A Greek Papyrus Letter in Keio University Library, Tokyo

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Abstract
Publication d'un papyrus grec conservé à Tokyo: lettre d'affaires.

Reference

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A Greek Papyrus Letter in Keio University Library, Tokyo

Among the holdings of Keio University Library in Tokyo, which comprise some 10,000 manuscripts and rare books, is a Greek papyrus bearing shelf-mark 170X@21@1. The papyrus was bought by Keio in September 1994 from Bernard Quaritch in London, who had bought it from Maggs. Its previous whereabouts are unknown.

The papyrus was briefly described in a sale’s notice, and its description and a photograph were included in the catalogue of an exhibition held at Keio University Library in 1996. The catalogue identifies the papyrus as a ‘personal letter by one Adrastus, a Greek merchant in Antinopolis, Egypt, to his father, Theon’. To our knowledge, the papyrus has never been published; the only way to determine more precisely its origin is to publish its contents.

Description, date and origin

The papyrus consists of a single rectangular sheet positioned vertically, measuring 216 × 108 mm. It is in good condition, with some damage in the lower half. The upper (17 mm), lower (30 mm), and left (30 mm) margins remain intact; the right margin has probably been trimmed.

On the front, the main text of the letter is written in a professional hand, in black ink. The writing is fluent and rather angular, the inclination is uneven – some letters are upright, others slightly inclined to the left or to the right. Most letters are written separately: ligatures are rare, such as epsilon-iota, double lambda, and alpha with a following letter, mainly iota. Among individual letters, it is worth noting alpha written in two ways: with a narrow triangular body, and with a small round body; narrow theta; kappa with its arms attached to its stem; pi with its horizontal stroke fully fitting within two vertical strokes; rho and phi with a small round body and a long descending tail. The diaeresis over iota is well marked (15–16: δι[παλίδας]). There are dots above the first two letters of line 17, a difficult passage for which we have not found a full explanation. Those could be cancel dots, as found also in literary papyri. This seems to be confirmed by the presence of another cancel dot in line 10 above the rho of ιπάνται, where the meaning of the text...
calls for a correction by the scribe; there could also have been a cancel dot above the following alpha, but the surface of the papyrus is rubbed off at the place where the dot may have been written.

The first two lines – the greeting formula – are in a larger and slightly more formal script. Whereas the body of the text is written in scriptio continua, in the initial greeting formula all words are separated.

The final greeting has been added in a cursive script, presumably by the sender himself, an epistolary practice well attested in Greek papyri.\(^6\)

On the back, the name of the recipient ΘΕΩΝΙ ΠΑΤΡΙ is written in a large (10 mm tall) majuscule, with a distance of 70 mm between the two words. The script bears resemblance to the so-called Alexandrian majuscule. Alpha is triangular, epsilon and theta are very narrow, and pi has serifs at the lower ends of its vertical strokes with a horizontal stroke reaching beyond the vertical. This type of script is attested in papyri from the mid-second century AD onwards.\(^7\)

Below the recipient’s name is an oblique line and a dark mark. One presumes that the scribe, once he had rolled the letter and written the recipient’s name, put some papyrus fibres around the letter, between ΘΕΩΝΙ and ΠΑΤΡΙ, and applied a mud seal.\(^8\) Above the oblique line is a sequence of barely visible traces, offprints, or tiny characters.

The letter mentions Antinoou Polis, which provides us with a terminus post quem, i.e. AD 130, this city’s year of foundation.\(^9\) Although the script of the first hand is rather difficult to date because it lacks a well-defined style, parallels suggest that it could be assigned to the second half of the second century.\(^10\) This matches also a possible dating of the second hand.\(^11\) Therefore the provisional dating offered in the sale’s catalogue is a bit late: all in all, it seems that this letter can be dated to the mid-second century.

A striking feature of the text is the high level of linguistic competence of the scribe, and perhaps also of the sender himself, Adrastos. The scribe makes systematic use of iota adscript in the dative (1: τοῖ; 6: τῶι … φίλωι; 9: τῇ); and in the subjunctive (8: δέη). We also find several expressions that display a good command of the language: 7–8: ἐν οἷς ἐὰν δέη; 9–11: μὴ δῆ (…) κατόκνει; 19: ὁ σὸς δόκνοις; 21: ὁσον γάρ οὖν ἐάν. The choice of such a wording should presumably be put to the credit of Adrastos, who dictated his letter.

Contents

There are five characters to the story: Adrastos and his father Theon; Sarapion, presumably his relative, acquaintance, or business partner; Rufus, the prefect’s friend; and finally someone called ‘father’, probably Sarapion’s. We cannot exclude that Rufus and the prefect’s friend are two separate persons (see note on lines 3–6), but this has little impact on the overall interpretation. Adrastos is writing from a place which the surface of the papyrus is rubbed off at the place where the dot may have been written.

The role of the prefect’s friend is especially important because Antinoou Polis, being governed as a Greek city, does not answer to a local name Theon, which is quite frequent in Oxyrhynchus; but this remains a mere possibility.

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6 See e.g. P.Mert. I 23 (pl. XXV; late II AD); P.Flor. II 259 (Pap.Flor. XXX, Tav. CXXVI; AD 249–268); P.Gen. I 75 (pl. LVI; late III AD).


8 See e.g. the back of P.Gen. IV 163 (pl. XXVI).


10 See e.g. P.Fay. 21 (http://www.pappal.info/sample/show/5559; AD 134); P.Köln II 115 (Tafel XVIIa; H. Harrauer, Handbuch der griechischen Paläographie, n° 109; AD 142); P.Köln V 229 (Tafel XVII; AD 178).

11 See SB X 10214 (http://www.pappal.info/sample/show/5621; AD 151); P.Oxy. XLI 2962 (http://www.pappal.info/sample/show/5628; AD 154).
It thus seems that Adrastos and Theon are trying to use an indirect connexion to the prefect in order to facilitate their business. Adrastos, however, does not specify explicitly in what capacity this prefect’s friend could help.

There seem to be two transactions of different scales: a rather important matter for which the prefect’s friend’s help is required, and the business of buying some clothes. Lines 20–22, where Adrastos mentions the purchase of woof, probably in bulk, suggest that the first task is related to the textile industry, and that Theon is to seize the opportunity to buy a few finished products on the same occasion.

Adrastos has had some contact with Sarapion, who may actually be the bearer of the letter. At least, it seems that he is a facilitator in the transaction. When Theon makes his purchase, Sarapion will help, perhaps make the payment, which Adrastos can then refund directly to Sarapion’s father in their place of origin. We are thus probably dealing with a loose partnership of dealers in the textile market.

On the role of the ἐπιστράτηγος in such matters, see A. Jördens, Statthalterliche Verwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit. Studien zum praefectus Aegypti (Historia Einzelschr. 175), Stuttgart, 2009, 335, with reference to SB V 7601 C, 9–11.

Translation
Front:
(1–6) Adrastos to his father Theon, greetings. You will do well, when you are in Antinoou Polis with Sarapion, to meet also Rufus, the prefect’s friend. (7–13) For he willingly promised to help you in whatever is needed; do not hesitate, however, to use your own capacity in order to achieve everything; for the journey to Antinoou Polis does not take you many days. (13–17) I asked Sarapion to help you in order to get on my behalf two mantles and a double cloak, all of them white, which in any case should be (...) for me before the upstream delivery. (18–23) Let there be no hindrance on any account either by your hesitation – for Sarapion will help – or because of the price of the woof: at whatever price, let it be bought; and the money I shall pay here to his father. (23–24) I pray that you be well, my respected father Theon.
Back: To my father Theon.
Commentary

1–2 Ἀδράστος Θέωνι τῶι πατρί: a man called Theon, son of Adrastos, is attested on an ostracon, SB XVI 12310 (provenance unknown, II AD). This Theon could be related to the Theon we encounter in our papyrus.

3–6 Those lines could also be translated as follows: ‘You will do well, when you are in Antinoou Polis with Sarapion and Rufus, to meet the prefect’s friend.’ This would imply that Sarapion and Rufus are both travelling to Antinoou Polis; on the other hand, a Latin name like Rufus could well match the profile of the prefect’s friend. The word order in lines 5–6, with συμβαλών placed between Ῥούφωι and τῶι τοῦ ἡγεμόνος φίλωι, is quite ordinary in the Greek style of the Roman period, and especially appropriate for a scribe with a high level of writing competence. The translation for which we finally opted was proposed by Andrea Jördens, whom we thank for the suggestion.

9–11 μὴ δὴ (...): for a parallel to the construction μὴ δὴ + imperative, see P. Flor. III 367, 13–15: μὴ δὴ (...) γίνου. This is already found in Thuc. 2, 89, 5: μὴ δὴ αὐτῶν τὴν τόλμαν δείσητε. See also Joh. Chrys. epist. 82 (vol. 52, p. 652, 5 Migne): μὴ δὴ κατοκνεῖτε γράφειν ἡμῖν συνεχῶς.

10 πρὸς πάδ[...]ιντα: on the correction, see the introduction (cancel dots).

15–16 παραδρόμων δύο καὶ διπλοίδος λευκόν: we have found no parallel for the use of παράδρομος or παράδρομον as a garment. The word seems, however, to be used in a diminutive form in P. Oxy. X 1346 desc. (Oxyrhynchus, II AD?): (... ἐν τῇ) πόλει γέγονε καὶ κακῶς ἐγνάφη, καὶ ἐὰν χρείαν αὐτῶν ἔχεις, ἐάν δὲ μὴ, ἄφος αὐτῶν ὅρις (l. ἄφες αὐτῶ ὅρις) ἐὰν παρασκευάσῃ, ἐπεὶ ἕκοκε (ἐπεὶ) ὁ λευκός μου παραδρόμαξ ἐχρηστός γέγονα (l. γέγονε). ἡγώρακα σοι (... ‘It was fulled in the city and was badly fulled, and if you have use of it, or else, leave it aside till I come, since the white paradromax has become useless. I bought for you (…)’. See also SB V 7576, 3 (Elephantine, I BC?)), an order for shopping: παραδρόμακες δύο. We opted here for a neutral form, which would help to explain the relative ἃ in line 16 (see following note). A διπλοίδος is – obviously – a double cloak, also called τρίβων διπλοῦς or εἷμα διπλοῦς and worn by the Cynics among others: see Anth. Pal. 7, 65, 1–3: σοφοῦ κυνὸς (... ὃ μία τις πήρα, μία διπλοίς (...). As mentioned by the editors of O. Claud. I 129, 9, it is ‘probably a lined cloak, as opposed to ἀπλοπάλλιον’, for which see SB XVIII 13748, 2 (VI/VII AD).

16–17 ἃ πάντως (... γενέσθω: a word ἃπαντως is unattested, and the flawless spelling in the rest of the letter does not speak in favour of a misspelling for ἃπαντος. At the beginning of line 17, the first letter looks like a kappa, but chi is also possible. There are dots above the two first letters in this line; the scribe may have meant to erase and correct them (see introduction). Although the reading of the beginning of this line remains uncertain, the general purpose of the sentence seems understandable: the purchase must be made before Theon sails back upstream.


23 τῶι πατρί: it is hard to tell whether the word ‘father’ is to be taken literally or not. One could perhaps think of a term of respect in the context of a business association.

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