flavius Titianus subscribed his judgement in this way.

So, I expect (see above, p. 266) that the governor issued much more detailed instructions (after all, the lack of directives was the reason of Harpokration's leave to petition the prefect again); and if so, they occupied part of the missing sections of column i, possibly following the putative request to the *strategos* to carry them out. As proven by *P. Oxy.* VI 899 and *BGU VII* 1574, such longer epistolary endorsement above the request does not bar a short, abbreviated endorsement at the end of it. Thus, one cannot exclude that this mysterious σεσημ(είωμαι) was designed to signal the prefectural approval: its unusual form might be explained by the cursive, and seemingly abbreviated, portrayal of Dionysia's last petition.

The comparison between *P. Oxy.* VI 899 and our text also demonstrates that there seems to be missing a reference to Dionysia's having filed the petition, that is her own signature. This inaccuracy could perhaps be justified by the fact that, unlike in many other instances (again *P. Oxy.* VI 899's use of ἀντίγραφον would suffice), Dionysia does not claim here that she produced an 'exact copy' of the missive. Neither does she affirm this as introducing obviously abbreviated rendering of her father's second missive in column vi. It is thus different from the instance in which the *strategos* denoted the material transmitted to the keepers of the archives in line 17 of column v as a 'duplicate of the *libellus*' (ἴσον βιβλιδίου). It also differs from 'copies' (ἀντίγραφα, ἀντίγραφον) of the prior material attached in the epistolary ping-pong between the prefects and the *strategoi* (see Rufus' letter in col. ii, l. 15; Isidoros' examining a copy of Chairemon's request in col. ii, l. 17; copies of the reports of the *bibliophylakes* appended to the letter of Isidoros to Faustianus in col. v, ll. 29–30).

A different solution may be offered if we assume that σεσημ(είωμαι) was written by a different hand than the rest of the document. It is almost impossible to discern whether it was the case (even if, as observed above, it has definitely a *ductus* different from the *comparandum* in line 29).

If it is a different hand though, it might point to the *strategos*, the addressee of the final petition of Dionysia. This could fit with the idea presented above (pp. 271–272) that Dionysia requested the *strategos* to serve a copy of her pleading to her father, and the official commanded this action to the *hyperetes*. We know that the place of the *strategos*' endorsement could at times be random.⁴⁸ Here, perhaps, we may be succoured by another look at BGU VII 1574. This document, effectively served by the aide to the opposing party, lacks any kind of endorsement of the petition addressee, that is the *strategos* (see *comparanda* discussed above, pp. 271–272). So, unless the *strategos*' command was only transmitted orally, this final $\sigma\epsilon\sigma\eta\mu(\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\mu\alpha\iota)$ in line 23 might have been his approval. Such a hypothesis would be easier to accept if the $\sigma\epsilon\sigma\eta\mu(\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\mu\alpha\iota)$ there was written in a hand different than most of the document. This was excluded by the first editor, and, having examined the picture with the help of Constantinos Balamoshev,⁴⁹ I would concur with this opinion.

Both solutions are tempting, but given too many unknowns in this equation, they must remain a conjecture.

All the arguments set out above may also be strengthened by the apparent similarity, noticed by Balamoshev, of the scribal hand that wrote our papyrus and the one of *P. Oxy.* LXV 4481 (179 CE), which transmits an authenticated copy of the petition directed to Pacumeius Magnus. I have explained above (pp. 263–264), why *P. Dionysia* cannot have been such an authenticated copy. Yet, if it was indeed written by the scribe of *P. Oxy.* LXV 4481, or at least someone who had a very similar handwriting, it could suggest that it was prepared by someone working in the milieu of the prefectural bureau. This scribe may have prepared the papyrus handed in for the prefectural endorsement or copied the text endorsed by the prefect to be served to the local authority at home. The unusual length and complexity of the text demanded a skilled scribe to compose it. Such were available from among those employed in the administration. The outcome, let me reiterate, gives the impression of a professional hand.

⁴⁸ Still usually towards the beginning of the request and not the end, see *P. RyI.* II 117 = *FIRA* III 181 or *SB* XX 14587 discussed above.

⁴⁹ See the photo at <<https://berlpap.smb.museum/02995/>> (accessed 1 December 2025).

3.5. Missing signature

If the above presented arguments are correct, we might expect the signature of Dionysia and an acknowledgment of her father at the end of column ix. This is impossible as the text clearly ends there. A snake-like sign seems also to mark the end of the substantial block of the plea. Were they completely missing or merely somewhere along the way?

In one instance, *P. Oxy.* XLIII 3126 (328 CE), the petitioner's original signature is only borne by the plea to a *logistes*, written in the first, narrower column. It is missing, meanwhile, in the *libellus* to the prefect bearing his prescript endorsement, which the *logistes* is asked to carry out, copied in a broader column ii.⁵⁰ Dionysia's signature might have thus been contained in the mysterious missing lines of column i, just before the address to Pomponius Faustianus (which might have been in turn preceded by *ἔστι δὲ ἀντίγραφον ? vel sim.*), and not reproduced beneath. The just-discussed *P. Oxy.* XVIII 2187 (a copy filed with the *logistes* to be served to the defendant), lacks the signature all together. The editor postulates a simple [*διευτύχει*] in line 14, just before the reproduced copy of the original application petition to the prefect. Thus, it is a very tempting match, if *P. Dionysia* was indeed intended to be served to Chairemon.

Otherwise, the petitioner's signature is normally present in the petitions transmitting a positively endorsed pleas to lower authorities.⁵¹ We could thus hypothesise that the autograph of Dionysia followed either on a smaller slip of papyrus, in a much narrower column, or perchance on the now lost verso.⁵² This we cannot know: as explained above (pp. 254–255), part of column ix was lost and then replaced by an added papyrus sheet on which the missing incipits of *Iliad* were added. Given the size of Dionysia's column

⁵⁰ It was omitted even though there is more than enough space on the papyrus. Only the lower part of column ii survives, its bottom margin could easily fit 3–4 more lines, moreover the end of the copy of the plea to the prefect is clearly marked by a horizontal line, see the photo at <https://portal.sds.ox.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/P_Oxy_XLIII_3126_Petition_to_a_Logistes/21167263?file=37536853> (accessed 1 December 2025).

⁵¹ See *P. Oxy.* VI 899, *SB XVIII* 13260, and *SB XX* 14587.

⁵² See *P. Oxy.* XVIII 2187. Its verso notice confirming a *hyperetes* having served the summons to the defendant and her refusal to accept them.

(26–30 cm, with lines containing *c.* 90 letters), it is possible that column ix, of which 14 cm remain with *c.* 50 letters surviving in the lines, was narrower, and that it was followed by a very narrow column x with the signatures.⁵³ Yet, this solution seems less likely and is based purely on conjecture.

One final matter to address here is the destination of our papyrus. If the reasoning hitherto presented here is correct, it cannot have belonged to the prefectural archive. Additionally, it would have been an incredible stroke of fate, if the petition concerning an Oxyrhynchite matter and filed with the prefectural bureau ended once more in Oxyrhynchos, this time in a supply of waste paper to find its second life as a book used there.

It is thus sensible to assume, given where the document was found and our reconstruction of its lost part, that it ended up as a part of the archive of the *strategos* of Oxyrhynchos and later was given away to be used as a book support.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is likely that *P. Dionysia* = *P. Oxy.* II 237 represents one of the latest stages of the procedural processing of the final petition of Dionysia, the one she submitted to Pomponius Faustianus, following a leave from the royal scribe Harpokration, puzzled with no prefectural instruction regarding Chairemon's claim for his daughter's separation. The missing 25+ lines of column i most probably did not include legal evidence, but the final decision of the governor in the matter and a follow-up request of Dionysia addressed to the *strategia* to have it carried out. Given the space we have at our disposal, it is possible that this request was forwarded once more by the *strategia* to a lower official, perhaps in order to be served to Chairemon, summoning him to appear for the final act of this dispute.⁵⁴ The text,

⁵³ One possible, yet inexact, parallel of such format could be *P. Lips.* II 145, where the second column with the subscription of the petitioner and the prefect's final endorsement is much narrower.

⁵⁴ An instance of such could be *P. Turner* 34 (Diospolis Parva?, 216 CE), a copy of a petition to an acting *epistrategos*, perhaps destined to be served to the defendant. At its beginning,

having been used thus, found its final place in the *strategos*' archive, and from there it may have been sourced to serve as support for the copy of the fifth book of *Iliad*.

Jakub Urbanik

University of Warsaw
 Faculty of Law and Administration
 Chair of Roman Law and the Law of Antiquity
 Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
 00-927 Warsaw
 POLAND
 e-mail: kuba@adm.uw.edu.pl

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALONSO, J. L. (2023a), 'Agraphos gamos: Marriage, family and inheritance in Roman Egypt', [in:] Ph. SCHEIBELREITER (ed.), *Symposion 2022. Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte (Gmunden, 22.-24 August 2022)* [= *Gesellschaft für Griechische und Hellenistische Rechtsgeschichte* 29] Wien, pp. 407-454.
- ALONSO, J. L. (2023b), 'Papyrologische Quellen', [in:] U. BABUSIAUX *et alii* (eds.), *Handbuch des römischen Privatrechts* I, Tübingen, pp. 224-275.
- BASTIANINI, G. (1988), "Επαρχος Αἰγύπτου nel formulario dei documenti da Augusto a Diocleziano", [in:] H. TEMPORINI (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.10/1, Berlin – New York, pp. 581-597.

Aurelios Apollonios aka Sarapian, a citizen of Alexandria, refers to the 'imperial decree transcribed above (the very one indeed that I transcribed above [transl. Thomas]' (col. i, ll. 4-5: ... τὴν προτεταγμένην καὶ θεῖαν διάταξιν [ἥνπερ] καὶ προέταξα ...'), in which virtue the will of his father should be considered void. This will he also claims to have appended in a copy below the text (col. ii, l. 26: ὑπέταξα δὲ καὶ τῶν διαθηκῶν ἀντίγραφον). Yet, neither of these texts is present in the extant document. The editor, J. D. Thomas, convincingly explained they were only appended to the original and not in this copy. Given the bizarre length of line 3 and its squeezed letters, it seems that the address in lines 2-3 between 'a copy' and the body of the petition was only added later (see the description and photo at <<https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.turner;34>> [accessed 1 December 2025]). We see thus that a copy served to the other party did not necessarily have to include all the material presented to magistrates, but this data does not preclude that it was not the case of *P. Oxy.* II 237.

- CHALON, G. (1964), *L'édit de Tiberius Julius Alexander* [= *Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana* 5], Olten.
- COLES, R. A., GONIS, N., NODAR, A., OBBINK, D., & STEWART, R. (eds.) (2001), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* LXVII, London.
- CORIAT, J.-P. (1997), *Le prince législateur: la technique législative de Sévères et les méthodes de création de droit impérial à la fin du principat* [= *Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome* 294], Rome.
- DOLGANOV, A. (2019), 'Reichsrecht and Volksrecht in theory and practice: Roman justice in the province of Egypt (*P. Oxy.* II 237, *P. Oxy.* IV 706, *SB* XII 10929)', *Tyche* 34, pp. 27–60.
- GRENFELL, B. P., & HUNT, A. S. (1899), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* II, London.
- GRENFELL, B. P., & HUNT, A. S. (1908), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* VI, London.
- HAENSCH, R. (1994), 'Die Bearbeitungsweisen von Petitionen in der Provinz Aegyptus', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100, pp. 487–546.
- HAGEDORN, D., 2001, 'Eine neue Bestellung eines *tutor ad actum*', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 135, pp. 163–164.
- JÖRDENS, A. (2011), 'Eine kaiserliche Konstitution zu den Rechtsprechungskompetenzen der Statthalter', *Chiron* 41, pp. 327–356.
- JÖRDENS, A. (2016), 'Die Strafgerichtsbarkeit des Praefectus Aegypti', [in:] R. HAENSCH (ed.), *Recht haben und Recht bekommen im Imperium Romanum. Das Gerichtswesen der römischen Kaiserzeit und seine dokumentarische Evidenz Ausgewählte Beiträge einer Serie von drei Konferenzen an der Villa Vigoni in den Jahren 2010 bis 2012* [= *Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement* 24], Warsaw, pp. 89–163.
- JÖRDENS, A. (2024), 'Plautian in Ägypten', [in:] S. KILLEN, S. SCHEUBLE-REITER, & S. SCHMIDT (eds.), *Caput studiorum. Festschrift für Rudolf Haensch zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* [= *Philippika* 177], Wiesbaden, pp. 231–258.
- KATZOFF, R. (1972), 'Precedents in the courts of Roman Egypt', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Romanistische Abteilung* 89, pp. 256–292.
- KOENEN, L., & SIJPESTEIJN, P. J. (1987), 'Offizielle Korrespondenz', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 33, pp. 55–62.
- KREUZSALER, C. (2008), 'Dionysia vs. Chairemon: Ein Rechtsstreit aus dem römischen Ägypten', [in:] U. FALK, M. LUMINATI & M. SCHMOECKEL (eds.), *Fälle aus der Rechtsgeschichte*, Munich, pp. 1–13.
- KREUZSALER, C., & URBANIK, J. (2008), 'Humanity and inhumanity of law. The case of Dionysia', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 38, pp. 119–155.
- LEWIS, N. (ed.) (1963), *Leitourgia Papyri* [= *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* NS 53/9], Philadelphia.
- LEWIS, N. (1970), 'Instructions for appointing a guardian', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 7, pp. 116–118.
- MESSERI, G., & PINTAUDI, R. (2000), 'I papiri greci d'Egitto e la minuscola libraria', [in:] G. PRATO (ed.), *I manoscritti greci tra riflessione e dibattito. Atti del V Colloquio*

- internazionale di paleografia greca (Cremona, 4-10 ottobre 1998)* [= *Papyrologica Florentina* 31], Florence, pp. 67-82.
- MODRZEJEWSKI, J., & KUPISZEWSKI, H. (1957-1958), "Υπηρέται: Étude sur les fonctions et le rôle des hyperètes dans l'administration civile et judiciaire de l'Égypte gréco-romaine", *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 11-12, pp. 141-166.
- PLATSCHKE, J. (2015), 'Nochmals zur Petition der Dionysia', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 45, pp. 145-163.
- REA, J. R. (1968), 'Five papyrological notes on imperial prosopography', *Chronique d'Égypte* 43, pp. 365-374.
- SESTON, W. (1947), 'L'amnistie des vicennalia de Dioclétien d'après P. Oxy. 2187', *Chronique d'Égypte* 22, pp. 333-337.
- SOLAZZI, S. (1925), 'P. Ryl. 117', [in:] *Raccolta di scritti in onore di Giacomo Lumbroso*, Milan, pp. 246-252 (= [in:] IDEM, *Scritti di diritto romano* III, Naples 1960, pp. 39-44).
- SIJPESTEIJN, P. J., & WÖRPER, K. A. (1990), 'Three London papyri', [in:] M. CAPASSO, G. MESSERI SAVORELLI, & R. PINTAUDI (eds.), *Miscellanea Papyrologica in occasione del bicentenario dell'edizione della Charta Borgiana* II [= *Papyrologica Florentina* 19/2], Florence, pp. 507-520.
- STRASSI, S. (1997), *Le funzioni degli υπηρέται nell'Egitto greco e romano* [= *Schriften der Philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* 3], Heidelberg.
- THOMAS, J. D. (1972), *The Epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*, II: *The Roman Epistrategos*, Opladen.
- THOMAS, J. D. (1975), 'A petition to the prefect of Egypt and related imperial edicts', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 61, pp. 201-221.
- THOMAS, J. D. (2003), 'The subscriptions in PSI IX 1026 and P. Oxy. XLVII 3364', *Tyche* 18, pp. 201-206.
- URBANIK, J. (2016), 'Dissolubility and indissolubility of marriage in the Greek and Roman tradition', [in:] Z. BENINCASA & J. URBANIK (eds.), *Mater familias. Scritti romanistici per Maria Zabłocka* [= *Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement* 29], Warsaw, pp. 1039-1068.
- URBANIK, J. (2024), 'The petition of Dionysia, daughter of Chairemon. A witness of legal plurality in Roman Egypt – P. Oxy. II 237 (after 27 June 186 CE)', [in:] U. LUDWIG & P. OESTMANN (eds.), *Münster Source Reader on Legal Unity and Pluralism*, Münster, pp. 4-27.
- YOUTIE, H. C. (1976a), 'Critical trifles V', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 22, pp. 43-49 (= *Scriptiunculae Posteriores* I, Bonn 1981, pp. 325-331).
- YOUTIE, H. C. (1976b), 'P. Mich. Inv. 160 + P. Oslo II 18: μηδένα υπέραλλα ἀπαί-τεῖσθαι', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 23, pp. 131-138.
- ZUCKER, F. (1910), 'Urkunde aus der Kanzlei eines römischen Statthalters von Ägypten', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften* 37, pp. 710-713.

THE JOURNAL OF JURISTIC PAPYROLOGY

FOUNDED BY
RAPHAEL TAUBENSCHLAG

EDITED BY
W. GRAHAM CLAYTOR
TOMASZ DERDA
ADAM ŁAJTAR
GRZEGORZ OCHAŁA
JAKUB URBANIK

VOL. LV (2025)



ΕΥΓΡΑΦΙΟΝ
ΗΕΗΩΘΗ
ΠΑΡΔΔΟ



UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
FACULTY OF ARCHAEOLOGY
CHAIR OF EPIGRAPHY AND PAPYROLOGY



UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
FACULTY OF LAW AND ADMINISTRATION
CHAIR OF ROMAN LAW AND THE LAW OF ANTIQUITY



THE RAPHAEL TAUBENSCHLAG
FOUNDATION

THE JOURNAL OF JURISTIC PAPYROLOGY

FOUNDED BY
RAPHAEL TAUBENSCHLAG

EDITED BY
W. GRAHAM CLAYTOR
TOMASZ DERDA
ADAM ŁAJTAR
GRZEGORZ OCHAŁA
JAKUB URBANIK

VOL. LV (2025)

SCIENTIFIC BOARD

José Luis Alonso (Universität Zürich), **Roger S. Bagnall** (New York University), **Benedetto Bravo** (Uniwersytet Warszawski), **Willy Clarysse** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), **Bernard H. Stolte** (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), **Dorothy Thompson** (Girton College, Cambridge University), **Jacques van der Vliet** (Universiteit Leiden/Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen), **Ewa Wipszycka** (Uniwersytet Warszawski)

LANGUAGE CONSULTANTS

English: **Giovanni R. Ruffini** (Fairfield University), French: **Chris Rodriguez** (Université Paris I), German: **Martin Lemke** (Uniwersytet Warszawski), Italian: **Fabiana Tuccillo** (Università degli studi di Napoli «Federico II»)

© For the book by Fundacja im. Rafała Taubenschlaga
© For the constituting papers by the authors

Computer design and DTP by
Piotr Berezowski, Tomasz Derda, Grzegorz Ochala, and Jakub Urbanik

Cover design by
Maryna Wiśniewska

Warszawa 2025

ISSN 0075–4277

The journal is published with financial support from the University of Warsaw

Wydanie I (wersja pierwotna)

Nakład: 100 egz.

Druk i oprawa: Sowa Sp. z o.o., ul. Raszyńska 13, 05-500 Piaseczno

CONTENTS

<i>From the Editors</i>	XI
-------------------------------	----

Constantinos BALAMOSHEV

P. Mert. II 81: On oracular inquiry and shady business.

<i>A re-edition with a new translation</i>	1
--	---

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 Epoeis to Demetrios (whom she calls ‘son’, most likely in an affectionate, non-literal sense) discussing a dispute involving a priest. Epoeis 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:

<i>Two Coptic ostraca in the Dnipro Museum</i>	17
--	----

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
---	----

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

<i>Coptic and Copto-Greek ostraca in Warsaw (O. Vars. Copt.)</i>	65
--	----

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
---	-----

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, *hypothèque-praxis*, *dikaia time*, legal practice, *apotage*, *hypothekimaia asphaleia*.

Book review	339
-------------------	-----