

THE
BULLETIN
OF THE
AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF
PAPYROLOGISTS



Volume 52
ISSN 0003-1186
E-ISSN 1938-6958

2015

The current editorial address for the *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* is:

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John Wallrodt, Andrew Connor, and Mohammed Bhatti provided assistance with the production of this volume. Andrew Connor was supported by a grant from the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati, the other two by the Semple Fund of the Department of Classics.

Papontos and the Hermaion *Amphodon* of Oxyrhynchus

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Abstract

Edition of a unique papyrus slip (P.CtYBR inv. 5087) mentioning Papontos and his responsibility/residence(?) in the Hermaion quarter in Oxyrhynchus.

P.CtYBR inv. 5087

12.8 x 7.7 cm

mid-III century CE
Oxyrhynchus

This intriguing papyrus was acquired by Yale University in 1997 from Gallery Nefer, Zurich. When and how this well-known dealer in antiquities (including the infamous Codex Tchacos) acquired the piece is unknown. It is written against the fibers (↓) on a rectangular sheet of papyrus that is complete; the back is blank. There are three lines of text, with four generous margins. Some insect holes and tears are present, along with tattered edges, save the upper edge, which is more or less straight. The sheet was folded three ways horizontally and at least three ways vertically.

The hand is a fluid, practiced cursive. Letters are frequently ligatured, bold, and upright. The descender of *rho* is looped in l. 2 but elongated vertically in all other instances. The *omega* and *sigma* of Παποντῶς in l. 2 are small, elevated, and written off the crossbar of the preceding *tau*. *Pi* is written in two and three strokes, with rounded and horizontal crossbars respectively (cf. Παποντῶς in l. 2). The oblique of *nu* connects high up the right hasta. The hand can be dated to the third century, based on several dated comparanda: *P.Oxy.* 31.2567 (253), *P.Oxy.* 74.4997 (254), *P.Oxy.* 34.2714 (256). The close graphic similarity of these hands suggests that these scribes had comparable training; it is possible that they also worked in the same office.

This little papyrus slip is interesting for the fact that almost nothing else like it is attested in the papyrological record. We find many papyri across genres in a similar format, i.e., small with only a few lines of text, such as mummy tickets (*CPR* 10.104), name tags (*P.Hamb.* 3.226, *P.Monts.Roca* 4.65), receipts (*P.Mich.* inv. 3448), and so on. Our papyrus, however, does not seem to fit in

any of these categories. The opening phrase probably provides our best clue: ἐπ' ἀμφόδου ("in the quarter"). The *amphoda* "were relatively small clusters of a few streets each, mostly named after local landmarks (especially sanctuaries), ethnic groups, and craft specialties."¹ They were used to locate persons and property in Egyptian cities that would have been difficult to navigate. In fact, the *amphodon* of Hermaion in our text was a well-known quarter in Oxyrhynchus, as demonstrated by the papyri.² It is difficult to know the absolute size of this *amphodon*, but we learn from *P.Oxy.* 40.2929 (26 May – 24 June 270) that 183 persons were eligible to receive the monthly dole of free wheat (Ἐρμαίου ἀνδ(ρεσ) ρηγ). This "dole" was modeled on Roman examples and was a kind of bonus for citizens.³ There are applications to receive this monthly dole, such as *P.Oxy.* 40.2892 (ca. 269-270), which indicates in which *amphodon* each applicant is registered. So, Papontos may have lived in this quarter of Oxyrhynchus. But why is this information given on our papyrus?

The opening phrase ἐπ' ἀμφόδου, which is ubiquitous in the papyri, generally points to the genre of registration. Amphodal registers were probably also used by tax collectors who went out to collect taxes from the taxpayers.⁴ What is very odd, however, is the complete lack of context, such as a reference to the registration (ἀπογραφῆ), a household, land ownership, date, age of the declarant, address to an official, etc.; among the many examples of registration, see *BGU* 1.95, *P.Col.* 8.231, *P.Oslo* 2.25, *P.Oxy.* 2.241, *P.Oxy.* 74.4989. So, if our papyrus is connected with metropolitan registration in one way or another, if only marginally, we should probably view our papyrus not as an official document in and of itself. Instead, it must be seen as a kind of extract from official records documenting Papontos' civil status, namely, he was registered in the Hermaion quarter.

The key question for us here is: for what purpose was this papyrus slip created? Our papyrus does not tell us, nor does any other papyrus for that

¹ R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 51.

² For a list of *amphoda* in Oxyrhynchus, see S. Daris, "I quartieri di Ossirinco: materiali e note," *ZPE* 132 (2000) 211-221, at 215-16; R. Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London and New York 2002), 137; K. Worp, "Town Quarters in Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Early Arab Egypt," in *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt*, ed. P.M. Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin (Leiden 2004) 227-248, at 231-233. For a general discussion of topological features of Oxyrhynchus, see J. Krüger, *Oxyrhynchus in der Kaiserzeit: Studien zur Topographie und Literaturrezeption* (Frankfurt am Main 1990).

³ P.J. Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London 2007) 107.

⁴ Alston (n. 2) 144.

matter. Was it a kind of identification card? If so, what social occasion would have required a papyrus slip like this? Can we imagine certain (exclusive?) social functions that would have required identification or some proof of registration?

One possible scenario is that Papontos was required to show some kind of additional proof of metropolitan citizenship for the monthly distribution of one artaba of free wheat (see above). But this conjecture runs into many problems once we realize that the required documentation had to be official. In other words, we expect minimally a fuller formula and a subscription. Our papyrus lacks all of these features, which means that the slip could not have been official proof of anything.

The opening formula suggests that the papyrus was not meant to be kept secret; it was needed for something. But for what? The *amphodon* of Hermaion seems to play the most important role in this text. I suggest that this papyrus may have served as instructions for *where* Papontos was to carry out some task. In support of this hypothesis, we may point to a very similar papyrus in *P.Petaus* 50: ἐπὶ τῆς καλάμης τοῦ χύματος | Ὅρσεν[ο]ῦφης Παθύνεως | Κέλσῃ ἀδελφὸς μη|[τ]ρὸς Σουμή[ιτ]ος.⁵ In this papyrus, Ὅρσεν[ο]ῦφης is responsible for the procurement of straw for dam construction. If we understand our papyrus in a similar way, then Papontos was responsible for some duty in the Hermaion quarter. Unfortunately, the specific task Papontos was expected to carry out is not mentioned in the papyrus. Perhaps it concerned the performance of a certain liturgical duty. Indeed, the *amphodogrammateus* (later replaced by the phylarch) was responsible for nominations to compulsory public services or liturgies.⁶ Ultimately, however, it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions as to this mysterious papyrus' original function, and so we must leave the question open here.

- 1 ἐπ' ἀμφόδου Ἑρμαίου
Παποντῶς Πετοσείριος
- 3 μητρὸς Τσenaφύγγεως

“(Responsible?) for the quarter of Hermaion: Papontos son of Petoseiris, whose mother is Tsenaphunchis”

- 1 ἐπ' ἀμφόδου Ἑρμαίου: See discussion above.

2 Παποντῶς: The name is attested in papyri from Oxyrhynchus in the third century (e.g. *P.Oxy.* 1.59, 8.1121, 10.1255, 19.2240, 22.2350), but our Papontos does not seem to be among them. The provenance graph in the Tris-

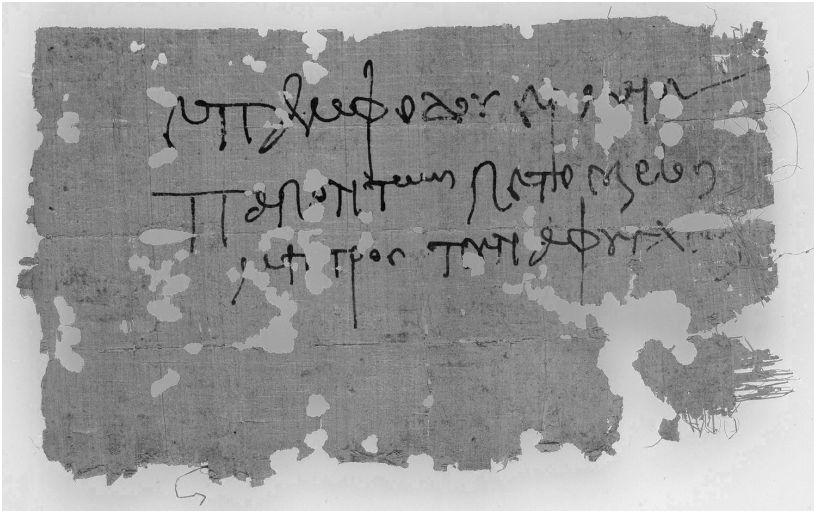
⁵ <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.petaus;;50>

⁶ Alston (n. 2) 145; Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. ἀμφοδογραμματεῦς.

megistos People database demonstrates that the occurrence of this name is statistically greater in papyri from Oxyrhynchus than elsewhere (based on 616 texts; see TM/People name ID 4872).

– Πετοσείριος: This is a variant of Πετοσῆρις, “he who was given by Osiris” (see TM/People name ID 893). For third century attestations in papyri from Oxyrhynchus see *P.Hib.* 1.53 and *P.Oxy.* 1.112.

3 Τσεναφύγγεωσ: This name occurs in a document from Oxyrhynchus dated to 158-9 (*P.Oxy.* 8.1123), although there is no way to know whether that person is the same as our Τσεναφύγγιος. On this name, see TM/People name ID 1059.⁷



⁷I thank Arthur Verhoogt, Roger Bagnall, and the anonymous reviewer of *BASP* for their most helpful comments and suggestions.

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