

The Christian letter by Lucius (P. Mich. inv. 5594)

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This article offers a transcription and translation, as well as a commentary, on P. Mich. inv. 5594. The papyrus is believed to date from the fourth century A. D. The origin and provenance of it are unknown. The papyrus is damaged in some places, so lacunae in the text or poorly readable places are restored in accordance with the formulas and word usage on the papyri, which is always explained in the commentary. The beginning of the papyrus has been lost but the formulas at the end of it (Ἀσπάση κατ' [ὄνο]ματα... καὶ ἔρρωσό μοι) and address on the *verso* of the papyrus indicate that it is obviously a private letter in which a certain Lucius writes to Plutio. The *Nomina Sacra* (θεο)ῦ ἐν κυρίῳ; κυρίος) regularly repeated in this letter suggest that it was written by a Christian to a Christian. The context of the letter and the definitions pertaining to Plutio on the *verso* (πρεσβύτερος καὶ ὁμολογητής) suggest that the relationship between Lucius and Plutio is that of a dependent and his patron where the Lucius is being supported by a superior in age or status. As is often the case, a scrap of letter details only a moment in someone's life, leaving us only to speculate on the context and the whole picture.

Keywords: papyrus P. Mich. inv. 5594, Christian letter, Diospolis.

Vsevolodo Zelchenko quinquagenario

P. Mich. inv. 5594 has been in the University of Michigan Library (Ann Arbor) since 1931, when it was purchased by the University from the British Museum.¹ It was Maurice Nahman,² the famous Cairo antiquarian, who in July 17, 1930 brought the papyrus to the British Museum. The origin and provenance of the papyrus are unknown. It dates to the fourth century A. D. and it is 14×16 cm in size.

The beginning of the papyrus has been lost but the formulas at the end of it indicate that it is a private letter. The writer 'spared no paper', leaving wide margins on the left, right, and bottom. We can assume that the side margins were folded inward when the letter was folded several times. Symmetrical traces of damage can be seen on both sides of the fold axis on the right. The vertical tear in the left side of the papyrus is the result of the papyrus fibers parting, and in some places the edge of the papyrus along the resulting gaping hole is bent, hiding several of the precious letters.

The papyrus has not been published. I propose its transcription, translation and a commentary on it.

¹ Facsimile available online: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-14401/5594ar.tif> (01.02.2023).

² Abdulfattah 2020, 105–123.

Recto

1 υ...[
2 τοῦ α..[
3 ἐν Διοσπόλει ἵνα οὖν μαρτυρήσῃ ἡμῖν τὰ τῆς
4 ἐν θεοῦ σου ἀγάπης. Προσαγόρευε ἐγκ(υρί)φ
5 τὴν ποθ(ειν)οτάτην ἡμῶν θυγ[α]τέραν
6 μικράν...τα καὶ ὄλων τῶν ἐν τῷ
7 οἴκῳ ἡμῶ[ν τῶ]ν ἀγαπητῶν καὶ [ἐπιμ]εμε-
8 λημένων [...] Κ(ύρι)ος ἀποδώσει κατ[ὰ τ]οῦς
9 κόπους α[ὐτῶν]. Θαυμάζω δ[ὲ πῶς] πολλά-
10 κίς σοι γράφ[ω καὶ ὅ]τι οὐ κατηξίωσες γρά[φ]ειν μοι.
11 Ἀσπάζη κατ' [ὀνό]ματα
12 οἶ[κοδο]μήν σοι ἐν κ(υρί)φ
13 καὶ ἔρρωσό μοι ἐν κ(υρί)φ.

Verso

1 Πλουτίωνι πρεσβυτέ(ρω) καὶ ὁμολογητῆ
2 Λούκιος

“...in Diospolis, that you may testify to us of your deeds of mercy in God. Greet in the Lord our little daughter, for whom we especially long, ... and all in our home beloved and [ἐπιμ]εμελημένων [...] The Lord will reward them according to their works. Only I'm perplexed that I often write to you, and that you do not dignify me by writing a letter back.

Salute <each> by names in your home in the Lord and goodbye in the Lord.

To Plution, elder and patron,
Lucius”

Recto

3 The name of the city Diospolis is well attested in the papyri, but we do not know whether it is Diospolis Magna (Thebes), Parva or Inferior.

On the conjunction ἵνα with the conjunctivus in private letters on papyri see: G. di Bartalo 2021, 67–78; for the combination ἵνα/εἶνα with the particle οὖν in epistolography on papyri the TLG search gives numerous examples: P. Leeds.Mus. 28, r, 5, 3 CE, etc.

4 ἐν θεοῦ — it seems that the author of the letter made a mistake in the case writing υ instead of ω (φ).

5 θυγ[α]τέραν — the substitution of one for the other in the third and first declension in the acc. sg. form is well attested in the koine, a parallel for θυγατέρα is, for example, θηκατέρα in the P. Fouad 82, 12, 4–5 CE (Gignac 1976, 263).

6 μεικράν — instead of μικράν; the reciprocal substitution of ει–ι is characteristic of itacism.

4–8 — Προσαγόρευε ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ / 5 τὴν ποθ[εῖν]οτάτην ἡμῶν θυγ[α]τέραν / 6 μικρὰν...τα καὶ ὄλων τῶν ἐν τῷ / 7 οἴκῳ ἡμῶ[ν τῶ]ν ἀγαπητῶν καὶ [ἐπιμ]εμε- / 8 λημένων [...]

If it were not for the clearly readable καί (6), one might try to understand the genitive ὄλων τῶν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἡμῶ[ν τῶ]ν ἀγαπητῶν καὶ [ἐπιμ]εμελημένων (6–7) as partitive of ποθ[εῖν]οτάτην (5). We can only assume that the author made a mistake and switched from the accusative θυγ[α]τέραν to genitive under the influence of ἡμῶν in l. 5.

Who are the [ἐπιμ]εμελημένων? Caring family members, servants, or members of the Christian community with certain responsibilities? The parallels for [ἐπιμ]εμελημένων in relation not to objects, but to persons, are not found in the papyri.

9 κόπος (κόπτω) — “trouble, work”: ... κόπους γὰρ μο[ι] παρέχει ἀσθενοῦντι (BGU 3 844, 10–11, 83 CE); καλῶς ποιῖς μμνησκόμενός μου, ἵνα μὴ κόπους παρέχομεν τῷ στρατηγῷ (P. Giss. Univ. 3 27, 13–14, 251–300 CE); κόπους ἔξει καὶ ἀναλώσει πολλά (P. Bas 2 4, 13, 201–300 CE), etc.

9–10 θαυμάζω δ[ὲ πῶς] — epistolary papyri contain frequent complaints about someone not answering a letter. A speech cliché used in such cases for a polite rebuke might be: θαυμάζω ((δὲ) πῶς) ... ὅτι οὐ ... μοι... Here is a selection of the many examples that have allowed to propose a restoration of the gaps in vv. 9–10 of our letter:

θαυμάζω [οὔν] πῶς οὐκ ἔγραψάς μο[ι ἐπι]στολήν (BGU. 1041, 12–14);

θαυμά[ζ]ω πῶς οὐκ ἔγραψάς μοι μίαν ἐπιστολήν (P. Kell. 1 65, r, 3–4);

θαυμάζω πῶς οὐδεμίαν ἐπιστολήν μοι ἔγραψας. ἐγὼ δὲ πολλάκις σοι ἔγραψα (P. Oxy. 59 3997, r, 3–5);

θαυ[μάζ]ω δὲ πῶς οὐκ ἐπέμψατε τὴν λοιπάδα τῶν διφθερῶν μέχρι νῦν (P. Apoll. 29, r, 7);

θαυμάζω δὲ πῶς οὐδεὶς μοι ἠγεγκε γράμματά σου... (P. Corn. 52, r, 5);

θαυμάζω, ὅτι τέως οὐκ ἔγράψατε [πρ]ὸς ἐμὲ περὶ τῆς ὑμῶ[ν] ὀλοκληρίας ὑμῶ[ν] (P. Iand. 6 100, 14–16).

10 κατηξίωσες γρά[φ]ειν μοι — this reading is based on the following texts on epistolary papyri: καθὰ γράψαι μοι κατηξίωσεν ἡ ὑμετέρα μεγαλοπρέπεια περὶ τοῦ ὀλίγου ὀπίου (P. Oxy. 49, r, 1); ἐγ[ὼ μὲν] ἐχόμενος τῆς εἰς σὲ αἰετοργῆς πολλάκις σοι ἐπέστειλα, σὺ δὲ οὐδ’ ἄπαξ’ κατηξίωσάς με γραμμάτων (P. Oxy. 1766, r, 5); χάριν καὶ νῦν ἔσχον, ὅτι κατηξίωσας ἡμῖν γράψαι (P. Neph. 8, r, 3).

11 ἀσπάζση κατ’ [ὀνό]ματα — examples for the formula ἀσπάζομαι/εται/ονται/ου/σαι κατ’ ὄνομα are numerous (Exler 1976, 111, 115).

12 οἰ[κοδο]μήν σο ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ — doubts remain about this working hypothesis because it is not confirmed by the parallels in the papyri. Another perhaps possible, though less likely, option to fill the gap is: οἰ[ή]μήν σοι ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ; the form οἰήμην is attested: ... οἰήμην ἀπὸ σοῦ τοῦ π[ρ]εσβυ[τ]έρο[υ] λαβῶν γράμματα... (P. Got. 12, 7, 276–325 CE).

13 ἔρρωσὸ μοι ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ — among the different formulas for the end of the letter there is this one ἔρρωσο μοι κτλ. (Exler 1976, 75).

Verso

1 πρεσβύτε — the abbreviated spelling for πρεσβυτέρω. One can assume that the author of the letter is referring to a superior in age and/or status. Given that it is a Christian letter, perhaps he is referring to a priest or an elder in a Christian community.

ὁμολογητῆ — translating this word as “patron” (ὁμολογητής) we focus on the meaning of “sponsor” which gives the *LSJ* (without examples, with a note “Gloss.”; the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* 2021 does not know this word). The only papyri parallel is not reliable because it is only a reconstruction of a possible reading in the P. Bodl. 1 166, l. 4 of [-ca?-] νομολογη... as a verb: [ἐὰν] ὁμολόγηται (Salomon 1996, 298).

2 The names Πλουτίων and Λούκιος are well attested in the papyri.

Nomina Sacra are often repeated in this Christian letter: 4 θ(εο)ῦ ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ; 7 κ(ύρι)ος; 12, 13 ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ. Lucius asks Plution about something related to ἀγάπη (τὰ τῆς ἐν θ(εο)ῦ σου ἀγάπης), perhaps, works of mercy or a shared Christian meal. The question of what exactly Plution should testify to, and to whom (“us”), remains open.

Lucius misses his little daughter, who apparently lives in Plution’s family or Christian community, and about whom Lucius worries because Plution does not respond to his letters. From the address of the letter, where Plution is designated as πρεσβύτερος καὶ ὁμολογητής, it is only clear that these families might be related by some other ties than kinship, and that Lucius is probably in some way dependent on Plutio.

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Христианское письмо Луция (P. Mich. inv. 5594)

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В статье предлагается транскрипция и перевод, а также комментарий к P. Mich. inv. 5594. Папирус датируется IV веком н.э., место его находки и происхождение неизвестны. В некоторых местах волокна папируса разошлись, так что эти и другие поворждения стали причиной лакун и плохо читаемых мест в тексте. Такого рода погрешности в тексте восстанавливаются в соответствии с формулами и словоупотреблением на папирусах, что всякий раз оговаривается и аргументируется в комментарии. Начало папируса утрачено, но формулы в конце текста (Ἀσπάση κατ’ [ὀνό]ματα... καὶ ἔρρωσὸ μοι), а также адрес на оборотной стороне папируса позволяют предположить, что перед

нами частное письмо, в котором некий Луций пишет Плутиону. *Nomina Sacra* (θ(εο)ῦ ἐν κ(υρί)ψ; κ(υρί)ος) с титлами, регулярно повторяющиеся в тексте, указывают на то, что это христианское письмо. Исходя из содержания и адреса письма, где Плутион назван, согласно нашей реконструкции, πρεσβύτερος καὶ ὁμολογητής, можно предположить, что Луций находился в какой-то зависимости от него как старшего по возрасту и статусу. Как это часто бывает, фрагмент письма на папирусе показывает нам в подробностях и деталях момент чужой жизни, оставляя читателю домысливать контекст и целое.

Ключевые слова: папирус P. Mich. inv. 5594, письмо христианина, Диосполь.

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