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**DOCUMENTARY CONTEXT  
FOR DATING AND INTERPRETING  
CHRISTIAN LITERARY AND SEMI-LITERARY PAPYRI:  
SOME NOTES**

THE FOLLOWING NOTES concern Christian literary and ‘semi-literary’ papyri. These observations derive from ‘documentary’ aspects of these texts and highlight the need of treating literary and documentary papyri as products of the same world and not of separate spheres. Furthermore, contrary to biblical papyri and known pieces of Christian literature, unidentified theological and liturgical texts are largely neglected. The following notes are a modest contribution aiming at bringing more order into the somewhat obscure papyrological world of these genres.

1. THE DATE OF A TEXT  
ON THE TRINITY AND BAPTISM  
(P. BEROL. 21232)

This interesting text was published as ‘Trinitarischer Text mit Taufbefehl’ by Kurt Treu and dated to the Byzantine period.<sup>1</sup> Later, Grace Ioannidou, in her new edition of the piece as *BKT IX 13*, proposed a dating to the

<sup>1</sup> K. TREU, ‘Varia Christiana’, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 24/25 (1976), pp. 113–127, at 124–126, no. 7 (TM 64847).

fifth–sixth century based on palaeographical arguments. Both authors mention that the text was written on the back of a protocol: the digital image available online<sup>2</sup> shows the beginning of two Arabic lines between two lines of ‘Stempelschrift’. The first line starts with the *bi-* of the *bas-mala*, while the second displays the beginning of the *shahāda: lā ilāha*. This would be compatible with Greek-Arabic protocols.<sup>3</sup> While there is no Greek word preserved, monolingual Arabic protocols do not contain fitting formularies, thus this option can be excluded. Bilingual protocols are attested in 694–720/1, while the first monolingual Arabic protocol appears in 732.<sup>4</sup> The *terminus post quem* for the theological text on the other side is therefore 694–720/1.

## 2. THE DATE OF A THEOLOGICAL TEXT WITH QUOTATIONS FROM THE PSALMS (P. BEROL. 2791)

Similarly to the papyrus discussed in the previous note, P. Berol. inv. 2791 contains an unidentified theological text of unclear nature, perhaps a homily. It was dated in the *editio princeps*<sup>5</sup> to the fifth/sixth century without any justification. The edition mentions remnants of another text on both sides. Based on a consultation of the original and digital images,<sup>6</sup> I identified this document as a Greek letter from the second part of the seventh or perhaps even the early eighth century, but no doubt dating to

<sup>2</sup> At <<https://berlpap.smb.museum/04428/>> (last accessed 22 December 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Grohmann’s formularies II.A1–A5 in *CPR* III, pp. xxxvi–xl.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Grohmann in *CPR* III, pp. c–ci, and A. Delattre & N. Vanthieghem in *P. Gascou* 27b, pp. 113–117.

<sup>5</sup> TREU, ‘Varia Christiana’ (cit. n. 1), pp. 117–119, no. 2 (TM 64851).

<sup>6</sup> I thank Marius Gerhardt, the curator of the Greek and Latin papyri of the collection for granting me access to the original and to the digital images. The online record of the papyrus contains only thumbnails: <<https://berlpap.smb.museum/16347/>> (last accessed 22 December 2022).

the Arab period. This interesting document will be discussed elsewhere<sup>7</sup> and published in a future volume of *BGU*. What concerns us here is the relationship between the documentary and the theological text. The letter is written *transversa charta* and is complete on all sides save the bottom. The other side contains the bottom of the theological text written parallel to the fibres and upside down below the address of the letter. While we only have the lower part of the theological text, the upper part of the letter on the other side is complete. It follows that the sheet containing the theological text was reused for writing the letter. Thus the writing of the Greek letter sometime in the second half of the seventh or early eighth century constitutes a *terminus ante quem* for the theological text for which it was reused.

### 3. NO PRAYER, BUT A DOCUMENT (P. BEROL. 17090)

The parchment fragment P. Berol. 17090 was published in 1971 by Kurt Treu who tentatively identified it as a prayer.<sup>8</sup> Consultation of the digital image available online<sup>9</sup> reveals, however, that it is a seventh-century document, perhaps already of the Arab period. Since most of the text is lost, its exact nature remains unclear: it might have been a tax receipt. Receipts on parchment of this date are exclusively Arsinoite, which confirms the proposed provenience. I offer below a new edition of the papyrus with translation and commentary.

<sup>7</sup> I presented this document on 3 December 2019 at the conference ‘Ties that Bind. Mechanisms and Structures of Social Dependency in the Early Islamic Empire’ at Leiden University. The letter will be discussed in my contribution to the conference volume with the title: “Peace be upon you”: Arabic greetings in Greek and Coptic letters written by Christians in early Islamic Egypt’.

<sup>8</sup> K. TREU, ‘Neue Berliner liturgische Papyri’, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 21 (1971), pp. 57–81, at 75, no. 9 (TM 64666).

<sup>9</sup> At <<https://berlpap.smb.museum/04187/>> (last accessed 22 December 2022).

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 ]αδια (ὑπέρ) [  
 ] τοῦ ἁγίου .. [  
 ]. θ ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) κερ(άτια) ὀκ[τ]ῶ [ . . ] . ( ) [  
 4 ]. θ ἰνδ(ικτίωνος) † Φιλόθεος † [

i. √ pap. || 3-4. υδῶ pap. || 3. κερ pap.

[---]αδια for [---] of the Holy [---] of the 9th indiction 8 carats [---] of the 9th indiction. † Philotheos † [---]

1. ]αδια: The end of a name, perhaps the rare Phoibadia (TM Nam 28051)?

2. ] τοῦ ἁγίου ..[: Probably a city quarter named after a church, cf., for instance, a similar Arsinoite tax receipt on parchment, *SPP VIII* 737, ll. 2-3: (ὑπέρ) διαγράφου) λαύρ(α)ς τ(οῦ) Ἁγί(ου) Βίκτορος.

#### 4. A CHRISTIAN AMULET? (P. CTYBR INV. 4710)

The edition of this piece describes it in the following manner:

... a narrow strip of papyrus with the symbol *XMT* (chi-mu-gamma) appearing four times in a row on the front of the papyrus (↓) (...) The piece is neatly cut on all four edges. It is 33.2 cm long, and it has a height of 4.0 cm on the left side that gradually increases to 5.9 cm on the right side. The back of the papyrus (→) is blank except for a few smudges of ink and what appears to be a single curved line on the narrow end of the piece. The strip was folded in half left to right three times, dividing it into eight roughly equal portions marked by creases. The size of the papyrus and the pattern of folds are quite similar to magical amulets, which is what this piece almost certainly was.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> B. NONGBRI, 'The Lord's Prayer and *XMT*: Two Christian papyrus amulets', *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011), pp. 59-68, esp. 64-68 (no. 2), quotation: pp. 64 and 66.

There are indeed examples of amulets that contain only or primarily symbols,<sup>11</sup> but there is no close parallel for P. CtYBR inv. 4710, as far as I know. However, the format of the text allows for another interpretation: I believe that this could be the uppermost strip of a papyrus document that was broken off after folding. *SB XXIV 16148* offers a comparandum.<sup>12</sup> This sixth–seventh-century letter was interpreted as a waybill by its last editors.<sup>13</sup> The sheet’s measurements are 33.2 × 31.5 cm: its breadth is similar to that of P. CtYBR inv. 4710 (33.2 cm). The text of only four lines is written in a large chancery hand and starts with three  $\chi\mu\gamma$ -s between two crosses at the top which resemble those of P. CtYBR inv. 4710. The similarity to P. CtYBR inv. 4710 is apparent, especially if we consider that both texts were written against the fibers (*transversa charta*), which was common practice in late antiquity. Furthermore, the folding pattern of the text would be fitting for a document as well as for an amulet.

One may, however, object that while the two documentary examples I cited contain three  $\chi\mu\gamma$ -s, P. CtYBR inv. 4710 displays one more. However, the quadruple repetition of the symbol is as odd in a magical text as it is in a documentary, since multiples of three or seven are more common, and does, at least in my view, not weigh in either direction in establishing the genre of the text. A further objection may be that P. CtYBR inv. 4710 appears to have been ‘neatly cut on all four edges’ – as the edition put it.

A digital image is available at <<https://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/2767848>> (last accessed 22 December 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g., P. Köln inv. 521 (TM 65042), published in D. WORTMANN, ‘Neue magische Texte’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 168 (1968), pp. 56–111, esp. 106 (no. 9). For its date, cf. L. BERKES, ‘A Christian amulet and estate administrators in seventh century Fayum’, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 64 (2018), pp. 88–97.

<sup>12</sup> One could also compare *BGU III 948*, a letter of the fourth–fifth century which starts with three  $\chi\mu\gamma$ -s at the top, but the papyrus was destroyed in the famous fire in the Hamburg port in 1899 together with many other Herakleopolite papyri and thus there are no measurements or images of the piece available.

<sup>13</sup> C. KREUZSALER & A. PAPATHOMAS, ‘*SB XXIV 16148*: Ein spätantiker Frachtbrief’, *Tyche* 30 (2015), pp. 78–80. An image is available at <<http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00005868>> (last accessed 22 December 2022).

However, clean breaks along folds are also possible, as it can be observed for instance at the top of *SB XXIV 16148*. Overall, the interpretation of P. CtYBR inv. 4710 remains difficult: in light of the above discussion, it might have been the uppermost strip of a papyrus document, but one cannot entirely exclude that we are dealing with an unusual amulet.

A final note is due on the date of the piece. The *editio princeps* (p. 66) argued: ‘The hand would not be out of place in the fifth or sixth century, but again, certainty is elusive’. However, the similar hand of *SB XXIV 16148* suggests that a date in the seventh century would also be possible.

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