Two Linguistic Notes on Ostraka from Mons Claudianus

1. O. Claud. II 243 and 249: τὸ τοῦτο

A curious expression, for which the editor offers no parallel, occurs in these two ostraka. In 243.2-4 we read καλῶς πυή[σεις], ἵ ᾧ ἀδέλφε, πέμψε (1) μοι τὸ τοῦτο ὅν [πέμπ]ρακες (δραμάς) δῆ (πεντάβολον), rendered by the editor as “Please, brother, send me the 4 drachmas 5 obols for what you sold” (2). In the note he comments on τὸ τοῦτο, “the same pleonasm is found in 249. Here τὸ τοῦτο must, rather carelessly, refer to the four drachmas five obols.” In 249.4-6 we find ἐρίς Ἀπολλωνίων διτ “ἔρωτημι ἐσοφόν μοι τὸ τοῦτο καὶ πέμψων μοι αὐτὸν ἵ ᾧ Ἀλλγάτι ἔπι χρίαν αὐτοῦ ἔχω” (3). This is translated, “Say to Apollonius: ‘I ask you, please do this for me and send it to me through Longas, for I need it.’”

Two parallels are known to me (4). The first is BGU III 892, where in lines 5-9 we read as follows: καὶ προσ[ἐ]δρευσα ἓρ’ ἡμέρας δῦν ἐκδηχομένος σε καὶ ἰὰ τὸ τοῦτο ὅκ ἔδυ[ν]ήθην παραγενέσθαι εἰς Τοῦτο Παῦκον (5). In BL I 78 Wilcken’s view is recorded that one should read and διὰ [τὸ] τοῦτο (6). There appears not to have been any comment on the matter since then. The second is P. Köln III 161.9-12, reading μὴ ὅν ἁμελήσῃς τοῦτον, τοῦτο εἶδος ἤτι σε ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἐπικτέστερον τῶν ἄλλων προκρείνας ἐπιμεληθέντας ἀναγοράσων.

(1) Corrected in the apparatus to πέμψων: but simpler and more conventionally grammatical than the switch to the imperative would be the aorist infinitive πέμψω, the phonetic equivalent of what was written.
(2) One might think of translating literally, “Please send me this thing which you sold for 4 dr. 5 ob.” But the next sentence goes on to stress the writer’s need of the cash, making it much more likely that the editor’s rendering is correct.
(3) Normalized, “ἐρίς Ἀπολλωνίων διί “ἔρωτημι ἐσοφόν μοι τὸ τοῦτο καὶ πέμψων μοι αὐτὸν ἵ ᾧ Ἀλλγάτι ἔπι χρίαν αὐτοῦ ἔχω.”
(4) Even with the Duke Data Bank looking for examples is not easy, and there of course may be other instances.
(5) “And I waited for two days expecting you, and because of this I was unable to go to Toua Pasko.”
(6) Both for the dots and for the brackets I use modern (Leiden) conventions; BGU underlines doubtful letters and Wilcken used double angle brackets: <<το>>.
This is translated, “Kümmere dich nun darum, denn dies weißt du, daß ich sie dir schicke, weil ich dich als Zuverlässigeren und Fähigeren den anderen vorziehe.” About line 10, the editor comments, “Oder τοῦ<το>, da das Neutrum eines Pronomens auch bei Verben im Akkusativ stehen kann.” But he does not otherwise comment on his “correction.” With the two instances from Mons Claudianus before us, it seems to me that we should recognize the existence of an idiom, so far attested only in the second century, of το τοῦτο. It follows that Wilcken’s added brackets should be eliminated, and that in P. Köln 161 we should read μή οὖν ὁμοληπτ Exhibition τοῦ τοῦτο, εἰδῶς δεξι κτλ. That would suggest that only the article was declined in this expression, τοῦτο itself remaining absolute, but this is our only non-accusative instance from which to judge. The sense may simply be an increase in forcefulness, a kind of finger-pointing in words; such a usage may reflect the decline in the force of the demonstratives in the Greek of this period.

2. O. Claud. II 293: καταχρηματίζω / καταχρηματίζω

As can be seen on the plate (Pl. XXX), this letter of Nilion to Petreaeis was written in two parts, a main letter ending in ἔρρωσο and a six-line postscript. Because ἔρρωσο was written well below the main letter, on a line of its own, a large blank space intervenes between the two text blocks. The main letter, on various business matters, is clear enough despite some difficulties. The postscript, however, rapidly written and not all clearly preserved, is another matter. The editor says, “son contenu m’échappe en grande partie, parce que je ne puis établir si après ὡς on cite Drillomys ou s’il s’agit d’un ordre transmis par celui-ci, et parce que plusieurs expressions peuvent être lues ou comprises différemment (ἀλλα, πεποιηκένων? , ἐπὶ σὲ ou ἐπεὶ σὲ?, sans parler du mystérieux κατακεχρω[.]τικα.” The text of lines 10-15 as printed is as follows:

10 λέγει δὲ καὶ οἱ Δρυλλομοί διὶ “ἐς τρίτην ἔνεςκοι σοι τὰς δύο κοτύλας τοῦ ἔλαιου”. ἔγω δὲ σὲ οὐ κατακεχρω-[.τικα ἀλλὰ πεποιηκένων, ἐπὶ σὲ [-]κα

15 . . . ο.κα.
This is translated, “Notre Drillomys (7) dit aussi «je t’apporterai dans
deux jours les deux cotyles d’huile». Moi je ne t’ai pas - - -.”

At the start of line 13, I believe that it is possible on the plate to see
clearly before the tau the shape of an alpha, ligatured to the tau. The
descending iota of ἰλαῖον may be overlapped by the alpha, but the letter
does not seem particularly doubtful. Before that are faint traces of another
letter. The word thus appears to be καταχρωματίζω. Neither the dictionary
(LSJ) nor a search of the TLG turns up any suitable compound verb.
But a look at simplex verbs with the proper beginning shows that only
χρωματίζω is possible. The traces before alpha are in my opinion conso-
nant with a reading of μυ, and reading καταχρωματίζω apparently
formed from καταχρωματίζω is thus almost inescapable.

The verb χρωματίζω means to color, and “I have not colored you”
does not at first seem to offer any attractive sense. It is true that LSJ cites
Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Dem. 22) for a metaphorical use in speaking
of rhetorical tone, for which χρόμα was a standard term. When the verb
seemed to appear in the Bonn papyrus now cited as SB XIV 11381, the
editors (H. Braunert and U. Buske), after noting that χρωματίζω had not
appeared in the papyri up to that time, speculated, “Können wir hier auch
eine metaphorische Bedeutung von ‘färben’ annehmen, so ergibt sich mit
großer Wahrscheinlichkeit die gewählte Übersetzung ‘anschwarzten’” (8).
All the same, this is a bold leap, and in our case it is all the more uncom-
fortable in that a search of the TLG shows that χρωματίζω is not attested
in the perfect active; indeed, its passive forms are far more common over-
all. Moreover, χρωματίζω is very poor in compounds, only διαχρω-
ματίζω and ἐπιχρωματίζω appearing, both rare.

When John Shelton reedited the papyrus (9), he recognized the form as
χρωματίσαντες, but he corrected this, commenting only “χρωματίσαν-
tes must be a slip for χρωματίσαντες, ‘enter in an official document’.
The misspelling may have a phonological basis; cf. Gignac, Grammar I
p. 293.” One may be skeptical that this is the correct explanation of the
form, for only a single example of η < ω is cited by Gignac, and ω/ε as a
whole is not common. But the context of the word in the Bonn document
is such that the translation as “list” must be correct.

(7) It is tempting to suggest that this name, otherwise inexplicable, is a metathesis for
Δρυόλος, a Greek name well-attested in the Ptolemaic papyri. But the editor tells us that
an unpublished ostrakon gives the genitive Δρυομοίτος.
Is this the explanation in our ostrakon? The compound καταχρης-
ματίζω is rendered by Preisigke as “ein Rechtsgeschäft
vornehmen, rechtswirkend verfügen über etw[as]” (WB I 770). The commonest usage
is in phrases like μή δὲ έξέστω αὐτῷ πωλεῖν οὐδὲ ὑποτίθεσθαι οὐδὲ
ἄλλος καταχρηματίζειν, with reference to a piece of property: one is
forbidden to sell, mortgage, or otherwise dispose of something (10). It is
hard to see that this offers much help. The beginning of the sentence in
ἡγὼ δὲ seems to link it backward to the statement that Drillomys says he
is coming on the day after tomorrow with the oil. But even if this is a false
impression — the writer shows elsewhere that he knows the use of con-
nective particles is necessary for good style, and there may be no real
connection of subject — καταχρηματίζω as it appears in the papyri is
difficult to understand with a personal object. If we fall back on the less
specific meaning of “treat, handle, deal with” the possibilities seem bet-
ter, particularly if the force of the compounding κατα- is, as often, nega-
tive for the object of the verb. In this respect it is worth noting that
καταχράωματι may mean not only to use fully or use up, but also to mis-
treat or misuse (WB I 770, s.v. 2; LSJ s.v. 3). Some contamination
between these two verbs is not unthinkable, particularly in a writer who
can confuse καταχροματίζω and καταχρηματίζω. “I have not mis-
treated you” would in this case be the meaning (11).

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(10) LSJ s.v. gives “deal with” and “dispose of” as definitions.
(11) I have had no success to date in understanding what follows in lines 14-15.