A COPTIC LETTER FROM TWO WOMEN

This letter, written on a papyrus now in the collection of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria (PAlex inv. 675), was first published by L. S. B. Mac-Coull in "Aegyptus" 66 (1986), pp. 190-191 with plate iii. The provenance is unknown; the editor suggested the eighth century as a date. We became interested in it in connection with the preparation of a work on women's letters from Egypt. The first edition does not give an entirely clear or accurate picture of the state of preservation of the text, and its readings and interpretations are, we believe, capable of improvement in a number of places. Here we give a new text, translation, and notes, not claiming to have solved all of the problems created by the dirty and deteriorated condition of the right-hand side of the papyrus, but believing that much more of the letter can be understood than was the case initially. We hope that others will be stimulated to solve the remaining problems.

1. XHNY
2. [ALOK] ΤΙΜΑΤΟΙ: ΦΕΛΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΣ: ΤΕΚΙΑΛΑΙ ΠΕΤΕΠΙΟΡΑ ΠΕΤΕΒΑΙΙ ΠΕΠΟΤΟΙΟΙ ΤΙΟΝ ΤΣ ΕΛΙΩΝ ΜΗΝ...
3. [ΠΕΡΙΧΩΣΕ: ΤΙΠΡΗΝΗ ΕΡΟΚ ΕΙ ΠΑΙΔΙΤΝ ΤΙΡΟΝ ΠΕΤΕΠΙΟΡΑΙ ΤΙΡΟ: ΑΤΟ ΤΙΠΡΟΧΕΝΙΕ ΕΛΕΟΙΟΙ ΠΕΝΕΟΥΡΗΣ...
4. [ΑΤΟΝ] ΩΦΕΛΙΜΕ ΜΙΗ ΑΛΑ ΑΛΗ ΠΡΟΚΥΗΝΙ ΠΑΝ ΤΙΟΝΟΤ: ΑΙΩΝΤΗ ΤΕ ΕΚΦΗΝΗ ΑΠΑΝΣΗ ΜΙΚΑ: ΑΙΣ...
5. [ΣΤΕΡΟΥ ΞΟΩΝ ΠΕΚΟΤΟ ΝΑΙ: ΗΝΟΝ ΦΩΛΙΒΕ ΤΙΟΝΟΤ: ΕΡΕΦΟΙΟΙ ΠΑΣΧΟΙΝΕ ΕΡΟΚ ΝΤΚΑΑ: ΕΥΚΙΜΗΝΕ...
6. [. ΗΣΟΙ: ΕΙ ΠΕΠΟΤΚΟΙ ΞΑΡ ΤΟΥΝΟΚ ΠΑΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΙΟΣ: ΑΤΟ ΠΕΡΙΟΙΟΤΕ: ΤΕΠΟΤ ΑΠΕΚΑΙΒΑΛ: ΕΙ ΝΑΠ...
7. [ΠΕΡΙΑ: ΔΗΤΑΙΟΝ ΤΕ ΠΟΙΒ ΕΝΤΑΠΑΡΑΛΑΙ ΑΛΟΚ ΕΤΑΙΤΗ: ΕΦΕ ΚΟΝΣΤΑΝΤΗΝΟ ΔΗΤΑΙΟΝ ΤΕ ΑΚΡ...
8. [Π]ΗΡΑ ΠΙΜΑΙΧ: ΕΡΕΠΟΣΟΤ ΓΕ ΝΑΙ ΠΕΠΟΤΚΟΙ ΑΝΤΙΠ ΠΕΡΙΚΗΜΟΤ: ΤΙΠΡΟΧΕΝΙΕ ΑΠΟΚΕ...
9. [. ΠΕΚΛΑ ΕΙΒΗΝ ΠΙΜΑΙΧ ΑΤΟ ΤΑΜΟΝ ΠΕΠΟΤΚΟΙ ΤΙΡΟΝ ΠΡΟΚΥΗΝΙ ΠΑΝ ΤΙΟΝΟΤ ΑΤΟ ΤΟΚΟ: ΑΠΕ ΠΕΡΙΟΙΟΙ ΠΕΡ ΝΑΙ...
10. [ΕΒΟΙ ΕΙ ΑΛΕΟΤΗ ΤΕ ΕΚΦΗΝΗ: ΑΤΟ ΤΕΠΟΥΝΕ ΕΝΟΙΚΙΑΙ ΥΜΗ ΑΡΟΚ: ΕΡΕ ΠΕΚΟΤΟΙ ΝΑΙ ΝΑΙ...
12. [. ΠΕΡΙΟΤΝ ΦΕ ΤΕΡΕ ΝΑΙ ΠΕΚΟΤΟΙΝ: ΑΤΟ ΕΡΕΦΟΙΟΙ ΠΕΝΕΟΥΡΗΣ ΤΙΡΟΝ ΑΠΛΟΚΕΝΤΕ: ΟΥΧΑΙ...
13. ΒΑΣΚΛ: ΕΙΝ ΠΕΚΟΤΟΙ ΠΑΜΕΡΙΤ ΠΕΚΟΤΟΙ ΠΙΟΤ ΑΤΟ ΠΗΡΕΛΕ: ΑΙΣ ΤΕΡΜΑΛΗ ΠΕΚΛΑ ΧΙΣΤΟΣ

Verso:

ΤΑΣΚ ΠΑΜΕΡΙΤ ΠΙΟΤ: ΑΤΟ ΠΗΡΕΛΕ (PLACE FOR SEAL) ΥΜΗ ΠΕΚΛΑ: ΑΙΣ ΤΕΡΜΑΛΗ ΠΕΚΛΑ ΧΙΣΤΟΣ

2. ΦΕΛΛΑΧΙΣΤΟΣ ΧΙΑ ΠΕΤΕΠΙΟΡΑΙ

(2) "I, Tmmatoi the humblest, your mother, and Tenbora, write to their lord father: Before (3) the matter, we greet you with all my heart and all my soul, and we embrace the dust of your feet; (4) and Theodore and Ama Heu embrace you warmly. I heard that you were ill, and my heart was distressed. Look (5) now, send your news to me, or else I am greatly afflicted. May the Lord bless you. You are in need because of your illness. (6) ... because it is God who sent you to them as a helper and as rescuer. Now, your servant came to us (7) yesterday, and he informed us that the matter concerning which we besought you, about Konstantinos, he informed us that you were (8) kind to him. May God grant him the means to serve you and find your blessing. We beseech (9) ... your mercy upon him, and inform us and all

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1. We are indebted to Jean-Luc Fournet for a digital image of the papyrus.
2. We are grateful to Terry Wilfong for reading a draft and making several useful suggestions.
the brothers. <All the brothers> embrace you warmly and were (very?) distressed (10) because they heard that you were ill. And our sister Budokia greets you. May the Lord ... you and establish (11) you upon your throne in peace; for all of us are awaiting you as he ... (12) ... all of them to give them food in its season, and with him destroying all your enemies under your feet. Farewell (13) in the Lord, my beloved father and son. The Holy Trinity».

Verso:

«Give to my beloved father and son the Papas from his humblest mother».

2 There are only slight traces of the first letter, probably the right side of the horizontal stroke of ταυ. We do not know why the name of Tmatoi (cited by W. E. Crum, A Coptic Dictionary, Oxford 1939, 190 b from PKRU 119, 1) is given with two μs. We have restored the singular pronoun αυτοκ on the supposition that even with multiple authors, it is more likely that Tmatoi used the first person pronoun than the plural. We have not found the name Tenbora elsewhere; it would also be possible to take this as «our Bora» with the possessive, but we also have not found the name Bora in other texts. In the grammatical framing of the letter, Tenbora is sometimes included, sometimes not (as in «my heart» in 3) in the pronouns and verbs. Such vacillation between singular and plural is a common feature of Egyptian letter-writing. It is in many cases a sign of oral style and thus probably of dictation of the letter (see Bagnall-Cribiore, above n. 1, chapter 7). As the restorations of succeeding lines show, there is not enough space at left to restore the name of a third sender, as the editor supposed.

4 For the name ευιτ see PKell iv (Kellis Account Book), p. 67. Crum expresses doubt about whether one should take the element αυτοκ as the respectful title («Mother»), the feminine equivalent of the common male Apa) or as part of a compound name αυτοκευτ (Crum, Coptic Dictionary cit., 729 b). The phenomenon of names formed from «Apa» plus the name of a saint has been discussed most recently by Tomasz Derda and Ewa Wipszycka, L'emploi des titres Abba, Apa et Papas dans l'Egypte byzantine, «JJP» 24 (1994), pp. 23-56 at 50-54, concluding that such formations are indeed to be seen as names in which the title was incorporated, rather than as separate titles. We do not know of any similar systematic treatment of the use of Am(m)a. Given the ecclesiastical context of this letter, we have considered it more likely that Ama is actually to be taken as a title.

5-6 Between the traces at the end of line 5 and the lacuna at the start of 6, no more than 5 letters are probably lost. Together with ηο in line 6, these may have contained a verb, perhaps in the first person, expressing happiness or gratitude. We have not found a suitable restoration along these lines.

8 It appears on the photograph that there are strands of papyrus out of place and folded over near the start of this line, making the reading of the ηο at the start of ηου difficult. We see no ink remains preventing the reading, however, and context seems to make it unavoidable. At the end of the line there is a filler stroke.

9 Although little is lost at the start, we cannot see how to restore it. Later in the line, probably «all the brothers» is to be taken with «us» as an object of «inform»; but if so, προκειμενα lacks a subject; most likely the writer failed to repeat the phrase. At the end, it is hard to avoid the thought that the idiom τυχων ηου (Crum, Coptic Dictionary cit., 406 b, «be troubled at heart») is intended. But the colon between ηο and ηου is very clear, and although ηου is a very possible reading at the end of the line (the top of the ηο is visible), what precedes the colon is not at all clear. None of the obvious words for «greatly» or «exceedingly» can be read (ευαλτεν and τωνον would be the most obvious possibilities).

10 The unread portion must contain a verb containing another of God’s actions affecting the addressee: heal you, or something like that.

12 Perhaps an allusion to Psalm 144, 15, και συ διδασ την τροπην αυτων εν ευχαριστ̆α, αυτοκ εταιρας ησαν επανεν, followed by an allusion to Psalm 109,1 (δοκεν αν δοτος εχθροις ου υποκοδιν τον ποδιν ου, γαντικων επεκβασε εταιρες δεικνυς δπεκτειντε) or 1 Corinthians 15, 25 (αχοι οι θη παντες τους εχθρους ύπο τους ποδας αυτων,
The reference in both cases is to God, but we have not managed to reconstruct the missing text at the end of 11 and start of 12.

13 The bottom of the surface in the first part of this line has been lost, but it appears that it was left blank; if instead there was text written there, then a restoration of some 18 letters would be required. Because nothing seems to be needed to complete the expression of good wishes that begins in 12, this possibility is unattractive.

Verso The first editor suggests from the mention of a *thronos* in 11 that the recipient of the letter may have been a bishop. The use of *papas* to refer to him here might also be taken in that sense, as it is mostly to bishops that the term refers in the Greek papyri later than the fourth century. Tomasz Derda and Ewa Wipszycka (above, note to l. 4), pp. 54-56, assert that «dans les textes coptes, *papas* sert habituellement comme titre des presbytres». They do not mention the present letter.

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