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Three Unpublished von Scherling Texts in the McGill University Library

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Abstract

Edition of three Greek texts once belonging to the collection of Erik von Scherling that now reside in the McGill University Library.

In the fall of 2013, during a scheduled field trip with my students to see a variety of Greco-Roman artifacts in the McGill University Library, Montreal (MUL), an ostracon that I had not seen before caught my attention. The inventory card associated with this item indicated that it was from Erik von Scherling’s collection, which piqued my curiosity. To my surprise, I learned during a subsequent visit that this was one of more than eighty items purchased in the 1930s from von Scherling’s private manuscript catalogue Rotulus. The majority of these artifacts – which include clay tablets, mummy portraits, an Ethiopian Psalter, Egyptian scarabs, mummy masks, papyrus of the Book of the Dead, mummy cartonnage, Indian and Persian miniatures, and Coptic figurines – have not been properly studied. A good portion of these items was at some point transferred from the MUL to the Redpath Museum, just across the street. In this article, I present three missing von Scherling items that are kept in the MUL Rare Books and Special Collections: a Ptolemaic tax receipt on pottery, a papyrus letter, and a mummy label.

1. Ptolemaic Tax Receipt

MUL MS Greek 20  W x H = 10 x 7.6 cm  22 July 98 BCE
von Scherling number ?  Thebes

This document is a complete receipt on a reddish-brown ostracon. The inventory card claims that this is von Scherling #1509 (“A Greek ostracon written on a fragment of rubbed red pottery. 4th-5th century”), but that is not the case, since #1509, now housed in Minnesota, was published in this journal by Klaas A. Worp in 2007. This enigma can be explained with the help of McGill’s order documentation from 1933, which are kept on file in MUL’s Rare Books and Special Collections:

March 2nd, 1933
Dear Sir [von Scherling]:

We have made the following selection from the October 1932 number of ROTULUS, all of which we trust you can supply. If, however, certain items have already been sold, we should be glad if you could substitute others in their place at the same prices, notifying us of this fact by letter, or upon your invoice.

Worp reports that #1509 “was acquired by the University of Minnesota from Erik von Scherling on 6 January 1933,” and McGill’s order is dated “March 2nd, 1933,” three months after #1509 had been sold to Minnesota. Thus, at McGill’s suggestion, von Scherling most likely substituted this (uncatalogued) ostracon in lieu of #1509. When it was received across the Atlantic, it was apparently mistaken as #1509, perhaps because it was not clarified that a substitution had been made.

The receipt documents large sums (totalling 90 talents), and so it undoubtedly refers to payments by one or more tax farmers to the bank for the ἐγκύκλιον tax, a kind of transfer tax on the sale of real estate. The provenance of the sherd is secure (Thebes) and is dated to July 22, 98 BCE. For parallel texts with similar formulae, see O.Bodl. 1.92 (104 BCE), P.Vars. 51 and 52 (92

BCE), *O.Heid*. 9 (91 BCE), and the comments by James M.S. Cowey in *ZPE* 151 (2005) 159-162. The scribe of MUL MS Greek 20 also wrote *BGU* 6.1338, a tax receipt for wine dated precisely one month after our receipt was written (21 August 98 BCE).4

1 Ἔτους ιϛ Ἐπεὶφ θ
τέ(τακται) ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν Διὸς πόλ(ει)
τῇ με(γάλη) τρά(πεζαν) θέμα (δεκάτης) ἤγκυ(κλίου)
eζ( ) . . . ( ) (τάλαντα) ἐβδομή(κοντα)
5 πέντε (γίνεται) (τάλαντα) ωε
(τάλαντα) ο

“Year 16, Epeiph 9 [= July 22, 98 BCE], … has paid to the bank in Diospolis Magna, as deposit for the ten percent sales tax, seventy-five talents, totaling 75 tal. (Including extra charges:) 90 tal.”

1 Ἔτους ιϛ Ἐπεὶφ θ: Taking into account the rate of the tax on sale (δεκάτης or 10%), year 16 must refer to year 16 of Ptolemy X and Cleopatra Berenike (= 99/98 BCE); see note to ll. 4-6 below.

2-3 ἐπὶ … τρά(πεζάν): The public bank in Diospolis Magna is usually referred to by this formula; see O.Bodl. 1.80.1-2 (129), BGU 6.1336.1-2 (129-121), SB 16.12349.1-2 (126), 12350.2 and 12351.1-2 (125). In these examples, as in our ostracon, the banker is not mentioned. In other ἐγκύκλιον tax receipts from Thebes, however, the banker’s name is given, e.g., in O.Bodl. 1.92.7 (104): Κέφα(λος) τρα(πεζάτης). On banks and bankers at Diospolis Magna, see especially Raymond Bogaert, “Liste géographique des banques et des banquiers de l’Égypte ptolémaïque,” ZPE 120 (1998) 165-202, at 187-192; see also Katelijn Vandorpe and Willy Clarysse, “Egyptian Bankers and Bank Receipts in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt,” in Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt, ed. Koenraad Verboven, Katelijn Vandorpe, and Véronique Chankowski (Leuven 2008) 153-168.


4 εζ( ): The first half of this line is difficult to read because of the fading of the ink. At this point in the receipt, we expect the name of the taxpayer. The first two letters look like εζ (followed by an abbreviation stroke), but a search in the Trismegistos People database reveals only Semitic names starting in εζ that are attested centuries later and mainly in Coptic documents. So, the reading is suspect. What follows these uncertain letters is also problematic. An abbreviation stroke is clearly visible, and so it is possible that we have the phrase καὶ οἱ μέτοχοι (“and his companions”), as in parallel texts (e.g., O.Bodl. 1.92). The large sums indicated in the following lines would lend support to a reading involving multiple tax payers responsible for levying a very large sum of money.

4-6 The sum in l. 6 (90 talents) is 20% greater than the sum in ll. 4-5 (75 talents), which is the standard increase in additional charges. The additional charge or agio “was often made in order to make up for payments in bronze from the middle of the 2nd cent. until the beginning of the 1st cent. BC.” Cf. Klaus Maresch, Bronze und Silber (Opladen 1996) 93-95, 210-216. The transfer tax εἰκοστή τοῦ ἐγκυκλίου = 1/20 or 5% of the total amount in the early second century BCE. After August 137 BCE, the percentage was doubled = 1/10 or 10%.

5 Charikleia A. Armoni, James M.S. Cowey, Dieter Hagedorn (eds.), Die griechischen Ostraka der Heidelberger Papyrus-Sammlung (Heidelberg 2005) 11.
2. Fragment of a Letter(?)

MUL MS Greek 17 W x H = 10 x 8.9 cm IV CE von Scherling #2008 Provenance unknown

A papyrus sheet in poor condition, broken on all sides except perhaps the right, where part of the margin seems to be preserved. Vertical and horizontal folds are visible. It is written in a cursive script against the fibers; the back is blank. The back holds strips of adhesive, and in the top left corner on the front side portions of inscribed papyrus have torn away, leaving only the adhesive strip visible. It is a letter or request in which the writer seems to be asking someone to care for the poor, perhaps Victor named in l. 2.

↓

1 χαίρειν παρακαλῶ σε . .
] ἀδελφὸν Βίκτορα τ . . . . .
] εἰς τὴν διοίκησιν . [ . . ]
] καὶ τὴν πενίαν τοσα[ύτην]
5 φροντίζει τῶν πενητῶν
] εἰ ἡμῶν γάρ αα . . . ο . . . .
] ἀπὸ πάντος . . .

“Greetings. I ask you … brother Victor … into the administration… and such great poverty … care for the poor … for our … always…”
χαίρειν: The *nu* may be the ending of *χαίρειν*, a reading that is further supported by the descending stroke near the beginning of this line that is likely *rho*. *παρακαλώ* often follows *χαίρειν*; see O.Krok. 1.93, P.Flor. 3.303, P.Giss. 65a, P.Giss.Apoll. 40, P.Oxy.Hels. 47a, c. There are faint traces of ink at the end of this line (and the next). Lines 1 and 2 appear to end with a supralinear stroke.

Βίκτορα: This Victor may not be the recipient but the person for whom the petition was written. Perhaps something like, “I ask you to (help?) brother Victor …”

tὴν πενίαν τοσα[ύτην]: Given l. 2, this could be a reference to Victor’s state of poverty; see l. 5 below.

φροντίζει τῶν πενητῶν: The phrase is found only here in the papyri, but it occurs in several Christian literary texts (e.g., John Chrysostom, Hom. Tit. 6; PG 62.698), as giving to the poor was very much a Christian virtue (cf. Mt 19:21). Since Christians used sibling language to address each other, it is possible that *ἀδελφὸν Βίκτορα* in l. 2 is a Christian designation, although it could just as well be a “pagan” friend or an actual sibling; *ἀδελφὸν Βίκτορα* in P.Mich. 13.660 + SB 16.12542 refers to the actual sibling of Theodoros.

### 3. Mummy Label

This mummy label is not from *Rotulus* but apparently from one of von Scherling’s “supplements.” Interestingly, a separate mummy label sold in one of these supplements bears the same name as the deceased in our label; see Worp and Dekker, BASP 49 (2012) 190. The order from 26 May 1939 indicates that the new label was from “Cat. #22, item #74.” The text contains the name of the deceased, her father, and a toponym on a dark piece of wood in the shape of a *tabula ansata*, with holes on both ends. The text was written with ink in uncial letters and then engraved in the wood after the ink was applied. There is a crack running through the middle of the wooden slab but it is kept together by reinforcement on the backside. As a general rule, mummy labels in the shape of a *tabula ansata* are not inscribed on the back, which is the case here. The type of wood used (plane, sycamore, acacia, pine, etc.) is not immediately discernible and would require lab tests, which were not possible. For a general introduction to mummy labels, see Jan Quaegebeur, *P.Batav.*, Appendix F ("Mummy

1 Σααρέμηφις
2 Ῥωνος
3 Πανοπολῖτις

“Saaremêphis, daughter of Héron, from the Panopolite nome”

1 Σααρέμηφις: The name is so far unattested. The initial letter on the slab is clearly sigma, but we would expect the common feminine theophoric prefix Τα- (“she who belongs to”); there are many female names beginning Τααρ- but not Σααρ-. The most likely interpretation is that it is a misspelling of the Egyptian name Σεναρέμηφις (see TM/People name ID 13690), with loss of intervocalic nu; see Gignac, Grammar 1:111-118. As mentioned above, this name is attested in another von Scherling mummy label (BASP 49 [2012] 190). There, we find Σεναρσμήφις (l. Σεναρέμηφις) as one who had erected a gravestone for her mother. The origin and translation of the Egyptian name Σεναρέμηφις has been a point of contention. It occurs in two Greek-Demotic mummy labels (P.Batav. 40a and b) studied by Jan Quaegebeur, who argues that Ἅρμηφις must be interpreted as Ἡρ-ιων-μω.τ=f, “Horus pillar of his mother” (P.Batav. 40, p. 165). Several variants of the name are attested in the papyri: Σεναρεμίφιος (P.Princ. 2.52), Σεναρεμήφιος (SB 1.1202), Σεναρήμηφις (Paris, Louvre 619), Θιναρέμηφις (P.Bingen 96). Cf. Demotisches Namenbuch, p. 1130, s.v. Senaremêphis.
Many mummy labels stem from the Panopolite nome; see, e.g., *P.Coll. Youtie* 2.97–120, and *P.Batav.* 40, 41. In some cases, the embalmer (νεκροτάφος) in the Panopolite nome is mentioned, e.g., Πανεχάτης in *SB* 1.5767.
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