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## Another Coptic letter from the Dioscorus archive in the collection of the Ghent university library?

Amory, Y.; Stolk, J.V.

### Citation

Amory, Y., & Stolk, J. V. (2024). Another Coptic letter from the Dioscorus archive in the collection of the Ghent university library? *Chronique D'egypte*, 99(197), 163-170.  
doi:10.1484/J.CDE.5.143256

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4210298>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# CHRONIQUE D'ÉGYPTÉ

XCIX (2024)

Fasc. 197



ASSOCIATION ÉGYPTOLOGIQUE REINE ÉLISABETH  
EGYPTOLOGISCH GENOOTSCHAP KONINGIN ELISABETH

BRUXELLES

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## Another Coptic Letter from the Dioscorus Archive in the Collection of the Ghent University Library?

The small papyrus collection of the Ghent University Library <sup>(1)</sup> contains eight Coptic papyri, two of them acquired together in 1908 with the help of Franz Cumont. <sup>(2)</sup> This so-called “fonds Cumont” mainly includes Greek papyri dating to the Roman period, but also three Byzantine documents written in Greek (Inv. 44–46) and two Coptic documents (Inv. 47–48). Two of the Byzantine Greek documents once belonged to the archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodito <sup>(3)</sup> and one of the Coptic documents has previously been identified as a letter addressed to Dioscorus himself. <sup>(4)</sup> This raises the question whether the remaining Coptic papyrus from this lot could have belonged to the Dioscorus archive as well. <sup>(5)</sup> Below, we will provide a first edition of this unpublished Coptic fragment, but first we will discuss the possible connection of this text to the Dioscorus archive based on the palaeography, linguistic characteristics, phraseology, prosopography and context.

(\*) The research by Joanne Stolk has been funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO16/PDO/181), the research by Yasmine Amory by the Special Research Fund of Ghent University. The authors equally contributed to the article. We would like to thank Hendrik Defoort (Ghent University Library) for granting us access to the original document and the permission to publish this papyrus, Anne Boud’hors for her precious comments on an earlier version of the edition, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful suggestions.

(1) The collection contains 135 inventoried papyri, acquired in three separate lots in 1908, 1922 and 1927. A short history of the collection can be found in R. BOGAERT, “De papyrusverzameling van de bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Gent”, *Ἀνάμνησις. Gedenkboek Prof. Dr. E.A. Leemans*, Brugge, 1970, pp. 107–109, in the catalogue by P. BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling van de Universiteitsbibliotheek te Gent*, Licentiaat KU Leuven, 1985, and in A. MARTIN, “Les collections des papyrus retrouvées en Belgique”, in *PapCongr.* XXII, p. 888.

(2) The Coptic papyri are eight, and not nine, as otherwise listed in Baert’s catalogue: P.Ghent Inv. 116 is, in fact, written in Greek.

(3) P.Ghent Inv. 44 = *SB* III 6266 = 6704 = M. HOMBERT, “Un document nouveau d’Aphrodito”, *Aegyptus* 4 (1923), pp. 43–48, now reedited by C.-L. RASCHEL, “Retour sur les chasseurs d’Aphrodité: réédition du *SB* 3.6704”, *BASP* 60 (2023), pp. 319–340; and P.Ghent Inv. 45 = *SB* III 7201 = M. HOMBERT, “Quelques papyrus des collections de Gand et de Paris”, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 4 (1925), pp. 649–652, no. 7.

(4) See Y. AMORY & J. STOLK, “A Coptic Letter to Dioscorus of Aphrodito from the Collection of the Ghent University Library”, *CdÉ* 96 (2021), pp. 147–153. The text has been recently joined with a fragment from the Coptic Museum in Cairo (P.Cair.Copt.Mus. Inv. 847), which contains the beginning of the lines that were missing from the Ghent papyrus. For the updated edition, see L. VANDERHEYDEN, “P.Ghent inv. 47 Completed. A Coptic Letter from Papa Diane to Dioscorus of Aphrodito”, *Pylon* 3 (2023).

(5) The only information on this document to date is found in the catalogue of the papyrus collection published by P. BAERT, *De papyrusverzameling* (above, n. 1), p. 90 (no. 87), where the papyrus is identified here as “a Coptic fragment, possibly a contract”, dating to the “6th–8th century”. It describes the fragment as broken off on all sides apart from the right side, where a blank space of 1.9 cm is preserved, but this cannot be right (see material description below). Images of this papyrus are available online through the catalogue of the Ghent University Library, see <<https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/rug01:001484519>>.

## PALAEOGRAPHY

The handwriting of the papyrus is overall bilinear with some tendencies towards quadrilinearity (see, in particular, the strong prolongation of hastas in ⲃ, Ⲏ, ⲓ, ⲕ, ⲗ, ⲣ, Ⲥ, Ⲙ, ⲙ, ⲟ, and ⲑ). This suggests that the text was written in a period of transition, palaeographically speaking, between the majuscule and the minuscule, probably around the sixth century, when most of the Coptic papyri show a largely bilinear but cursive script, and the seventh century, when the two types of writing still largely coexisted. <sup>(6)</sup>

The mixed style of the handwriting probably also directly depended on the digraphic skills of the scribe: the extension of the hastas, as well as the ductus of some letters (see especially Ⲏ, ⲗ, and the “treble clef” shaped Ⲥ in l. 2), suggests in fact a familiarity with the Greek cursive handwriting. The influence of the Greek script seems confirmed by the few ligatures attested in the text, which mostly appear in the Greek loanwords as if the scribe automatically turned to Greek writing habits when penning Greek words: see Ⲓ in ⲡⲔⲎⲘⲐⲐⲟⲩⲠⲤ, ⲔⲠⲐⲕⲣⲏⲥⲓⲒⲒ (both l. 6), and ⲒⲠⲟⲩⲥⲓⲒ (l. 11); ⲒⲠ and ⲧⲎ in ⲔⲈⲠⲠⲟⲧⲏⲥ (l. 8); Ⲓ in ⲔⲒⲓⲔⲥ (l. 14). In a similar way, the ductus of Ⲏ in Ⲏ ⲔⲒⲓⲔⲥ ⲧⲒⲓⲔⲥ (l. 14) may have been originally drafted as a minuscule ⲏ, as it is part of a Greek expression. The Ⲏ seems to have been corrected afterwards through the addition of a short vertical stroke extending the second leg in order to shape the letter into a majuscule, as to adapt it to the Coptic script. It can therefore be assumed that the scribe was not only proficient in both languages and scripts, but also conscious about the differentiation between the styles.

## LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PHRASEOLOGY

The letter is written in Sahidic with a few peculiarities. Some of the variant spellings might give an indication to the provenance of the text. The alternation between ⲃ for ⲑ (see e.g. ⲡⲈⲔⲗⲁⲃ in l. 7, but ⲡⲈⲔⲗⲁⲒ in l. 6, ⲈⲠⲟⲃ for ⲈⲠⲟⲒ in l. 6 and ⲗⲎⲕⲓⲗⲁⲃ for ⲗⲎⲕⲓⲗⲁⲒ in l. 9) is commonly attested in papyri from Middle Egypt, although it also occurs in documents from elsewhere. <sup>(7)</sup> Vowel doubling (ⲎⲧⲠⲟⲟⲙⲏⲈ = ⲎⲧⲠⲟⲙⲏⲈ, in l. 9) is often attested in documentary papyri from Thebes, but the same feature also occurs in papyri from Aphrodito. <sup>(8)</sup> While the interchange between ⲟ and Ⲡ is frequent in Greek, especially in case endings, and in Greek loanwords in Coptic (cf. ⲡⲔⲎⲘⲐⲐⲟⲩⲠⲤ = Ⲕⲏⲙⲟⲥⲓⲟⲩⲟⲩ in l. 7), <sup>(9)</sup> the

(6) On this, see *P.Bru.x.Bawit*, pp. 128–129.

(7) See *P.Bal.*, pp. 93–94 (§66) and 136–138 (§121), where P.E. Kahle adds about ⲃ for ⲑ “This peculiarity is extremely common in texts from Achmim northwards, especially at Ashmunein and in the Fayyum, but hardly known at Thebes except for ⲃⲓ = ⲑⲓ which occurs frequently there as elsewhere”. The phenomenon is regularly found in other papyri from Middle Egypt, such as from Bawit, see *P.Mon.Apollo I*, pp. 36 and 145; *P.Bru.x.Bawit*, p. 141; and Wadi Sarga, see *P.Sarga*, p. 13.

(8) See examples from Thebes in *P.Mon.Epiph.*, vol. I, p. 242, and *P.Bal.*, pp. 82–83 (§45): “In non-literary texts this is common only at Thebes”, although P.E. Kahle also cites some examples from Aphrodito. Cf. L. VANDERHEYDEN, *Les lettres coptes des archives de Dioscore d’Aphroditê (VI<sup>e</sup> siècle ; Égypte)* (Paris, 2015), vol. I, III.A.a.5 (unpublished PhD dissertation; referred to here as *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.*): “mais il semblerait que cette particularité affecte aussi la langue d’Aphroditê”. The phenomenon of vowel doubling also occurs in the papyri from Bawit, see *P.Mon.Apollo I*, p. 144.

(9) See W.A. GIRGIS, “Greek Loan Words in Coptic”, *BSAC* 18 (1965–1966), p. 81, and S.J. CLACKSON, “Coptic or Greek? Bilingualism in the Papyri”, in A. PAPAConstantinou (ed.), *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (Farnham, 2010), p. 80. Of course, iotacism is also commonly found in Greek loanwords in Coptic, cf. ⲔⲠⲐⲕⲣⲏⲥⲓⲒⲒ = ⲔⲠⲐⲕⲣⲓⲥⲓⲥⲓⲒ in l. 7. On this phenomenon, see again the above-mentioned articles by W.A. GIRGIS, p. 79, and by S.J. CLACKSON, pp. 79–80.

regular use of  $\omicron$  instead of  $\omega$  (see e.g.  $\phi\omicron\beta$  =  $\pi\zeta\omega\beta$  in l. 1 and  $\pi\epsilon\omicron\omega$  =  $\pi\epsilon\omega\omega$  in l. 3 of our text), can be considered as a marked feature of Middle Egypt and occurs regularly in letters from Aphrodito. <sup>(10)</sup> Furthermore, the omission of  $\nu$  in the future (see  $\epsilon\lambda\chi\omicron\omicron\gamma\omicron\gamma$  in l. 3) is also typical of the region. <sup>(11)</sup>

The only complete epistolary formula is preserved in the last line of the letter (l. 14). According to A. Biedenkopf-Ziehner, the closing formula  $\omicron\gamma\chi\lambda\acute{\iota}\ \bar{\zeta}\bar{\mu}\ \pi\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \eta\ \lambda\gamma\iota\alpha\ \tau\pi\iota\alpha\varsigma$  would seem to be characteristic of texts from the Theban area of the seventh and eighth century. <sup>(12)</sup> It has later been shown, however, that the formula also appears in texts from sixth-century Aphrodito. <sup>(13)</sup> The language and phraseology of the letter would thus fit a provenance from Middle Egypt, making it tempting to connect this letter to the other papyri from the Dioscorus archive in Ghent.

#### PROSOPOGRAPHY

A certain Kollouthos son of Kyriakos is mentioned in line 6 of our letter. Despite of a few other attestations of this name (see note to l. 6 below), it seems remarkable that a person with the same name and patronymic is also attested in the archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodito in *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67297.7 (23 July 535) and *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67143.14 and 30 (538–547). In both texts, Kollouthos appears to be a *chrysochoos*, a goldsmith. <sup>(14)</sup> At that time, the *chrysochoos* was in charge of the verification and exchange of money. <sup>(15)</sup> As the Kollouthos of our letter is mentioned right after the *zygostates*, who was in charge of weighing the *solidi*, <sup>(16)</sup> it is tempting to identify him with the homonymous goldsmith from the archive of Dioscorus. If the identification is correct, this could help date our letter more precisely, namely around the time that the two Greek papyri were drafted, in the later 30s and 40s of the sixth century.

#### CONTEXT OF THE DIOSCORUS ARCHIVE

As we have shown above, the palaeography, a Coptic bilinear script with some influences from Greek quadrilinear writing with ligatures, would fit a date in the sixth century. The linguistic characteristics also suggest a provenance from the region of Aphrodito. Together with the possible links in prosopography, which also supports dating the letter in the first half of the sixth century, this makes a connection to the Dioscorus archive plausible.

(10) See *P.Bal.*, p. 90 (§61): “This peculiarity is of some interest as it is one of the most marked features of Middle Egyptian”, and, on the Middle Egyptian dialect, p. 222: “Peculiar to Middle Egyptian is the short  $\omicron$  for long  $\omega$  in closed syllables, e.g.  $\pi\omicron\tau$ ,  $\zeta\omicron\beta$ ”; see also p. 82 (§44). For Aphrodito, see *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.*, vol. I, III.A.a.3.

(11) See *P.Bal.*, pp. 151–158, and A. BOUD’HORS, “Du copte dans les archives d’Apollôs”, in J.-L. FOURNET (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* (Paris, 2008), p. 71.

(12) A. BIEDENKOPF-ZIEHNER, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Briefformular* (Würzburg, 1983), pp. 106–107 and 252–253.

(13) See L.S.B. MACCOULL, “‘The Holy Trinity’ at Aphrodito”, *Tyche* 6 (1991), pp. 109–111, and *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.*, pp. 75–78, with another attestation in *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.* 19.27.

(14) On this person, who happened to be a thief and an informant of Dioscorus, see G.R. RUFFINI, *Life in an Egyptian Village in Late Antiquity. Aphrodito Before and After the Islamic Conquest* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 65–66.

(15) See F. CARLÀ, *L’oro nella tarda antichità: aspetti economici e sociali* (Torino, 2009), pp. 374–376.

(16) See F. CARLÀ, *L’oro nella tarda antichità* (above, n. 15), pp. 196–205.

The sender refers to the addressee as “your brotherhood” (ll. 3–4 and 13), which suggests that the relationship was either collegial<sup>(17)</sup> or monastic.<sup>(18)</sup> If the identification of Kollouthos son of Kyriakos (see prosopography above) could give us any indication for the date of the letter, the addressee may have been Apollos, who at that time (537–546/547) was simultaneously exercising the function of *protokometes* and living in his monastery.<sup>(19)</sup> If this assumption is right, the fiscal context of the letter – which can be implied by mentions of taxes (l. 7), sums of money (ll. 5 and 11), a list (possibly of taxpayers, l. 11), and officials related to the tax collection, such as the pagarch(s) (l. 4) and, possibly, a *zygostates* (l. 6) – may then be related to the official tasks of a *protokometes*.

P.Ghent Inv. 48  
h. 18.4 × w. 17 cm  
FIG. 1

Aphrodito?  
First half of the sixth century

Fragment of a light brown papyrus with some lighter and darker stains, broken off at the left side and at the top. The lower margin (1.9 cm) and the ends of lines on the right side are preserved. Some vertical fibres are missing, but ink is visible on the horizontal layer below, which shows that the papyrus was already of poor quality at the time of writing. The verso is blank.

The sheet is broken into five panels, probably as a result of rolling and folding multiple times horizontally and two times vertically. If the letter was rolled bottom up, the address would have been in the lost part at the top. The text on lines 1, 4–5 and 10–12 is also severely damaged around these break lines. As the usual width of a letter in the Byzantine period is approximately 30 cm,<sup>(20)</sup> we may assume that approximately half of the document on the left is lost.

The letter is written on the recto *transversa charta* in a confident handwriting, which is inclined to the right, regular and quite cursive (see e.g. the sequence ΜΜΑΡ in l. 3). The writer pays attention to the layout of the document by elongating the last letter of the line as to justify the text (see in particular ll. 4, 8, and 12). Diaeresis is noted on iota in consonant position (ll. 3, 5, 11, 13, 14).

(17) Considering that low-ranking functionaries address each other in late antique Greek texts as with the Greek equivalent ἡ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότης, the correspondents of our letter might belong to the same social group and fulfil the same administrative functions.

(18) In case of a monastic context, the letter might have been sent to Dioscorus’ father, Apollos, who spent the last ten years of his life in the monastery he founded, or to Dioscorus himself, who retired to the same monastery around 573 (see J.-L. FOURNET, “Archive ou archives de Dioscore ? Les dernières années des ‘archives de Dioscore’”, in J.-L. FOURNET (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* [Paris, 2008], pp. 17–32).

(19) See E. WIPSYCKA, “Le monastère d’Apa Apollôs: un cas typique exceptionnel ?”, in J.-L. FOURNET (ed.), *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte* (Paris, 2008), pp. 265–266, and L. VANDERHEYDEN, “The figure of Apollos, Father of Dioscorus, in the Light of the Coptic Letters from Sixth-Century Aphrodito”, in S.R. HUEBNER, E. GAROSI, I. MARTHOT-SANTANIELLO, M. MÜLLER, S. SCHMIDT & M. STERN (eds.), *Living the End of Antiquity. Individual Histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt* (Berlin, 2020), pp. 122–123.

(20) J.-L. FOURNET, “Esquisse d’une anatomie de la lettre antique tardive d’après les papyrus”, in R. DELMAIRE, J. DESMULLIEZ & P.-L. GATIER (eds.), *Correspondances: documents pour l’histoire de l’Antiquité tardive. Actes du colloque international Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille 3, 20-22 novembre 2003* (Lyon, 2009), p. 31.

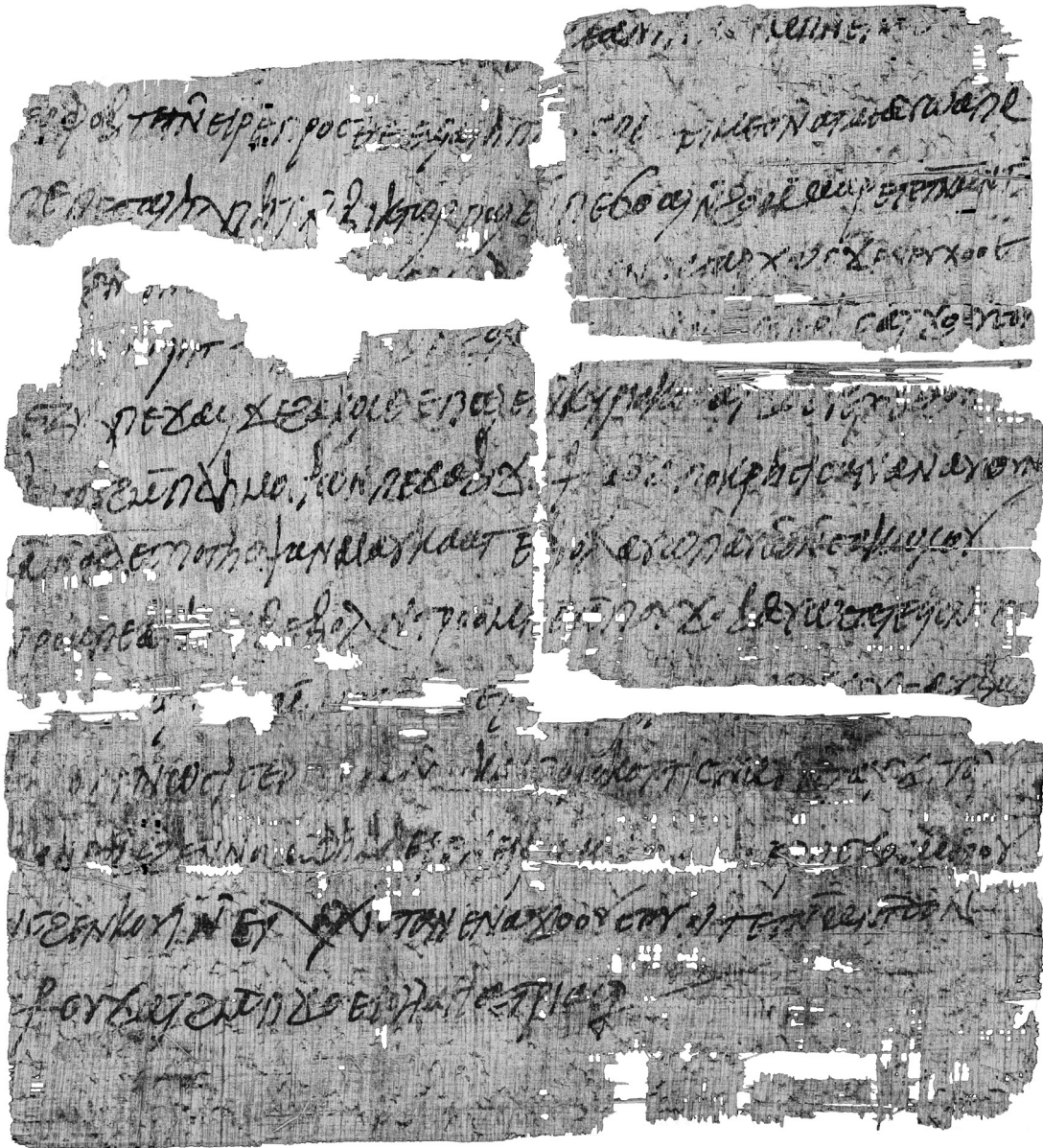


FIG. 1 — P.Ghent. Inv. 48 (© Ghent University Library)

↓ [ca. ?] . Δ . εαη . . . . . μπμε . . .  
 [ca. ?]ε φοβ τετ̄νεϊρε προς θε εσαυνη[τ]ρεπε . ς̄ιμεο ν̄ατ ς̄ αυω απ̄  
 [ca. ?]πεπεϛ ωηλ η̄ν̄ι ν̄βικτωρ π̄ωε η̄πεβωη ν̄γομ μαρετετ̄ν̄μ̄ντ-  
 [CON ca. ?] . η̄ οη̄ . [ . . . . . ] . . . . . [ . . . . . ] . η̄παγαρχος η̄ε νευχ̄οος  
 5 [ca. ?] . . η̄ττ̄ . [ . . . . . ] . . ζολο[κο]τ̄[τ̄ . . . . . ] [ ς̄ . ερης . λιχοοϛου  
 [ca. ?]ε ζυγ(οϛτατης) . πεχαχ η̄ε ζα κολ̄ε π̄ωε η̄κ̄υριακος λιχοοϛου ερω  
 εζοϛη̄ [ . . ]

[ca. ?] . . . ΟΥ ΖΜ ΠΔΗΜΟΣΙΩΝ. ΠΕΧΔΒ ΧΕ † ρ ΔΠΟΚΡΗCΙC ΔΝ ΔΝΑΥ ΟΥΝ  
 [ca. ?] ΜΠΔΔΕCΠΟΤΗC ΨΔΝ. ΜΑΥΚΑΔΤ ΕΒΟΛ ΔΥΩ ΠΑΥ ΔΝCΑΚΩΛΟΥ  
 [ca. ?] ΝΡΟΜΠΕ. ΔΥΚ[Δ]ΔΒ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΡΟΟΜΠΕ. ΜΠΟΥΧΟΒ ΔΥΩ CΑ ΤΕCΗΝΤΕ  
 10 [ca. ?] . . . [ . . . ] ρ[ . . . ] ο[ . . . ] [ . . . ] ερ[ . . . ] [ . . . ] . . . . Χ. ΔΥΒΩ  
 [ca. ?] ΟC ΓΝΩCΙC ΕΡ[ . . . ] ΜΝ ΠΚΑΙΖΟΛΟΚΟΤΤ(ΙΝΟC) CΝΑΥ ΝΤΑΪΧΙΤΟΥ  
 [ca. ?] . . . . Ε ΖΕΝΝ . . . ΦΗΜ ΕΡΟΚ ΕΙΡ . . . . [ . . . ] ΕΡΟC. ΧΟ ΜΜΟΟΥ  
 [ca. ?] ΕΙC ΖΕΝΚΟΥΪ ΝΕΛΑΧΙCΤΟΝ ΕΝΔΑΧΟΟΥCΟΥ ΝΤΕΤΝΜΝΤCΟΝ  
 [ca. ?] . † ΟΥΧΔΪ ΖΜ ΠΧΟΕΙC Η ΔΓΙΑ ΤΡΙΑC. †

2 ΤΕΤΝΕΙΡΕ: ετ corr. ex ει | πρόσ | επιτρέπειν | ϛίμεο: ϛ corr. | αγω: λ corr. ex ο 4 πάγαρχος 5 δλοκόττινος  
 6 ζυγ(οστάτης), ζυγζ pap. 7 δημόσιον | απόκρισις | οὐν, οὐν: ο rescript. 8 δεσπότης 11 γνῶσις | l. κε |  
 δλοκόττι(νος), ζολοκοτϣ pap. 13 ἐλάχιστος 14 ἡ ἅγια Τριάς

l<sup>1</sup> ... l<sup>2</sup> *the thing. You (pl.) do according to the way in which they order Simeo... and... l<sup>3</sup> ...  
 despoil the house of Viktor the son of Pekjosh the shoemaker (?). May your (brother)hood  
 l<sup>4</sup> ... pagarch, so that they would not say l<sup>5</sup> ... about the solidi... to the South. I sent them  
 l<sup>6</sup> ... zygostates. He said: “For Kolthe the son of Kyriakos. I sent to him ...” l<sup>7</sup> ... in the  
 tax. He said: “I (?) do not pay”. Look thus l<sup>8</sup> ... my lord Psan. They do not exempt me. And  
 l<sup>9</sup> ... year. It was left for the year. It was not sown and except for his two (?) l<sup>10</sup> ... l<sup>11</sup> ... the  
 list ... with the two other solidi that I received l<sup>12</sup> ... Cultivate them l<sup>13</sup> ... small humble  
 things which we will send to your brotherhood. l<sup>14</sup> ... † Greetings in the Lord, the holy trinity.*

1 ελη . . . . If we take the η for a λ, ελητινοου seems to be a possible reading. It is, however,  
 still problematic: the first η has a more rounded shape when compared to the others, and the  
 first ο does not match very well the traces.

2 ΤΕΤΝΕΙΡΕ The verb seems to be in present tense, but it could also be a subjunctive with the  
 omission of the initial η-, which is regularly found in Aphrodito, see *P.Aphrod.LettresCopt.*,  
 vol. I, III.B.b.

ϛίμεο νατ ϛ After the verb επιτρέπειν we would expect an object, commonly introduced  
 by η- with this verb, see H. FÖRSTER, *WB*, s.v., pp. 289–290. The reading η does not really  
 seem to fit the few horizontal traces of ink before ϛ, but it may have been corrected in some  
 way. The name Symeon (TM Nam 39497) is occasionally attested in Coptic with or without  
 the final -η, cf. e.g. σεμνω in *O.Vind.Copt.* 449.2 (Thebes, seventh–eighth century) and σιμνω  
 in *P.Lond.Copt.* I 450.1 (Syene, ninth century). The following could then be read as ναταc or  
 νατμc, as the second λ is very pointed for an λ in this hand. The name Atas as a patronymic  
 of Symeon may seem a (albeit rare) possibility (the variant Ἀτᾶς is only found in *P.Lond.*  
 V 1652, a list of persons from the first half of the fourth century; variant Ἄτα occurs in texts  
 from eighth-century Aphrodito; see TM Nam 14110), but the patronymic is usually intro-  
 duced by ηωε in this text (cf. ll. 3 and 6).

3 ωηλ One would expect a verb with the following mention of the house as an object, but from  
 the preceding letters it is not clear who the subject might be. The verb form could be ωηλ for  
 ωελ of ωωλ “to despoil, spoil”, or, less likely, of ωωλ, “to flow, loosen”, or a stative of  
 the last verb (W.E. CRUM, *CD*, pp. 557–558).

ηη̄ η̄βικτωρ η̄ωε η̄πεcωω η̄ζομ̄ Both Viktor and Pekysis (the Greek variant of πεcωω,  
 “the Kushite”) are very common names in Upper Egypt (see respectively TM Nam 8930  
 and TM Nam 797). No Viktor son of Pekysis is so far attested in the archive of Dioscorus;  
 a Viktor son of Pekysis is mentioned in the lease of land *P.Oxy.* LXXXIII 5383.12 (583), but  
 that Pekysis is referred to as φροντιστής.



**ΜΑΥΚΑΔΤ ΕΒΟΛ** Considering the general context, the expression might as well imply a fiscal meaning, by which the sender has not been released from a tax payment. On the technical meaning of **ΚΩ ΕΒΟΛ**, which stands for “to be relieved of a debt, a tax” in its passive form, and “to dispense of a tax” in the active form, see T.S. RICHTER, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik: Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Stil und Grammatik der Sprache koptischer Rechtsurkunden* (Wiesbaden, 2008), p. 78 and §40, p. 205. Another possibility would be that the tax payer has not been released from jail because he did not fulfil his tax obligations (on the practice of imprisonment upon non-payment of taxes, see S. TORALLAS TOVAR, “Violence in the Process of Arrest and Imprisonment in Late Antique Egypt”, in H.A. DRAKE (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 103, and, for the later period, P.M. SIJPESTEIJN, “Policing, Punishing and Prisons in the Early Islamic Egyptian Countryside (640–850 CE)”, in A. DELATTRE, M. LEGENDRE & P.M. SIJPESTEIJN (eds.), *Authority and Control in the Countryside. From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> Century)* [Leiden, 2019], pp. 547–588).

**ΝΣΑΚΩΛΟΥ** The ductus of the **Υ**, which extends to the end of the right edge as a filler, suggests that the word does not continue on the following line. Perhaps **ΝΣΑ <Α>ΚΩΛΟΥ** [ΘΙΑ, “after compliance”, although one would have expected the word to be able to fit on this line, or an unattested spelling of the Greek verb **κωλύειν** “prevent”. The reading of what would be the subject of the verb is not clear to us. **ΚΩΛΟΥ** could perhaps also stand for **ΣΩΛΖΟΥ**, “gather them” (see W.E. CRUM, *CD*, s.v. **ΣΩΛ**, pp. 806b–807a), with reference to the solidi mentioned in l. 5, but that still does not solve the interpretation of the preceding letters.

- 9 **ΣΑ** Perhaps for **ΝΣΑ**, cf. **ΔΥΩ ΣΑ ΤΕΜΒΟΛΗ**, “and except for the annona”, in a letter from Dioscorus’ father Apollon in *P.Aphrod.LetresCopt.* 7.21, although the interpretation of what follows is unclear in our letter.
- 11 **ΙΟΣ ΓΝΩΣΙΣ ΠΙ** **ΙΟΣ ΓΝΩΣΙΣ** seems possible, but we would then need to assume a scribal error, an article being dismissed, which goes against the *Lex Youtie*.  
**ΠΚΑΙΞΟΛΟΚΟΤΤ(ΙΝΟΣ) ΚΑΙ** for **ΚΕ**. The interchange of **<ε, αι>** is attested both ways in Greek loanwords in Coptic, see e.g. W.A. GIRGIS, “Greek Loan Words in Coptic” (above, n. 9), pp. 74–75, but in this particular position after **κ** it may be the result of lexical analogy with the Greek **καί**, see J.V. STOLK, “A Cognitive Approach to Spelling Production in Historical Sources: Explaining the Variation between **<ε, αι>** and **<ο, ω>** in Greek Documentary Papyri”, *TPhS* 119 (2021), p. 300.
- 13 **Ι ΕΙΣ ΖΕΝΚΟΥΪ ΝΕΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΝ** The same expression is attested in a seventh-century letter to the pagarch Papas, P.IFAO Jarre Inv. 003.3, where the sender dispatches some vegetables, announcing them as followed: **ΕΙΣ ΠΕΚΟΥΪ ΝΕΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΝ**. The edition of the text is currently under preparation by Anne Boud’hors, who notices that the expression is also mentioned in the will of the monk Paham *P.KRU* 67.17 (Thebes, sixth–eighth centuries?): **ΕΤΒΕ ΝΚΟΥΙ ΝΝΕΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΝ ΕΤΨΟΟΠ ΝΑΙ ΖΑ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΜΝ ΤΑΜΑΛΥ**. At the end of the letter *SB* XX 14241 (Aphrodito, mid-sixth century), Dioscorus sends to the addressee fifty eggs, and defines his gift as “something humble” (l. 18: **Ἐλάχ(ιστα) δέ τινα ἀπέστειλα ὑμῖν, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ᾧὰ πεντήκοντα**). Thus, the sender of our text might have employed the same rhetoric for some things he is going to dispatch.
- 14 On the final epistolary formula, see the section on linguistic characteristics and phraseology in the introduction above.

Ghent University

Yasmine AMORY

Leiden University

Joanne STOLK