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A Letter from Harpalos and Sarapion(?)

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Abstract
Edition of the second half of a letter from Harpalos and Sarapion(?) to Harpalos and Ellious.

This papyrus was purchased for Yale University by Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff from Maurice Nahman in Paris, July 1935, with funds donated by Edward Stephen Harkness and Horatio McLeod Reynolds. It constitutes the second half of a letter from Harpalos and Sarapion to Harpalos and Ellious, as the address on the back indicates. There are nine complete lines of text on the front and two lines on the back. The writing on the front proceeds with the fibers (→) but so does the writing on the back, which is a result of the scribe’s turning the papyrus 90° after folding in order to write the address for dispatch. The papyrus is broken at the top, and there are some holes and abrasions, but the surviving text as a whole is intact. Five folding lines are evident on the papyrus and the right edge on the front side is conspicuously straight in contrast with the other three tattered edges. Interestingly, the scribe has drawn a horizontal line the width of the text beneath the conclusion of his letter. It is unclear whether an ἔρρωσο farewell was written below the horizontal line; it may have been omitted altogether, for which there are parallels. ² The precise provenance of the text is unknown and none of the persons mentioned can be specifically identified. The purpose of the letter is unclear, although we may infer from the extant text that it concerned family matters, since the sender’s mother, perhaps also the recipient’s mother, sends along her greetings to more than one person.

The handwriting is very roughly bilinear, written in neat majuscule letters with a fluid ductus. The letters have a tendency to incline slightly to the

¹I would like to thank Roger Bagnall, Peter van Minnen, and the anonymous reviewers of BASP for their helpful comments which greatly improved this paper.
left, are mostly detached, and written with finials on the tips of some letters (especially δ, η, κ, π). *Epsilon*’s curved back is occasionally broken at its center, being joined by two, separate curves. The right vertical hasta of *eta* is shorter than its counterpart and curved. The hand can be compared to that of *P.Tebt. 2.479* (account of expenses, 3rd century CE) and *P.Tebt. 2.417 verso* (letter, 3rd century CE), but it may also be compared to that of *P.Tebt. 2.495* (letter, 2nd century). It is also similar but neater in appearance to the hand of *P.Yale 1.78* (letter, 2nd century). We may thus tentatively assign a date of 2nd-3rd century CE to the papyrus.

| 5 | ζετα[ί] σε Διδύμη και Σαραπιάς. και έρωτό- μεν ύμας και παρακαλούμεν γράψατε ἡμείν ἐπιστολήν περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ύμων. |

**Verso**

| 8 | ἡ μήτηρ μου: i t is common for letter writers to use the phrase “my mother” even when the writer and recipient(s) have the same mother. The same is also true of phrases such as “my brother, my sister, my father,” etc. Cf. *P.Mert. 2.82.17*; *BGU 3.843.10-11*; *SB 16.12981.13-15*. There is a horizontal stroke coming off the first *eta* of μήτηρ; this may have been a first attempt at the cross stroke of the following *tau*. |
3 ὡς ἄρτι: The forms ἕως and ὡς are interchangeable; cf. P.Kell. 1.74.18, O.Did. 428.4, P.Athen. 63.21.

κάθηται: The term here may mean “reside, dwell, stay, live” as in 2 Esd. 21:6, Matt. 4:16; see LSJ s.v. κάθημαι. But it may also have the more usual meaning “sit,” in which case the authors may be indicating that the mother “at present is sitting with us,” that is, as the letter was being composed. This is supported by the use of ἄρτι, which frequently denotes (of time) “just now,” “presently,” “just at present” (LSJ s.v. ἄρτι); cf. P.Mich. 3.203.10, P.Mich. 8.500.5, P.Mich. 8.510.16.

4 ἐχόμενα: ἔχω is here being used as a preposition followed by a genitive of person (i.e., “with us”); see LSJ, Suppl. s.v. ἐχόμενα. The phrase ἐχόμενα σου occurs in P.Col. 8.215.24. This word was sometimes misspelled as ἐχόνομα, as in P.Oxy. 8.1160.8, and P.Mich. inv. 5805.19-20.27. See H.C. Youtie, “A ‘Lost’ Parallel for εχονομα,” CPh 32 (1937) 155-158 (=Scriptiunculae 2:805-809).

6-8 ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν: The phrase occurs exactly in this form in the New Testament, in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:1). Cf. also O.Ber. 2.129.14, O.Did. 410.3, P.Col. 8.215.21, P.Oxy. 4.744.7, SB 24.16293.3.

8 γράψατε: The verbs ἐρωτάω and παρακαλέω normally take an infinitive or subjunctive, occasionally being preceded by either ὅπως or ἵνα, but the imperative is frequently used as well. See, e.g., P.Brook. 17.9, P.Berl.Sarisch. 14.8, P.Apoll. 69.18, P.Oxy. 34.2731.17-18, P.Oxy. 59.4008.3, P.Mich. 8.481.33. The use of the imperative can be explained as a shift to direct speech.

Verso
Ἁρπάλωι: I initially ruled out this reading given the large amount of space before the lambda and took it to be a monosyllabic name beginning with lambda. But I now adopt Peter van Minnen’s observation that the scribe drew an “X” over a now missing string, and that Ἁρπα- was likely written to the left of that, on the missing, first half of the papyrus:

– Ἐλλιηοῦτι: The name may be a variant of Ἑλλιοῦς, which is attested only once: as a patronym in P.Sakaon 49.4 (Ἑλλιοῦτος). The latter is probably itself a misspelling of the very common name Ἑριεύς and can be explained by the frequent liquid interchange λ > ρ (on which see Gignac, Grammar 1:102-107).

– Σαραπί(ωνος?): The name is most probably abbreviated given that (1) the letters on this line become increasingly compressed, (2) the sheet may be complete at this point (i.e., not broken), and (3) there are markings above and through the top of the iota suggesting an abbreviation marker. The edge of the sheet where this name breaks off corresponds to the bottom on the front, and the letter has already reached its conclusion at this point. The name could be Σαραπίωνος or Σαραπίαδος. According to the Trismegistos People database, Σαραπίων (#5663) is attested more than 5,100 times, whereas Σαραπίας (#5662) is attested only 517 times, approximately only 10% of the total. It is also unclear whether the Σαραπίας in l. 6 on the front would be the same person as here in the address.
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