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A Coptic letter to Dioscorus of Aphrodite from the collection of the Ghent University Library

The papyrus collection of the Ghent University Library contains 135 inventoried papyri, acquired in 1908, 1922 and 1927. ⁽¹⁾ The majority of the papyri are in Greek, but the collection includes a total of nine Coptic papyri, which remain unpublished. We publish here one of the Coptic fragments from the first acquisition (inventory number 47), belonging to the archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodite. ⁽²⁾ The only information on this document to date is found in the short description offered by P. Baert in his catalogue of the Ghent papyrus collection. ⁽³⁾ Apart from a brief material description, the papyrus is identified here as a “fragment of a Coptic letter”, dating to the “sixth–eighth centuries CE”. The papyrus belongs to the so-called “*Fonds Cumont*”, acquired by the library in 1908 with the help of Prof. dr. Franz Cumont. Most of these papyri originate from the Fayum (especially from the village of Theadelphia) and date to the Roman period, but there are also three Byzantine documents in Greek (inv. 44-46) and two Coptic documents (inv. 47-48). Two of these Byzantine papyri have been identified as belonging to the well-known archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodite, namely P.Ghent inv. 44 = *SB* III 6266 = 6704 ⁽⁴⁾ and P.Ghent inv. 45 = *SB* III 7201. ⁽⁵⁾

P.Ghent inv. 47
FIGG. 1-2

11 × 17 cm

Aphrodite
ca. 573

This fragment of dark brown papyrus is broken off on the left side and in the right lower corner. The upper (0.8 cm) and lower (1.2 cm) margins and the ends of lines 1-6 are preserved. The text is written *transversa charta*. There are a few traces of ink visible at the

(*) We would like to thank Esther Garel and Anne Boud'hors for their helpful suggestions to earlier versions of this edition. The research by Joanne Stolk has been funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO16/PDO/181).

(1) For more information on the history of the collection see R. BOGAERT, “De papyrusverzameling van de bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Gent”, in *ANAMNHΣΙΣ. Gedenkboek Prof. Dr. E.A. Leemans* (Brugge, 1970), pp. 107-109, the catalogue by P. BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling van de Universiteitsbibliotheek te Gent* (Leuven, 1985) [unpublished graduate thesis], and A. MARTIN, “Les collections des papyrus retrouvées en Belgique”, *Atti del XXII congresso internazionale di papirologia: Firenze, 23-28 agosto 1998* (Florence, 2001), p. 888.

(2) Images of this papyrus are available online through the catalogue of the Ghent University Library, see < <https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/rug01:001484518> >. We would like to thank Hendrik Defoort (Ghent University Library) for granting us access to the original and the permission to publish this papyrus.

(3) BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling* [n. 1], p. 89 (nr. 86).

(4) Edition by M. HOMBERT, “Un document nouveau d’Aphrodito”, *Aegyptus* 4 (1923), pp. 43-48; see also BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling* [n. 1], p. 86, nr. 83.

(5) Edition by M. HOMBERT, “Quelques papyrus des collections de Gand et de Paris”, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 4 (1925), pp. 649-652, nr. 7; see also BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling* [n. 1], p. 87 (nr. 84).

upper edge which may have come from a previous text written on the same roll. There is a sheet join (upper over lower) visible around 9.5 cm from the top of the papyrus.

The preserved half of the letter measures *ca.* 17 cm and the seal on the back is placed at around 14 cm from the left side. If the original sheet had a width of 28-30 cm – the usual width of Byzantine letters – with the seal placed approximately in the middle of the sheet, around 11-13 cm of the papyrus was lost. Leaving a small margin of *ca.* 1 cm at the left side of the recto (compare the 0.8 cm margin at the verso), this would allow space for 11-16 missing letters, which seems to fit very well with the supplements of 13-14 letters suggested for ll. 2-3 and 12. There is some damage along horizontal lines, which may have resulted from rolling and folding the letter from the bottom upwards.

The text consists of twelve lines written in black ink on the recto and two on the verso. The hand is a bilinear upright majuscule, carefully executed (especially in the beginning of the letter), with some letters (e.g. Ϸ, ψ, Ϸ and ϣ) occasionally descending below the line. The hand shows various literary features, such as the roundels added to the τ and ψ, and sometimes to other letters (e.g. ε and η) and interpunction in the form of a high dot in line 7. Diaeresis is noted on word-initial and word-final iota's (ll. 1, 5, 6 and 9). Most letters show the broad rounded letter forms, pseudo-ligatures and loops of the squared Alexandrian majuscule (see e.g. the shapes of κ, α, λ, γ, μ and ω and the wide ε, ο Ϸ), combined with more rigid style and the contrastive thickness of the biblical majuscule (compare e.g. the thinner horizontal and diagonal strokes to the fatter vertical strokes in τ, π, η, η and ε).⁽⁶⁾ The style of handwriting suggests that the writer would have been a professional scribe or copyist working in an ecclesiastical or monastic environment.⁽⁷⁾

Any influence of the regional dialect⁽⁸⁾ on the text is almost unperceivable: the letter is written in standard Sahidic with only few peculiarities, such as the accidental elision of the η in ηε<η>μερτ (l. 12). Superlinear strokes are added above syllabic consonants, sometimes positioned between the preceding and the intended letter (the peculiar first stroke on τηρϣ, l. 4, may have been written by mistake in anticipation). The interpunction in l. 7 may have been added to indicate the end of the prescript and the beginning of the body of the letter (see note to l. 7).

The letter is addressed to a certain Dioscorus (see the name in the address on the verso, l. 13, and the end of the name preserved in the introductory formula on the recto, l. 2). The presence of papyri from the archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodite in the “*Fonds Cumont*” of the collection of Ghent University Library makes it plausible that the Coptic letter belongs to

(6) For the Alexandrian majuscule, also known as ‘Coptic uncial’, see G. CAVALLO and H. MAEHLER, *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period. A.D. 300 – 800* (London, 1987), pp. 22-25; see also the hybrid scripts, regularly used for Coptic as well, *op.cit.* pp. 84-85, nr. 38a and b, dating to the middle of the sixth century.

(7) Similar epistolary hands with a literary character in the Dioscorus archive are found in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67342 (= *P.Aphrod.LettresGr.* 79), *P.Berol. inv.* 25749 (= *P.Aphrod.LettresGr.* 29), and *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 2 and 4. All these texts are also likely to originate from a monastic context: see respectively for the Greek letters Y. AMORY, *Communiquer par écrit dans l'Égypte de l'Antiquité tardive: les lettres grecques des archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité (Égypte, VI^e s. apr. J.-C.)* (Paris, 2018), I, pp. 43-44 [unpublished PhD dissertation; papyri (re)edited there are quoted in this paper as *P.Aphrod.LettresGr.*], and for the Coptic ones L. VANDERHEYDEN, *Les lettres coptes des archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité (VI^e siècle; Égypte)* (Paris, 2015), I, pp. 40-42 and 119-120 [unpublished PhD dissertation; texts (re)edited in this work are referred to here as *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.*].

(8) For an overview of the linguistic characteristics of the region of Aphrodite, also known as ‘the region D’, see *P.Bal.*, pp. 48-192.

the same archive and that the addressee of the letter is Dioscorus himself. Additionally, the dark colour of the letter is also typical for the papyri from Aphrodite ⁽⁹⁾ and there are several (epistolary) phrases that are attested in other Coptic letters from the archive (see notes to ll. 2-3, 4 and 12). All these elements are in favour of relating the text to the Dioscorus' archive, adding thus a new piece to the Coptic component of this large Byzantine dossier. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The fragmentary status of the letter does not allow a full understanding of the text: after the first lines (ll. 1-5), which contain extended greetings to Dioscorus, there is a reference to previous correspondence (l. 7), perhaps concerning a field (l. 8), a certain work done by the senders (l. 8), a plantation in the place of Iakob (l. 9), and camels (l. 10). As usual, the final greetings close the document (l. 12).

The formulary of the letter clearly shows a monastic context, in all likelihood the monastery of Apa Apollos founded by Dioscorus' father in 537 CE. ⁽¹¹⁾ Since the senders address Dioscorus as their 'brother', it is likely that the letter belongs to the little-known last period of Dioscorus' life, when he retired in his father's monastery around 573 CE. ⁽¹²⁾ Dioscorus receives the same appellation in another monastic letter from the same period, *P.Aphrod. LettresCopt.* 17, l. 17. This small, overlooked text from the Ghent collection thus offers us additional information to the last years of Dioscorus' archive.

↓ [ⲧ ±10 ⲙⲛ ⲛ]ⲉϣⲥⲛⲏⲩⲩⲩ ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲁⲓ ⲙⲡⲉϣⲥⲟⲛ
 [ⲉⲧⲧⲁⲏⲩⲩ ⲁⲓⲟⲥⲕⲟ]ⲣⲟⲥ ⲁⲗ ⲉⲏ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲛⲁⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲧⲛ-
 [ⲱⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲁⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲁ]ⲏⲧ ⲧⲏⲣⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲧⲉⲛⲩⲩⲩⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ
 [±9 ⲧⲛⲉⲓ]ⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲉⲉϣⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲉ
 5 [±13 ⲕ]ⲟϣⲓ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲡⲛⲟϣⲧⲉ ⲥⲟⲟϣⲧⲏ ⲛⲧⲉⲕ-
 [±14]ⲉ ⲁⲱⲱⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲭⲉ ⲥⲉϣⲁⲱⲕ ⲧⲏ-
 [ⲣⲟϣ ±7]ⲉ ⲛⲱⲟϣⲁⲱⲩⲩ ⲉⲧⲱⲉ ⲉⲉ ⲛⲧⲁⲕⲥⲁ[ⲁⲓ]
 [±14] ⲛⲉⲓⲱⲁⲉ, ⲁⲛⲣ ⲡⲁⲱⲃ ⲉⲱⲱⲉ ⲉ[. . .]

(9) Cf. *P.Aphrod.Lit.* I, p. 10.

(10) The understudied Coptic documents from Dioscorus' archive were reviewed in J.-L. FOURNET, "Une lettre copte d'Aphrodité? (Révision de SB Kopt. I 290)", *Études coptes VIII. Dixième journée d'étude, Lille 2001* (Lille-Paris, 2003), pp. 170-175. The Coptic letter from the collection of the Ghent University Library does not appear in the "Appendice 2. Liste provisoire des papyrus coptes des archives de Dioscore à éditer" (p. 175). For the Coptic letters of the archive, see also L. VANDERHEYDEN, "Les lettres coptes des archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité", *Actes du 26^e Congrès international de papyrologie. Genève, 16-21 août 2010* (Genève, 2012), pp. 793-800; A. BOUD'HORS, "Du copte dans les archives d'Apollôn", *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte. Histoire et culture dans l'Égypte Byzantine. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (8-10 décembre 2005)* (Paris, 2008), pp. 67-76; and the publications by L.S.B. MACCOULL, "The Apa Apollos Monastery of Pharoou (Aphrodito) and its Papyrus Archive", *Le Muséon* 106 (1993), pp. 21-63; EAD., "More Missing Pieces of the Dioscorus Archive", *Actes du IV^e congrès copte. Louvain-la-Neuve, 5-10 septembre 1988. II. De la linguistique au gnosticisme* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992), pp. 104-112; EAD., "A Coptic Monastic Letter to Dioscorus of Aphrodito", *Enchoria* 18 (1991), pp. 104-112; "The Coptic Archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodito", *Chronique d'Égypte* 56 (1981), pp. 185-193. L. Vanderheyden also devoted her PhD research to the (re)edition and the study of twenty-one Coptic letters (*Les lettres coptes* [n. 7]).

(11) The date has been proposed by E. WIPSZYCKA in *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IV^e-VIII^e siècles)* (JJP Suppl. 11) (Warsaw, 2009), p. 305. On the monastery of Apa Apollos, see EAD., "Le monastère d'Apa Apollôn: un cas typique exceptionnel?", *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* (Paris, 2008), pp. 261-274, and the publications by L.S.B. MacCoull (cf. *supra*).

(12) See J.-L. FOURNET, "Archive ou archives de Dioscore? Les dernières années des 'archives de Dioscore'", *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* (Paris, 2008), pp. 17-32.

[±14] ΝΚΛΩ 2Μ ΠΜΑ ΝΊΛΚΩΒ .[.....]
 10 [±13] ΕΤΕ ΝΒΑΜΟΥΛ Ο .[±10]
 [±14] Ε ΜΜΟΝ 2ΩΩΤ .[±9]
 [ΟΥΧΑΙ 2Μ ΠΧΟΕΙC Π]Ε<N>ΜΕΡΙΤ ΝCΟΝ Ε[ΤΤΑΙΗΥ]

VERSO

→ † ΤΑΔC ΝΔΙΟCΚΟΡΟC ⊗ 2ΙΤ[Ν ±10 ΜΝ]
 ΝΕCΙΝΗΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ

2 μέν | 3 ψυχή | 4 λαός | 6 Ι. σεογαῶκ | 7 Ι. ἡωγογαῶγ

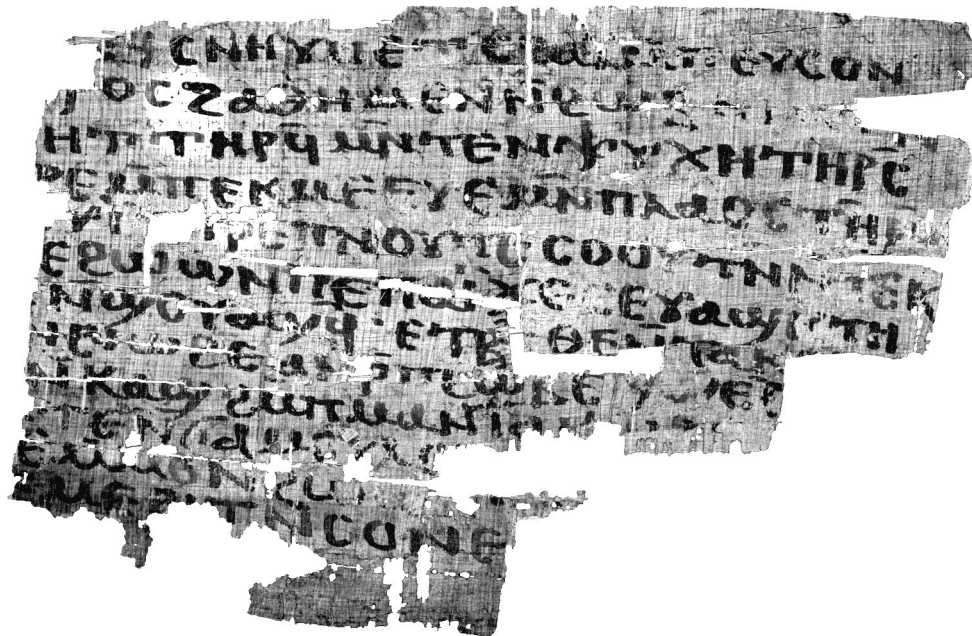


FIG. 1. — P.Ghent inv. 47 recto (© Ghent University Library).



FIG. 2. — P.Ghent inv. 47 verso – detail (© Ghent University Library).

¹ This is [... and] his brothers who write to their [venerable] brother ² Dioscorus. Before anything else, we ³ [greet you with all our] heart and all our soul. ⁴ [... we] remember you and the whole community ⁵ [...] youngest, so that God straightens your ⁶ [...] ourselves is this (?): everyone loves you [...] worthy of being loved. Because of the way in which you wrote [...] field, we did the work. If (?) it is fitting to [...] plantation in the place of Iakob

[...] camels [...] otherwise (?) myself [...] Greetings in the Lord, our beloved and venerable brother.

¹³ Send to Dioscorus from [...] and] ¹⁴ all his brothers.

- 1** The first line displays the typical cleft sentence construction in use at the beginning of a Coptic letter in the form of “A Ꞣⲉⲧⲥⲁⲓ ⲛ-Ⲑ”, see A. BIEDENKOPF-ZIEHNER, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Briefformular unter Berücksichtigung ägyptischer und griechischer Parallelen* (Würzburg, 1983), p. 226 (type II), and, for the cleft sentence construction, pp. 42-44; on the formula, its variances and antecedents, see also M. CHOAT, “Early Coptic Epistolography”, *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (Farnham-Burlington, 2010), pp. 157-167.

As suggested by ⲛⲓⲉⲩⲥⲛⲏⲩⲩ, the letter probably began with the name of the main sender, who, in consideration of the monastic context, could have been an Apa. The analysis of the verso seems to confirm the existence of another person together with the ‘brothers’: the mention of the ‘brothers’ appears, in fact, on the second line of the external address, which leads us to presume that also the end of l. 13 included the name of someone else. At this time, we are unable to identify the anonymous sender in a more precise way: if, however, any Apa and his brothers appear among the epistolary correspondents of the other Coptic letters, a handful of Apa and their brothers are often mentioned, especially in the greetings’ section, see e.g. *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 3, ll. 13-14, where the sender greets all the brothers together with Apa Apollos, and *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 8, l. 30, with greetings to Apa Pahom, Apa Isak, and all the brothers.

The presence of ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲁⲓ, instead of the expected ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲁⲓ, can be explained by the fact that the singular form “seems to have quickly become formulaic to the point where some scribes did not even notice or care if it agreed in number or gender with the people who write the letters”, see M. CHOAT, “Early Coptic Epistolography”, p. 157, n. 27.

- 1-2** ⲙⲡⲉⲩⲥⲟⲛ | ⲉⲧⲧⲁⲏⲩ ⲁⲓⲟⲥⲕⲟⲣⲟⲥ: The lacuna has been filled out in accordance with l. 12. A similar phrase, ⲡⲁⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲛⲥⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲁⲏⲟⲩ, is found at the end of the letter *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 17, 17 (cf. l. 12n.), a Coptic letter from a certain Apollos to his ‘brother’ Dioscorus of Aphrodite. In that letter, however, Dioscorus is addressed as ⲙⲡⲉⲩⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲛⲥⲟⲛ ⲁⲓⲟⲥⲕⲟⲣⲟⲥ in the introductory formula.

- 2-3** This intensified greeting formula is attested in later Coptic letters (cf. the examples listed in the second volume of *O.Frangé*, p. 69). In the Dioscorus’ archive, it appears in three Coptic letters, which are all of the hand of Dioscorus’ father, Apollos (*P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 7, 8, and 9). Apollos is not the sender of our letter, since he already passed away when Dioscorus retired to a monastic life.

- 4** ⲧⲛⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲉⲩⲩ: This sequence seems to be part of a specific epistolary *topos*, that is the sorrow of being apart. The pain can and should be mitigated through the commemoration of the absentee, cf. A. BIEDENKOPF-ZIEHNER, “Motive einiger Formeln und Topoi aus ägyptischen Briefen paganer und christlicher Zeit”, *Enchoria* 23 (1997), pp. 16-17, and the example quoted on p. 17 from W.C. Till, “Koptische Briefe. 3”, *WZKM* 49 (1942), p. 2: ⲛⲧⲗⲟ ⲁⲛ ⲉⲓⲉⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲉⲩⲩ ⲛⲩⲭⲟⲛⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ, “I don’t stop thinking of you day and night” (ll. 10-11).

ⲡⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ: The expression, which literally means “the whole people”, was probably taken from the Bible (e.g. Hebrews 9:19, Lk 20:6 and 45, Acts 2:47 and 4:10) and is used to indicate a cenobitic monastic community (cf. *P.Bal.*, p. 34, and the introduction to *O.Frangé* 775-776 for additional examples). This is the second occurrence in the Dioscorus’ archive, besides another Coptic letter, where the construct indicates the community of the monastery of Apa Apollos (cf. *P.Bal.*, p. 21: ⲡⲗⲗⲁ ⲫⲓⲟⲓⲃⲁⲙⲙⲟⲛ ⲡⲓⲱⲧ ⲙⲡⲧⲟⲩⲩ ⲛⲁⲡⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲗⲱ [...] ⲙⲛ ⲡⲗⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲉⲥⲛⲏⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲏⲕⲉ, “Papa Phoibammon the father of the mount of Apa Apollos [...] and the whole people of God and the poor brothers”; the letter was later

entirely published in L.S.B. MACCOULL, “The Apa Apollos Monastery of Pharoou (Aphrodito)” [n. 10], n° 12, pp. 37-39). $\lambda\alpha\omicron\varsigma$ is also found in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67353 r° (Antinoopolis, 569), an arbitration of the hand of Dioscorus whose re-edition is in progress by Anne Boud’hors and Jean-Luc Fournet. While the context there is distinctly monastic (the dispute concerns the heritage of a cell) and $\lambda\alpha\omicron\varsigma$ refers to a monastic group, to whom the disputants introduced their case before turning to Dioscorus’ judgement, it is not clear who is represented by the expression “the people of the assembly of the great sons and the leaders of the assemblies” (ll. 15-16: $\text{να} \text{πλα}\omicron\varsigma \mid \overline{\text{νν}}\overline{\text{νο}}\overline{\text{ϑ}} \overline{\text{νω}}\overline{\text{η}}\overline{\text{ρ}}\overline{\text{ε}} \overline{\text{μν}} \overline{\text{να}}\overline{\text{π}}\overline{\text{η}}\overline{\text{γ}}\overline{\text{ε}} \overline{\text{νν}}\overline{\text{λα}}\overline{\text{ο}}\overline{\text{ς}}$).

- 5 $\kappa\text{]} \text{ογ}\overline{\iota}$: The diaeresis on the iota supports it being the final letter of a word. The presence of $\kappa\text{ογ}\overline{\iota}$ in the first lines of a letter recalls the typical formula $\chi\text{ιν} \overline{\text{μ}}\overline{\text{π}}\overline{\text{κ}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\iota} \text{ωα} \text{πνο}\overline{\text{ϑ}}$, often part of the preliminary greetings. It usually goes from the youngest to the oldest ones, although the opposite order is also attested, see e.g. *O.Frangé* 19, ll. 4-5: $\chi\text{ιν} \mid \text{πεγ}\overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{νο}}\overline{\text{ϑ}} \text{ωα} \text{πεκ}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{ε}}$. Another possibility is to consider that the sender is listing all the community engaged in the commemoration of Dioscorus, and that $\overline{\text{μν}} \text{πλα}\omicron\varsigma \text{τηρ}\overline{\text{ϥ}} \mid [\overline{\text{μ}}\overline{\text{π}}\overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{τε}}$ “and the whole community of God” (see l. 4n.) is further specified with $\overline{\text{μν}} \text{νικ}\text{]} \text{ογ}\overline{\iota}$ which could refer to the novices in the monastery. Both supplements would fit the available space in the lacuna.
- 5-6 $\epsilon\text{τρ}\overline{\text{ε}}\overline{\text{π}}\overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{τε}} \text{σοογ}\overline{\text{τ}}\overline{\text{ν}} \mid \overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{τεκ}}\overline{\text{]]}}$: Only a thin horizontal stroke at the upper left side remains of the first letter, most similar to the π in this hand, but ϵ would fit the space and gives a more satisfactory reading syntactically than the substantivized form in this context. There are no exact parallels for this expression, but a similar one can be found in *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 3, ll. 4-5: $\text{απ}\overline{\text{χ}}\overline{\text{ο}}\overline{\text{ε}}\overline{\text{ις}} \text{σοογ}\overline{\text{τ}}\overline{\text{ν}} \mid [\text{.}] \text{πε} \overline{\text{μ}}\overline{\text{π}}\overline{\text{μα}} \text{ετογ}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{β}} \text{ζιτ}\overline{\text{ν}} \text{νετ}\overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{λη}}\overline{\text{α}}$, “the Lord straightened ... of the holy place through your prayers”. The structure evokes a certain phraseology of later Coptic letters, mostly from the tenth and eleventh centuries, which combine wishes for the health and prosperity of the addressee with an invocation to God, see T.S. RICHTER, “Coptic Letters”, *Documentary Letters from the Middle East: the evidence in Greek, Coptic, South Arabian, Pehlevi, and Arabic (1st-15th c. CE)* (Bern, 2008), pp. 752-753. Taking this into consideration, the phrase could perhaps be supplemented with $\overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{τεκ}}\overline{\text{]]}}\overline{\text{ζιη}}$, alluding to the biblical expression of ‘(God) straightening your way’ (see e.g. Gen. 24:21 and 40 or Is. 48:15, also referred to in Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4 and 7:27).
- 6 $\text{νε} \text{να}\overline{\text{ι}} \chi\epsilon$: The conjunction could be used here to introduce a declarative complement or cause. It depends on whether $\text{να}\overline{\text{ι}}$ was used for anaphoric or cataphoric reference here, which is difficult to determine due to the uncertain context.
- 6-7 $\text{σεγ}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{κ}} \text{τη}\overline{\text{]]}}\overline{\text{ρ}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{ι}}$: A reading $\text{σεγ}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{κ}}$ cannot be excluded entirely, but a second person seems more likely in the context of the letter. The verb might be followed by $\text{τη}\overline{\text{]]}}\overline{\text{ρ}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{ι}}$ “everyone loves you”, see also l. 7n. Incidentally, the present form $\text{σεγ}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{κ}}$ confirms that the verb $\text{ογ}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{α}}$ constitutes an exception to the Stern-Jernstedt rule, i.e. that there are no constructed forms for the pronominal object in the durative present conjugation (see B. LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar* [Wiesbaden, 2000], § 171d).
- 7 $\text{]ε} \overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{ι}}$: This expression usually qualifies the addressee of the letter as a person worthy of being loved by God (like the prophet Daniel), see section 1 in *O.Frangé* II, p. 69, on this epistolary cliché. If we supplement $\text{πρωμ}\overline{\text{]]}}\overline{\text{ε}} \overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{ογ}}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ω}}\overline{\text{ι}}$, as in *O.Frangé* 349, x+6 and 371, 8-9, the remainder of the lacuna could be filled with a short adverb, such as νται “here”. The sentence addressed to Dioscorus (ll. 6-7) would then run as follows: “everyone loves you here, man worthy of being loved”.
- $\text{ετβε} \overline{\text{θ}}\overline{\text{ε}} \overline{\text{ν}}\overline{\text{τακ}}\overline{\text{ζ}}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ι}}$: The high dot might indicate the end of a long greeting formula stretching over six lines, which would make this the beginning of the body of the letter. The verb $\overline{\text{ζ}}\overline{\text{α}}\overline{\text{ι}}$ could introduce the start of the message by referring to previous correspondence, and seems to fit the traces and available space at the end of the line. ναν could therefore be possible at the beginning of l. 8 to complement the expression, with the meaning “because of the way in which you wrote to us”.

- 8 εῳϣε ε[: The circumstantial form εῳϣε could simply state the circumstances of what is preceding or following, or perhaps provide some sort of adverbial stipulation as in a conditional clause, see also l. 11n.
- 9] ḿκλϣ: ḿκλϣ was maybe preceded by a complement. A few texts from the monastery of Apollos in Bawit contain the expression πνοε κλλϣ, “the big reed”, which probably originally referred to a plantation of reeds before starting to designate a toponym (cf. *P.Bru.x.Bawit* 13, 1-2n., with mention of the occurrences). The current plantation was probably related to the work mentioned by the senders in l. 8; other texts from the same archive show that the monastery of Apa Apollos was in possession of lands and reared livestock (for more details, see E. WIPSZYCKA, “Le monastère d’Apa Apollôs: un cas typique exceptionnel?”, *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* [Paris, 2008], pp. 262-263).
 ⲙⲙⲁ ⲛⲓⲁⲕⲱⲃ: This is the first occurrence of this microtoponym in the Coptic documents of Dioscorus’ archive. Given that ⲙⲁ is the equivalent of τόπος, we can turn to the Greek texts as well. Here we find the *topos* of Abba Iakob (*P.Lond.* IV 1419, 874, 883, 913 and 921; *P.Lond.* IV 1421, 13 and 113; *P.Lond.* IV 1422, 20; *P.Lond.* IV 1442, 56) and the *topos* of Iakob son of Apollon (*P.Lond.* IV 1419, 1242), but both places are attested from the beginning of the eighth century. While we cannot exclude *a priori* that the “place of Iakob” of our letter later became the *topos* of Abba Iakob or the *topos* of Iakob son of Apollon, we do not have enough material to prove it. On the use of Greek and Coptic for name places in the Aphrodite papyri, see I. MARTHOT & L. VANDERHEYDEN, “Désigner et nommer en grec ou en copte? Bilinguisme toponymique de la campagne d’Aphrodité du VI^e au VIII^e s.”, *Décrire, imaginer, construire l’espace. Toponymie égyptienne de l’Antiquité au Moyen Âge* (Cairo, 2016), pp. 217-246.
- 10]εⲧε ⲛⲃⲁⲙⲟϣ: The fragmentary line does not allow to contextualize the reference. Camels are also mentioned in *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 7, where Apollos asks his sons to provide someone with all their camels (l. 30: ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲧεϣ ⲛεⲧⲛⲃⲁⲙⲟϣ ⲛⲁϥ ⲧⲏⲣⲧⲛ), and in the account book *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67141 (before 547/548 according to J.-L. FOURNET, “Liste des papyrus édités de l’Aphrodité byzantine”, *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* [Paris, 2008], p. 318), where several expenses concern the forage for the camels (Fol. 1, v^o, ll. 13, 20, 26; Fol. 5, v^o, l. 12). In the sale contract *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 1, l. 33 (Aphrodite, 23 April 598 according to *P.Oxy.* LVIII, p. 523 and *BL* VIII 501), six camels are used to carry the *embole* from the vineyard to the harbour.
 After ⲛⲃⲁⲙⲟϣ, ϣ or ϥ are possible.
- 11]ε ⲙⲙⲟⲛ ϣⲱⲧ:]ε ⲙⲙⲟⲛ might be part of the expression εῳϣⲏ]ε ⲙⲙⲟⲛ, “otherwise”, which could be the counterpart to the conditional εῳϣε (see l. 8n). Another possibility is to consider ⲙⲙⲟⲛ as the preposition ⲙⲙⲟⲛ, and]ε as the end of a verb. The context is too fragmentary to decide.
- 12 The line could be supplemented with the help of a parallel in another Coptic letter addressed to Dioscorus, *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 17, 17 (ca. 573?): ⲟϣⲭⲁⲓ ⲛⲙ ⲛⲭⲟⲩⲉⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲛⲥⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟϣ // (cf. ll. 1-2n.).

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