





Inediti offerti a ROSARIO PINTAUDI  
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*(P.Pintaudi)*

a cura di  
Diletta Minutoli



EDIZIONI GONNELLI  
Firenze 2012

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Proprietà letteraria riservata

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ISBN 978-88-7468-038-2

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Tipografia Latini Firenze – Finito di stampare nel mese di ottobre 2012

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## A LETTER FROM TAOS TO MARKOS

P.Berenike BE11-76/999/001\*  
Berenike

8,5 × 20,5 cm

TAVV. L-LI  
Second half I AD

The papyrus consists of several fragments from the left side of a private letter addressed by a woman named Taos to her πατήρ Markos. Top, left and bottom margins are extant, and the text is more-or-less complete in the last 5 lines. Where the papyrus is broken, we seem to be missing anywhere from 5 to 8 letters. It is unclear whether the text is continuous across the break between lines 24 and 25. No direct join is visible and too little can be made of the content of the letter in these lines to be sure. Writing runs parallel to the fibers on the front; the back contains 6 additional lines in the form of a postscript with its own concluding greeting, plus a one-line address written upside-down in relation to the 6 lines. Text on the back runs perpendicular to the fibers.

The letter was discovered during the 2011 excavation season at Berenike in the Eastern Desert. It was uncovered alongside a wooden stylus near a cat mummy in the western part of an extension to the north of trench 76 in the early Roman dump. The archeological context is said to have been disturbed, although notes suggest that the level on which the finds were made corresponded to an area labeled locus 003 which is located in the trench proper. This locus was the source of a variety of finds dating to the I<sup>p</sup>. That period, and more precisely the second half of the century, the reigns of Nero and the Flavian emperors, is the date of the bulk of the written material found in the dump in earlier seasons. The hand in which the letter was written is consistent with this date.

In this letter Taos writes to Markos at Berenike. From ll. 3-6 it might be inferred that Taos was writing from Koptos (cf. *infra*, nt. to ll. 4-5). It is also conceivable that she was located at an intermediate station on the desert road, but the number of relatives mentioned favors a valley location. She associates herself with her mother in ll. 4-5, but shortly afterward the mother of her husband (never named, as far as we can see) appears. A man named Dionysios (?) appears in ll. 8-9, but his relationship is unknown; so also with Konnas, mentioned in l. 10. The husband's mother is apparently the person who says that the matter alluded to is easily soluble. After that point the loss at right is somewhat larger and connected sense hard to find. But theft from Germanos (also "my father" in l. 30) is mentioned in l. 16. From l. 21 on, we hear about the bad behavior of an unnamed female, who is also apparently responsible for some of what is recounted earlier (μετὰ πάντα ταῦτα, l. 21). She abuses

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\* We are indebted to Steven Sidebotham and Iwona Zych for giving us the opportunity to publish the written materials from the Berenike excavations, and to Katarzyna Lach for the conservation of this papyrus in the field. We have not yet been able to see the original papyrus, and the present edition has been prepared from photographs.

<sup>1</sup> We thank Iwona Zych for providing us with preliminary information concerning the 2011 finds. For Berenike, see S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, M. HENSE, H.M. NOUWENS, *The Red Land. The Illustrated Archaeology of Egypt's Eastern Desert*, Cairo-New York 2008, and, in more detail, S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, Berkeley 2011. These provide abundant bibliography concerning the site reports for previous seasons. For earlier written finds, largely from the same early Roman dump, see *O.Berenike* I and II.

someone, and in the end the writer declines to describe her behavior fully in writing. The continuation on the *verso*, after a concluding greeting, talks about sacrifice, but continuous sense is elusive.

*recto* →

- Ταῶς Μάρκωι τῶι [πα-]  
 τρὶ καὶ κυρίωι πλειῖστ(α) χ[αίρειν.]  
 γινώσκειν σε θέλωι ὅτ[ι ? ἐὰν μὴ ἔλ-]  
 θης ἰς Κόπτον, κύριέ μ[ου,  
 5 μήτερ μου καὶ ἐγὼ [  
 σωι τὰ τοῦ ἀνδρός μ[ου. ἢ μή-]  
 τερ τοῦ ἀνδρός μου [ἀνακα-]  
 λύψακα κεράμια ἐ[ἴπε Διονυ-]  
 κύωι ὅτε εὐλύτο[ν ἦν τὸ]  
 10 πρᾶγμα, Κοινᾶς α[  
 λε ἐκτέες τῆς θύρα[ς πέ-]  
 πωκεν αὐτὰ με[  
 λι ὅλην ὥραν μοι . [  
 ἃ περιτέθεισε α . [  
 15 μα τάσσι τοῦ πατρ[ός  
 κλέπτει παρὰ Γερμ[ανουῦ  
 λέγει μικροῦ φιδ . [  
 ἀνθρώπουσε ἰδ ἐμ . [  
 λωξατης οἰκίας [ ἐν]  
 20 τῶι Ἰεῖωι καταρα . [  
 μετὰ πάντα ταῦτα [  
 πεποίηκεν ἔγραψεν . [  
 κακ[α]ολογοῦσα καὶ πεποι[ήκεν ?  
 ἐμοῦ τὴν μητέραν [  
 25 κατα[ ca. 6 letters ] . μ[  
 ουδ . ητις . [  
 οὐ φέρι λοιπὸν . λυπ . ο[  
 ἀφ' ἡμῶν. ἡμῖς γὰρ οὐ θέλο-  
 με(ν) γράψαι σοι πάντα ἃ ποι-  
 30 εἶ διὰ τὸν πατέραν μου Γερ-  
 μανόν. ἀσπάζ[ομαι] αὐτὸν  
 πολλά. ἔρρωσο

verso ↓

- ] νηκεν λέγουσά μοι  
 ]μιε μοι ἐπὶ τῶν  
 35 ] μα[ ]των ενε κραιδίων  
 ] τὸ θῦμα πεποίηκε  
 ] ci Ἐπώνυχος αὐτὴν  
 ] φηκεν. ἔρρωθε
- 39 ἱς Βερενίκ(ην) [ἀπό]δ vacat ος Μάρκωι συτρ[ατιώτη

3. l. θέλω || 4. l. εἰς || 5.6-7. l. μήτηρ || 11. l. ἐκτός || 14. l. περιτέθειται || 15. l. τάσσει || 16. l. κλέπτει || 17. l. λέγει  
 || 27. l. φέρει || 28. l. ἡμεῖς || 36. l. πεποίηκε || 39. l. εἰς.

Taos to Markos, her father and lord, many greetings. I want you to know that, should you not come (?) to Koptos, my lord, my mother and I ... what belongs to my husband. My husband's mother, after she opened the jars, said (?) to Dionysios, when the matter was easily solved, Konnas ... outside the door ... has drunk them ... for a whole hour ... which you have put around ... (s)he enters the (name?) of (my?) father ... (s)he steals from Germanos and (?) says of little ... 14 men ... of the house ... in the Ision ... after all the things that she has done, she wrote ... abusing and has made ... my mother ... does not bear. Moreover ... from us. For we do not want to write to you all of what she is doing on account of my father Germanos. I send him many greetings. Farewell.

Verso:

... has come (?) saying to me ... the pieces of meat ... you have made the sacrifice ... Eponychos ... her ... Greetings.

Address at the bottom of the papyrus: To Berenike. Deliver to Markos the fellow soldier.

1. The name Ταῶς, as Preisigke already recognized (*NB*, s.v.), can be either masculine (representing Egyptian *Dd-hr*, *NBDEM*. 1368-9: “Das Gesicht (des Gottes ...) hat gesprochen” – more commonly rendered in Greek as Τεῶς) or feminine (representing Egyptian *Ta-hr*, *NBDEM*. 1205: “Die des Gesichts”). It is clear in the present case from ll. 6-7, where the writer's husband is mentioned, that the name is feminine.

2. It is possible that χαίρειν was abbreviated.

3. A case of *Verschleifung* gives the appearance of γινώσκιν.

4-5. Perhaps we should restore in l. 4 only the definite article ἡ and in l. 5 the beginning of the verb, ποιή-. Taos would thus be saying “I wish you to know that if you don't come to Koptos, my lord, my mother and I will take care of the affairs of my husband”.

7-8. For ἀνακαλύπτω meaning to open a wine jar, cf. *P.Thomas* 9.11, ἀν{ακ}εκάλυψε κεράμιν (late Ip; Didymoi). The verb πίνω (here ll. 11-12) also occurs in that context.

9. It is tempting to think that ὅτε has been written for ὅτι, but replacement of *iota* by *epsilon* in such a position is anything but common. In the lacuna, one might restore ἐκτί instead of ἦν, but we do not know the exact size of the available space and with “when” the imperfect seems better.

10. Κωνῆς is evidently a hypocoristic of Κόνναρος. The latter is identified by *LSJ* as the tree

*Zizyphus spina Christi*, the fruit of which is usually referred to in the papyri as ζίζυφος (δίζυφος). The tree is characteristic of Egypt, no doubt the reason why the name and hypocoristic are found mainly in texts from that country.

11. In all likelihood, λε is the end of a third-person singular verb form.

13. λι ὄλην ὄραν, with the first two letters perhaps from a verb ending in λι (=λει). μέλλ(ε)ι would be possible, and possibly we should imagine that nothing but a *lambda* is lost and we should read μέ[λ]λι. What the overall construction and sense would be, however, we do not know.

15. The active τάσσει is far less common in papyri of the Roman period than the middle; it can mean to enter a name in a register, for example. Restoring ὄνομα here is thus attractive, but the context is too unclear to allow the meaning to be certain.

17. We have not been able to formulate a coherent explanation of the sequence of words after λέγει. φιδ may be the beginning of some form of φείδομαι or related word (“sparing little” would fit the scene of excessive behavior that Taos apparently describes); otherwise, it might be part of a proper name.

19. Possible readings: e.g., λω εα(υ)της, λωξετης, λωξε της, λωξ[ε] της. Reading *sigma* before *epsilon* is difficult. We have considered λω ἐξ της, but acknowledge that *kappa* is hard to reconcile with the remaining ink, which is more consistent with *epsilon*.

20. The reference is evidently to a sanctuary of Isis, but where that was located cannot be determined. What follows looks like a form of κατάρατος, “cursed”, and given what is said in lines 16 and 23-30, that is not inherently implausible; but too little survives to provide any meaningful interpretation.

25. The small fragment bearing 6 letters, which is visible in the photograph, may come from this line, although we have been unable to place it. The letters look like ]αγουντ[ or ]αῖουντ[.

27. In all likelihood, λουπόν begins a new sentence or clause.

29. Omission of final nasal is commonplace in the papyri, see GIGNAC I, pp. 111-112.

31. We have reservations about the last few letters in this line. It seems that Germanos is the intended recipient of Taos’s greetings.

33. ἀνήκεν, “she has come up”, seems most likely. The traces at the start are too limited to verify *alpha* but would be compatible with its tail. In the lacuna, perhaps a short name or relationship term.

34. Perhaps κό]μιε for κόμικαι, “bring”.

35. κραιδίων is a misspelling of κρεαδίων, a diminutive of κρέας, “morsel, slice of meat” (*LSJ*). *O. Claud.* I 145 speaks of the sale of two keramia of κρεάδια. Precisely what kind of cut or piece is meant is hard to say, but the meat is likely to be connected with the sacrifice mentioned in the following line. What ενε represents here, we do not know. One possibility is a number (read ἕνα or ἐννέα?), with an understood measure. Another is ἕνι = ἕνετι, cf. MANDILARAS, p. 77, § 106. But we are not confident that either yields an acceptable construction. At the start of the line, there may have been a correction; we have not been able to determine the writer’s final intention.

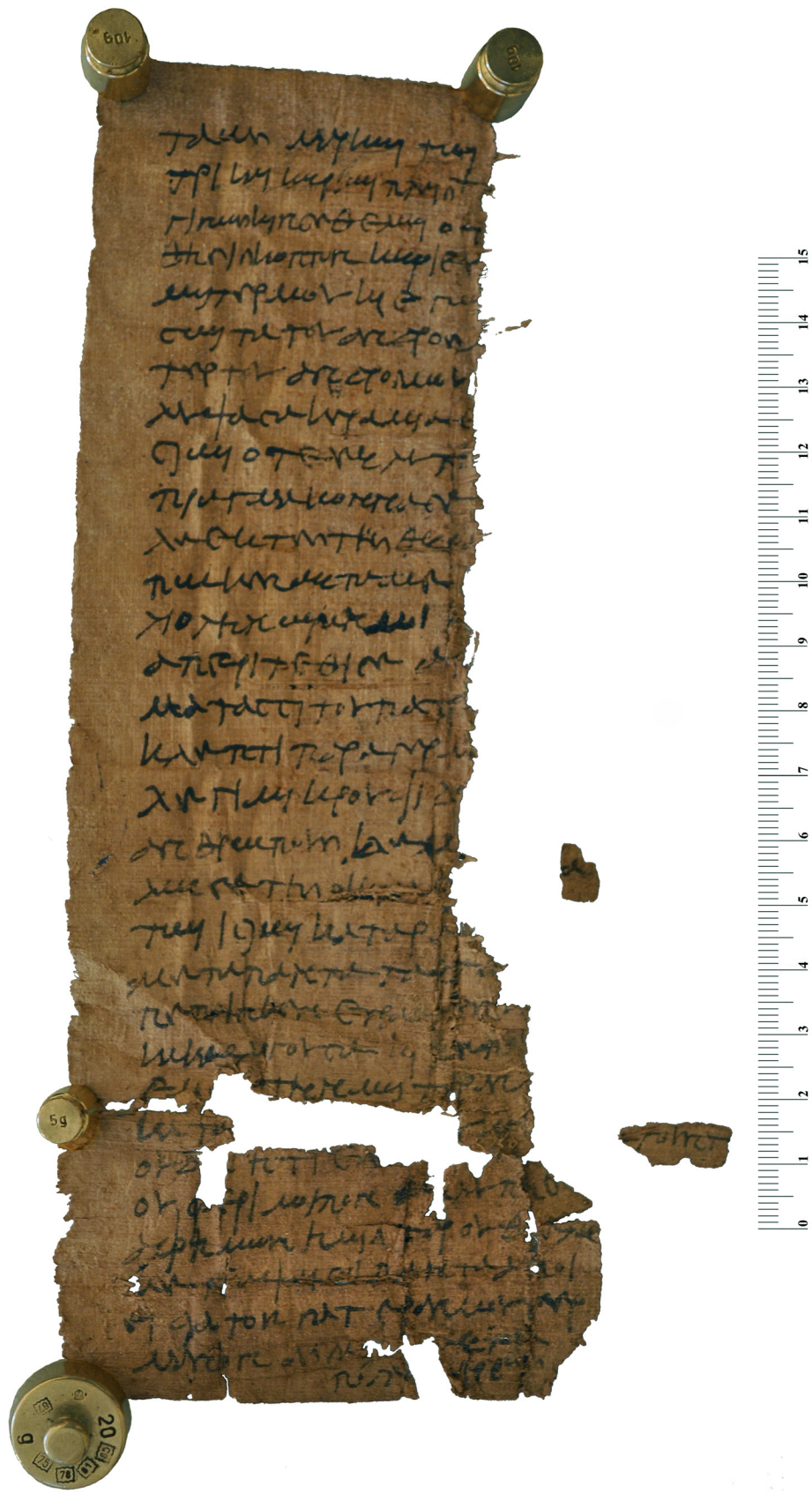
38. Perhaps ἄφηκεν. The trace of the first letter is compatible with the tail of *alpha*.

39. Probably there is nothing lost at the beginning of the line, but it is just possible that the *epsilon* of εἰς was written to the left on papyrus now lost, as the *iota* is close to the edge (but cf. ἰς in l. 4). The blank between [ἀπό]δ and ος was probably filled by a sealing or marks for the placement of one. The use of κυτρατιώτη, perhaps abbreviated, points to a situation where the address was actually written by a man, rather than by Taos.

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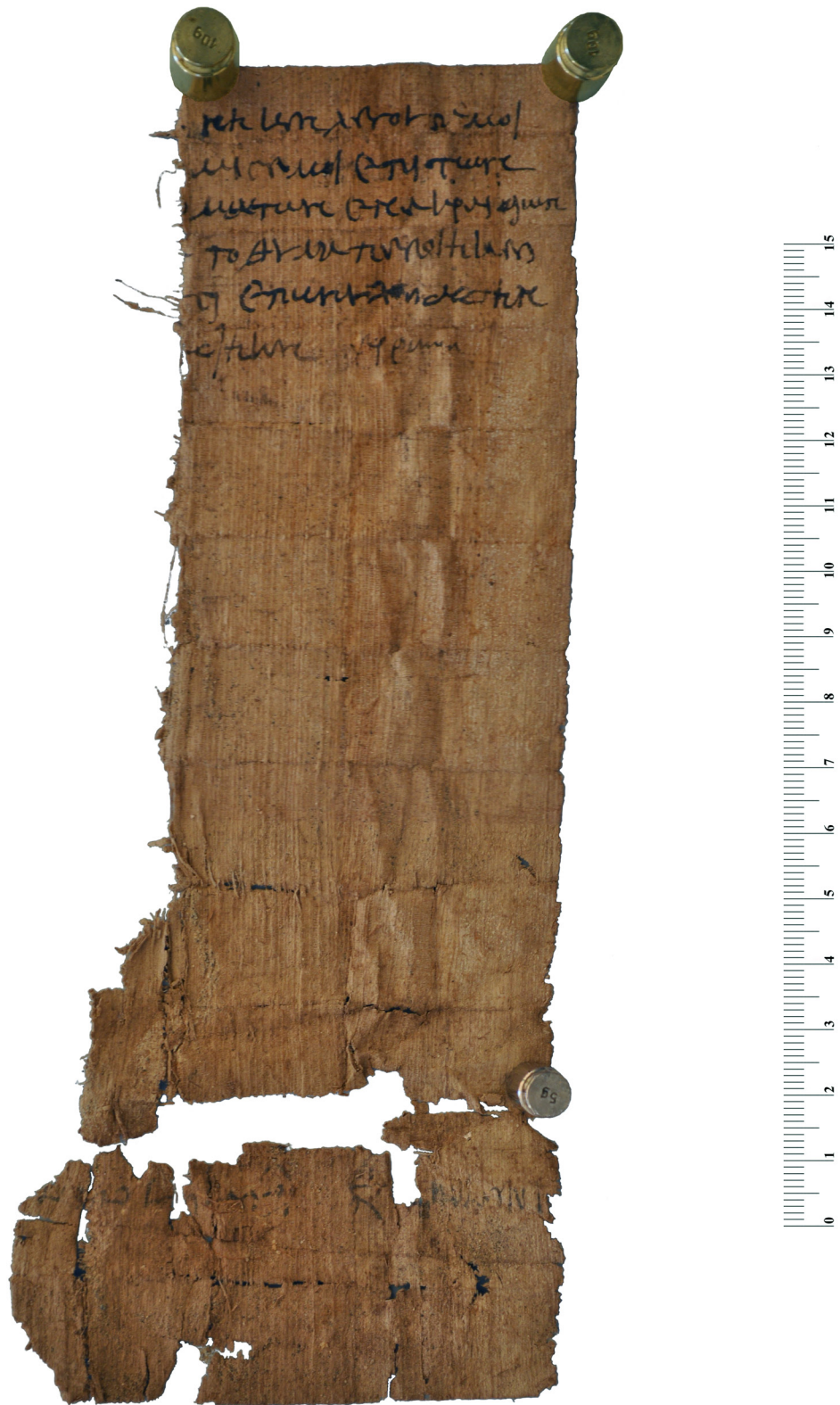
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*P.Pintaudi 53*

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