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Eirene to Epaphrys:
P. Yale I 77 revised

This Oxyrhynchite letter offered its editors several challenges, not the least of which was determining the gender of the author. Most of all, they found it difficult to follow the sense of the text, commenting, "The syntax of the letter is terribly disjointed and scarcely logical. Even a barely literate person makes some sense, but this writer often does not. He also has a thoroughly annoying habit of using ὡς ἐδήλωσά σοι about every other line. This last does, however, underline the fact that Eirenes is clearly the superior of Epaphrys." Every editor of papyrus letters will understand the frustration expressed in these lines but will equally recognize that usually it is our own inability to understand often imperfectly-preserved Greek rather than the writer's failure to communicate that is at stake. It is true that the author's syntax is at times a bit loose, and I cannot claim — even with help ⁽¹⁾ — to have solved all of the problems of this difficult text, but I hope in what follows to establish a more intelligible syntax and show that the letter generally makes sense.

First, the author. The name is given at the start of the text as Εἰρηνης. The editors remark that "it could be a simple mistake for Εἰρήνη or it could be a feminine of the type -ής or -άς with genetives [*sic*] in -ῆδος or -ᾶδος... It might also be a hypochoristic [*sic*] man's name modelled after such names as Διοπᾶς and like Εἰρηναίς from Εἰρηναῖος" (note to line 1). The author is referred to as "he" throughout the rest of the edition. It is, however, accented in the text as Εἰρηνής, which would seem to suggest (according to the note) a feminine name. Case errors in the names of the addressees of letters are hardly rare (e.g., genitive for dative in *P.Oxy.* LVI 3864, nominative for dative in LVI 3859); those in the names of the senders are less common. Nonetheless, it seems far the most economical

(1) I am much indebted to John Rea and Klaas Worp for discussion of this text and many acute suggestions. I have had the benefit of a digital image supplied by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (where this is inv. 115) and of several sessions trying to make further progress on the original; I also studied the piece in a graduate seminar at Yale in May, 1998. I am grateful to Robert Babcock for help of various sorts on this and other occasions.

hypothesis that the writer's name is Eirene, with the genitive perhaps influenced by the mental presence of *παρά* before it ⁽²⁾. There is nothing in the letter suggesting a man as author, and the detailed instructions concerning golden bracelets may well point to female authorship. Whether Eirene wrote the letter herself or dictated it cannot be said; the hand, although a bit ungainly and (as the editors noted) marked by a number of slips and corrections, has some sense of style but is perhaps a little below average for letters. The language is vivid and oral and the orthography by no means bad for a letter ⁽³⁾.

The first half of the letter is largely concerned with the making of a bracelet for an adult woman. It remains difficult to be sure how to punctuate some of this section and thus to understand precisely what the writer is ordering. She indicates first that it is to be χρυσοῦν, which might mean either "of gold" or "of the weight of a χρυσοῦς." The term χρυσοῦς of jewelry metrology in Roman Egypt referred to a unit equal to a quarter of a mnaieion, which itself weighed 8 drachmas. (It was called a mnaieion because it had the value of a mna of silver when the ratio between the metals was 1:12.5.) ⁽⁴⁾. The "quarter" (τετάρτη) often used as a standard for gold weight in the papyri is in fact a quarter of this *chrysous*, or a sixteenth of the mnaieion. In metric terms, the weight of the mnaieion was about 26.9 grams, the *chrysous* thus 6.725 grams and the *tetarte* about 1.7 grams.

Eirene proceeds to indicate that it is to be for the arm of a mature woman. There follows the passage where punctuation and usage are difficult. The writer specifies ὥς τὰ τῆς νεωτέρας γεινέσθω ὥς εἰς χεῖραν Ματροῦτος τῶν δύο χρυσῶν. The meaning of the first ὥς is uncertain (see notes). If it introduces a new thought, a reference to the bracelets of the νεωτέρα (not otherwise identified, but obviously known to Epaphrys), then they are described by comparison to those of Matrous. It would then be a question whether the following phrase indicates their weight (each).

(2) Cf., e.g., *P.Oxy.* XLVIII 3406. In *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2680, the writer equips her name with a superfluous iota adscript which gives it the appearance of a dative (Ἐρσινόη). And what is one to make of Πέτροσι(ρι)ος in *P.Oxy.* LXII 4340?

(3) The editors date the text to ca. A.D. 100, without any indication of the basis. I would prefer "first century" with some leaning to the early side. See 4-5n. for one indication of an early date. I cannot cite a good and datable palaeographic parallel, but on the whole the writer seems to me to be attempting the sort of hand we find in *P.Mert.* I 12 (pl. XV), of A.D. 58, but without the skill found there.

(4) See *P.Oxy.* XLIX 3455 and 3456 for the metrology. The gold piece referred originally to a Ptolemaic gold didrachm.

A bracelet of 2 *chrysoi* would weigh 13.45 grams ⁽⁵⁾. [Jack Ogden has shown that in fact these weights may have varied over time according to what standard for the *tetarte* was in use at a given time, and that the actual weights of preserved jewelry correspond in many cases to multiples of the *tetarte* ⁽⁶⁾.] The bracelet ordered here, if this is right, is far from the heavyweight mentioned in *P.Oxy.* II 259.10, with its 8 *chrysoi* of gold (53.8 g), but was obviously not the lightest possible; its 2 *chrysoi*, at 12 Roman grams, were the equivalent of 3 Constantinian solidi, a respectable amount of money. But the function of the article τῶν is unclear. Other readings are also possible (see notes).

The second part of the letter, where it is uncertain if there has been more than trivial loss at the bottom of the sheet (before it was turned to complete the letter), concerns a delivery which could not be completed in the manner originally expected and so has been carried out by an alternative courier. This section is followed by some instructions concerning the recipient's possible journey to the Oasis; there are again some difficulties here, discussed in the notes.

Εἰρήνης Ἐπαφρῦτι
τῶι ἀδελφῷ πλεῖσ-
τα χαί(ρειν). πρὸ πάντων
4 ἀσπάζομαι σε μεγά-
λως σὺν τοῖς σοῖς πα-
σιν, ἔπιτα ἐρωτῇ-
σαι σοι, ἀδελφε, μὴ
8 ἀμελεῖν περὶ τοῦ
ψελείου. χρυσοῦν,
ὥς ἐδήλωσά σοι,
γεινέσθω εἰς χεῖρ' ἵν'
12 τελείας γυναικός.
ὥς τὰ τῆς νεωτέρας
γεινέσθω ὥς εἰς
χεῖραν Ματροῦτος
16 τῶν δύο χρυσῶν

(5) I am using a figure of 322.8 grams for the Roman pound, a subject still of controversy. Using a figure of ca 327 grams produces results about 1.5 percent higher than those I give.

(6) J. Ogden, "Weight Units of Romano-Egyptian Gold Jewellery," in D. M. Bailey, ed., *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt* (JRA Suppl. 19, Ann Arbor 1996) 191-96.

- ὥς δι' ἐτέ[ρ]ας ἐπισ-
τολῆς ἐδήλω-
σά σοι τῇ ἄλλῃ
20 φορᾶ α σοι μελ-
λε.....ν ἄλλο'ν'
ᾧ χρυσῶν, ἐπὶ τὰ
αὐτῆς εἰς ἄλλην
24 χρέαν ὑπάγει.
κόμισαι παρὰ Πετε-
χῶντος(ος) ἀγρίας ἀσταφί-
δος μ() α, ὃν ἐδήλω-
28 σεν Διογᾶς πεπομ-
[φέναι (?) vacat?]

Back

- διὰ Ἑρμοδώρου
Ζοιλᾶτι. ἐρεῖς
32 δὲ Ζοιλᾶτι ὅτι
ὥς ἐδήλωσά σοι
οὐχ εὖρ[ο]ν δοῦναι
Ἑρμοδώρῳ. ἔδωκα
36 Πετεχῶντος(ι) καὶ εἶδος
καὶ σάκκον καινὸν
ὅπως δώσεις εἰς αὐ-
τὸ τὰ ἔρια εἰ δοκεῖ
40 σοι. λυπὸν ἐλθέ μοι
εἰς) αὖσιν μή μοι
ἐλθῆς μετὰ λόγον ἐνι-
αυτῷ. σημᾶ(ναι?) ἐν Ὀξυρύνχ(ων)
44 εἰ τέλειον τὸ τῆς οἰκίας.
ἔρρωσ(ο). Θῶθ ἱ.

ἀπὸ Εἰρήνης(ης) Ἐπαφροδ(ίτου)
ἀδελφῶν.

Eirene to Epaphrys her brother, warmest greetings. Before all I greet you greatly with all your family. Next I ask you, brother, do not be neglectful about the bracelet. As I informed you, it is to be of a gold piece (?), for a hand of a mature woman. As for those of the younger girl, let

them be as if to fit the arm of Matrous, at a weight of two gold pieces, as I informed you in another letter. By the other delivery... (at the weight) of three gold pieces, since hers is going to another use. Receive from Petechon 1 m(—?) of wild stavesacre, which Diogas indicated that he (?) had sent (*back of papyrus*) to Zoilas by way of Hermodoros. You will please tell Zoilas that, as I informed you, I did not find an opportunity to give (it) to Hermodoros. I gave to Petechon both a design (?) and a new sack, for you to give the wool for it (to him), if you think it best. Moreover, come to me to the Oasis, so that you don't reach me after the annual accounting. Let (them) know in Oxyrhynchos if the matter of the house is finished. Farewell. Thoth 10.

(address) From Eirene to Epaphrod(itos) her brother.

1 Ἐπαφρῶς is an uncommon name, and the Egyptian examples are mainly servile and mainly Oxyrhynchite (*SB* I 1206 is servile but Panopolite); there were three slaves of this name in the Theones' household (*P.Oxy.* XLIV 3197), one a *notarius*. That it is (as one might expect) a hypocoristic of Epaphroditos is indicated by the fact that the recipient's name here is abbreviated Ἐπαφροδ() in the address on the back.

3 ᾱς pap.

4-5 μεγάλως with forms of ἀσπάζομαι is uncommon; I find only *BGU* IV 1079.32 (AD 41), *P.Wash.Univ.* II 106.10 (18 BC), and *SB* V 7600.3 (AD 16). The early date of all three is noteworthy.

6 The alpha of ἐπιτα (for ἐπειτα) is difficult, but it may just be written higher in the line than is usual for this writer. The alternative reading of ἐπιτή (= ἐπειδή), requiring more significant spelling errors (although attested, e.g. in *P.Oxy.* XLIII 3126, *P.Laur.* II 46, *P.Prag.* II 196), is not easier, because the cross-bar of eta is usually higher than the traces here. I have also considered ἐπὶ τὰ, with τὰ for the relative τᾶ, but I have not found a good parallel, and ἐπειτα occurs commonly enough at this place in letters (e.g., *P.Oxy.* IX 1217, X 1299, LV 3819). The scribe has left blank space before ἐπειτα.

6-7 ἐρωτήσαι: Or read ἡρώτησα{ι}? The editors prefer to take this as the aorist infinitive, perhaps dependent on an understood θέλω. This is certainly possible, but even if epsilon is the right reading omission of augmentation of epsilon in ἐρωτάω is not rare (Gignac, *Grammar* II 234), and neither αι for α nor (phonetically) e for α is surprising.

7 σοι: One expects σε; but I do not think the omicron can be read as alpha, thus σοι = σε. Alain Martin points out that there are other instances

of ἐρωτάω with the dative (*P.Mich.* VIII 482.14, 17, 18; *P.Rain.Cent.* 76.1), and that the analogy of δέομαι, another verb of asking, is perhaps instructive: Willy Clarysse has noted (*CE* 68 [1993] 198) that its occurrence with the dative is a sign that the writer is a native speaker of Egyptian, for whom this construction would be normal.

8 Or perhaps ἀμέλειν for ἀμέλει (imperative) rather than the infinitive (edd.). Gignac, *Grammar* I 113, lists examples of nu added before a stop.

9 There are traces after the lambda of ψελείου which suggest correction; John Rea suggests that the writer used the second stroke of lambda as the back of epsilon, then rewrote εἰ more clearly.

10 The omega of ὦς has been written over iota. Here we have the first occurrence of the ὦς ἐδήλωσά σοι that so annoyed the editors; in reality the phrase occurs (with slight variation) only two other times, in 17-19 and 33. On the image there appears to be a stroke after ἐδήλωσα, but this is not ink.

11 Gamma of γεινέσθω is written over sigma. For χέρτιον (here spelled χέρτιν) as diminutive of χεῖρ, see *LSJ* s.v.; I owe recognition of the form to John Rea. The only other papyrological example appears to be *O.Claud.* I 174.10, where it is spelled χέρειν.

13 The ὦς is difficult to construe. Instead of the rendering given, it could mean “like” and continue the thought of line 12 (in which case the full stop at the end of that line should be deleted). If that is accepted, however, what follows must still be about the same bracelet rather than about two additional ones. In that case the χρυσοῦν in 9 would mean “of gold” while τῶν δύο χρυσῶν in 16 means “of two gold-pieces (weight).”

14 γεινέσθω: second epsilon written over omega. The writer may momentarily have thought of a form of γεινώσκω before making the correction.

15 Ματροῦτος: Μαν(ν)οῦτος ed.pr. The latter name, with two nus, is well enough attested, but late. I have not found other examples of Ματροῦς, but it is likely to be a hypocoristic of Ματρώνα.

20-21 The editors’ ἀλλὰ after φορῶ in 20 is not at all convincing. The ending seems rather to be οἱ, and the first part simply a very large alpha, on a scale with the outsized letters in which φορᾶ is written but separated by a blank space from the preceding word. If the οἱ are preceded by sigma, which seems possible, σοι is plausible enough. Following that, the editors read μέλιξι, which is possible, but I cannot reconcile the ποῖσαι (for ποιῆσαι) which they read after it with the remains. John Rea sug-

gests instead that we have an attempt to write μελέτω, which is also possible. I simply have not been able to find an interpretation of these lines which takes account of everything that I see. The logic should connect with the following statement that hers is going to another purpose.

22 ἐπιτα (for ἐπειτα) edd., no doubt on the basis of line 6. But I cannot find any syntax in line 24 to complete the thought if ἐπειτα is read, and the third-person singular verb in 24 (ὕπαγει) completes a clause with τὰ αὐτῆς as subject.

23 αὐτῆς pap.

24 χρέαν, read χρεῖαν: Recognized by Rea, as was the possibility that we have a form of ὑπάγω here.

26-27 The editors give literary references for “wild *astaphis*” or stavesacre in the ed.pr. Papyrological references are collected by M. Marganne, *Inventaire analytique des papyrus grecs de médecine* (Geneva 1981) 370 (*P.Coll.Youtie* II 87 is now *SB* XIV 12142). Although ἀσταφίς by itself routinely means raisins, something it would be natural enough to find mentioned here in quantity, I cannot find any evidence that it can have this meaning when accompanied by ἀγρία. Stavesacre is *Delphinium Staphisagria* L., a tall annual grown for its seeds, which contain a high percentage of alkaloids and are used for externally-applied vermicides, particularly against body lice. See Maud Grieve, *A Modern Herbal* (London etc. 1931, with many reprints) s.v.; www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/s/stavas90.html.

27 The editors read and resolve μ(ετρητήν), but this would be a large quantity (39.39 litres) to find of a seed (it takes about 25 stavesacre seeds to make one gram), and it is a measure generally used for liquids. The mu has a wavy line over it that does not distinctively suggest a particular letter. More likely might be μ(ἄτιον), a much smaller unit (about 3.88 litres, see *P.Kell.* IV, p. 47); in this case, however, we must accept the masculine relative ὅν where neuter ὃ would be correct, and the amount is still relatively large. The same would be true of the often equivalent μ(έτρον). From the point of view of size, μ(νᾶ) would be more attractive (100 drachmas, or about 336 grams); but it is feminine, and the confusion of relative pronouns is less likely. Unfortunately none of the papyrological attestations of stavesacre indicates an amount.

28-29 It is not clear if anything is lost between front and back, i.e., if some papyrus has disappeared beyond the one line restored here. The editors punctuated after Διογᾶς and restored πέπομ[φα], but as Klaas Worp remarks to me, the entire flow of text makes better sense without that

period. Most likely Diogas is himself the subject of the infinitive πεπομφέναι. The ending of the infinitive may have been squeezed into a partial line at the foot of the papyrus, with nothing else lost.

31 ἐρεῖς is presumably a future with volitive or imperative overtones, cf. B. G. Mandilaras, *The Verb*, §§389 ff., 396 ff.

34 The editors took the uncertainly-read ευρων variously as participle (translation: "not finding") or as finite verb (to judge from their accentuation as εὔρων). Nonaugmentation in the aorist is normal for this verb (Gignac, *Grammar* II 240). If it were a participle and correctly read, it could of course be taken as evidence that the author was a man; but if it is a finite verb, it has no bearing on that question. Seeing this as a finite verb, I have taken a new sentence to begin with ἔδωκα. Another possibility is that after ὅτι we are in direct quotation, and then ευρων etc. refer to Epaphrys. But the presence of ὡς ἐδήλωσά σοι makes this less likely.

36 εἶδος was rendered "(other) things" by the editors, as if plural, but this hardly imposes itself. If it refers back to the previous sentence, it could denote the ἀσταφίς, in which case καί ... καί has the sense of "both... and." If it introduces a new thought, with the sense "also," then in connection with a weaving project it is likelier to refer to a drawing or cartoon of the design supposed to be woven. LSJ cites (s.v., 2) for this meaning Plutarch's *Themistocles* (29.3), where the Athenian tells the King that τὸν λόγον οἰκέειν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τοῖς ποικίλοις στρώμασιν· ὡς γὰρ ἐκεῖνα καὶ τοῦτον ἐκτεινόμενον μὲν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι τὰ εἶδη, συστελλόμενον δὲ κρύπτειν καὶ διαφθεῖρειν: only when unrolled do tapestries display their designs clearly. On such designs in Roman Egypt, see A. Stauffer, "Cartoons for Weavers from Graeco-Roman Egypt," in D.M. Bailey, ed., *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt* (JRA Suppl. 19, Ann Arbor 1996) 223-30.

38-39 The editors translated ὅπως δώσεις εἰς αὐτὸ τὰ ἔρια as "so that you may put the wool into it," but this is an improbable sense for δίδωμι. ὅπως: omicron probably corrected from alpha, perhaps because the writer originally intended ἀποδώσεις.

40 ἐλθέ μοι: ἐλθέναι edd. The omicron may have been squeezed after the writer originally wrote μι. For ἐλθέ μοι followed by a geographical phrase with εἰς see BGU IV 1030.3, *P.Oxy.* VII 1065.4. λυπόν: read λοιπόν. I owe to John Rea the observation that this, and not εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, should be the start of new sentence.

41 For omission of sigma at the end of εἰς, see Gignac, *Grammar* I 124-25.

41-44 This passage caused the editors considerable difficulty, because they read

μημα
ἐλθης μετὰ λόγον ἐνι-
αυτὸς σημ'ά' ἐν 'Οξυρύν'χ'(οις)

44 εἰ(ς) τέλειον τὸ τῆς οἰκίας

translating "... For a year I shall... in Oxyrhynchus until the matter of the house is completed." D. Hagedorn, *ZPE* 12 (1973) 292 (*BL* 7.283) corrected the expansion of the place-name to 'Οξυρύνχ(ω) or 'Οξυρύνχ(ων sc. πόλει). (Only the latter is likely at this date, see *P.Oxy.* LVI 3860.9-10n., although the "correction" of 'Οξυρυνχον to 'Οξυρύνχων there is doubtful, as the writer is careful with his omicron/omega distinction.) The supposed omicron followed by two sigmas at the end of αὐτὸς seem more likely to be omega followed by a single sigma. The μη in 41 are surely μῆ, with the aorist subjunctive following in 42. There is certainly a mu next in 41, but what follows it is anything but clear, and there appears to have been an erasure after the last letter; nu might be read in the ghostly remains. The writer's final intention is hard to be sure of, but it may have been μι corrected to μοι as in 40: "so that you not come to me." Originally, perhaps μῆ μ' ἀν- was written, ἀνέρχομαι being the correct verb for travelling from Oxyrhynchus to the Oasis. But this is far from certain.

Unfortunately, it is anything but clear whether the first raised letter in 43 is alpha or epsilon. One can also see traces of (erased?) ink over the nu of ἐν, suggesting that the problem is more complex than we can now understand. The writer's final intention, however, looks most like σημα(), which seems to me most likely to represent the aorist infinitive, used as imperative, of σημαίνω. The translation given is a possible rendering of that understanding, if it is assumed that ἐν 'Οξυρυνχ() is not instead to be taken with the house mentioned in the next line, in which case one might render "let me know if the matter of the house in Oxyrhynchus is finished."

46 ἀπὸ Εἰρήνης) Ἐπαφροδ(ίτῳ): απ Ἐπαφρῦτ(ι) edd. The omicron of ἀπό appears to have been corrected. But there is no sign of the abbreviation that would mark the ἀποδῶ that the editors supposed in their note and translation to have been intended (or, for that matter, of ἀποδος), and they in fact suggested that ἀπὸ Εἰρηνηῖδος was written. Although ἀπό with sender's name in this context is not usual, there are many examples, e.g., *P.Harr.* II 233; cf. *P.Oxy.* LIX 3988.21n.