A Letter of Proklos to Asklepiades: 
P.Lond.inv. 2553 + *P.Col.* VIII 211

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A papyrus in the British Library (inv. 2553), published in 1924, preserves the left portion of a letter of one Proklos. A papyrus belonging to the archive of Isidoros of Psophthis,¹ now at Columbia University (*P.Col.* VIII 211) and published in 1972, preserves the right portion of a letter to Asklepiades. Study of the two has led to the discovery that they are the two halves of a single letter.

The archive of Isidoros of Psophthis so far contains eight published texts, all held by American collections: Michigan (*SB* XVI 12713, 12714, 12835; *XXIV* 15909, 15910; *Pap.Congr.* XXVI p.323), Columbia (*P.Col.* VIII 211), and New York (*P.NYU* II 18). The papyri were bought from M. Nahman through the agency of H. I. Bell of the British Museum in 1923/4. The Michigan papyri arrived at Ann Arbor from the British Museum in 1924 (*SB* XVI 12713, 12714, *XXIV* 15910, *Pap.Congr.* XXVI p.323 in January; *SB* XVI 12835, *XXIV* 15909 in November);² *P.Col.* 211 was purchased by Columbia


² Information from APIS: for *SB* XVI 12713 see quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1434/1440R.TIF, for 12714 quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1432/1436R.TIF, for *XXIV* 15910 quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1433/1438R.TIF, for *Pap.Congr.* XXVI p.323 quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-4047/1430R.TIF, for *SB* XVI 12835 quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1505/
University in July 1923;\(^3\) *P.NYU* 18 was probably purchased around the same time.\(^4\)

It has not been noticed that *P.Lond.* inv. 2553, which was “bought in the Fayum, with other papyri, by Dr. Askren for the University of Michigan, on whose behalf it was presented by Prof. Francis W. Kelsey to the British Museum,”\(^5\) is the missing left half of *P.Col.* VIII 211. It remained in the British Museum and was published in 1924 in *New Palaeographical Society, Indices*, with plate 136a; the right half was sent to Columbia and was first published by C. H. Kim in 1972,\(^6\) and re-edited in *P.Col.* VIII. The text of the London fragment has until now escaped the major papyrological resources (*SB*, *DDbDP*, *HGV*, *TM*). The new join confirms Worp and Nielsen’s suggestion\(^7\) that Proklos is the author of both *P.NYU* II 18 and *P.Col.* VIII 211, which Hanson rejected\(^8\) arguing that “the signatures of the writers … are remarkably different in penmanship, length, and sentiment.”

The texts of this archive date to A.D. 5–6 and are related to a dispute that Isidoros, a cultivator from Psophthis in the Memphite nome, had with Tryphon, strategus in the Arsinoite nome. According to Isidoros, the reason for this dispute was that agents of Tryphon had forced Isidoros to submit a sworn declaration that he would cultivate a plot of \(5\frac{1}{2}\) arouras of land on the estate of the empress Livia at Philadelphia. Isidoros

\(^3\) Information from APIS: wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=columbia.apis.p246.

\(^4\) The exact year is not given in APIS: wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=nyu.apis.4790.


\(^6\) *The Form and Structure of the Familiar Letter of Recommendation* (Missoula 1972) 205.


\(^8\) *Pap.Congr.* XXVI 328.
claimed that this was illegal, as he was registered in Psophthis, and tried to take back his sworn declaration from Tryphon and avoid this obligation. Among the texts of the archive are two letters of recommendation that were sent from Proklos, to whose household Isidoros belonged (so line 4): our letter, from Proklos to Asklepiades the dioiketes, and P.NYU II 18, from Proklos to Tryphon the strategus. Proklos’ social status is not known, but the language of his letters reveals someone of similar social standing to the strategus and gymnasiarch Tryphon and the dioiketes Asklepiades; he asks them to do the favour he requests for Isidoros on his own account.

Our letter is in the same hand as P.NYU II 18, which was written on 25 Mecheir of year 35 of Augustus (19 Feb. 6), three days after our letter. Proklos may also be the sender of SB XVI 12835, dated the same day as our letter and similar palaeographically; but its top is broken and the sender and addressee remain uncertain.10

P.Lond.inv. 2553 measures 9.7 x 20 cm (personal inspection), and P.Col. VIII 211 8.3 x 20.1 cm. (Plate 1). The text is written along the fibres. The back of P.Col. 211 is blank. P.Lond.inv. 2553 is now mounted, and it was not possible to verify its back, but it is probably blank, like P.NYU 18. In the edition below of the joined papyri, some minor differences from the ed.pr. of 2553 regarding the placement of brackets and dots are not mentioned in the commentary.

9 Hanson, Pap.Congr. XXI 421–423.
10 The editors of P.Col. VIII 211 (introd.) suggested that SB XVI 12835 and P.Col. VIII 211 are in the same hand, and the editors of P.NYU II 18 (3–4n.) suggested that SB 12835 possibly originated from Proklos, but Hanson argued that SB 12835, P.Col. 211, and P.NYU 18 were written by different hands (Pap.Congr. XXI 415 n.5 and XXVI 328).
Πρόκλος Ἀσκληπιάδη τοῖ διοικητῆι πλείστα χαίρειν Ἰσίδωρ[π]ος ὁ ἀποδίδοο[υ]ς σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἔστιν μου ἐκ οἰκίας ὑπὸ δὲ κωθῆ Ψώθεω τοῦ Μεμφίτου· ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν παρὰ Τρύφωνος τοῦ στρατηγοῦ κατὰ συνφθήγην γενόμενος ἐχειρογραφήσεν ὑπὲρ τοῦ καταλογίσπραι περὶ κώμης Φιλαδέλ-

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PLATE 1: P.Lond.inv. 2553, P.Col. VIII 211
Proklos to Asklepiades the dioiketes, many greetings. Isidoros, who is delivering the letter to you, is a member of my household, and he is from the village Psophthis of the Memphite. When he was detained by the men of Tryphon the strategus, he signed a sworn declaration with regard to sowing five and a half arouras near the village of Philadelphia belonging to the revenue-estate of Livia. I ask you, therefore, dearest, after you investigate whether he pays the poll-tax at Psophthis, to cooperate with him so that he may be undisturbed with regard to the sworn declaration that he has given, (the sworn declaration) having been returned to him, and for the future to consider the man as recommended by me.

Farewell. Year 35 of Caesar, Mecheir 22.

I ask you, dioiketes, on my account to do everything for Isidoros, for I am concerned about him.

4 μου [ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας]. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 it was given as μοῦ [. . . τῆς οἰκίας. Nielsen and Worp (P.NYU II 18.3–4n.) correctly proposed this supplement, [μοῦ ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας], for P.Col. VIII 211 on the basis of P.NYU 18.3–4, suggesting that both letters were sent from Proklos.

5 τοῦ Μεμφίτου. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 this was read as τούμε πι[ε]ρί του.

6 συνολχήν. In P.Col. VIII 211 the word was restored as κατολοχήν, but it has been corrected by Hanson on the basis of P.Mich.inv. 1430.7 (= Pap.Congr. XXVI p.323, with 7n.).
8 Λιβίας ἐποσόδου. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 this was read as λιβίας τῆς.

9–10 ἐπισκεφτόμενον ἐν περί τῆς Ψωφθίν λαογραφεῖται. As shown by D. Hagedorn, in the first century dioiketai were lower-ranking members of the local administration, without excluding the possibility of private managers. Here, it seems that this dioiketes would be able to check if Isidoros indeed paid his taxes at Psophthis. Compare SB XVI 12835.4–5 ἐφόρτοι ὕστερ αὐτῷ ἐξεῖ υπὲρ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐτοι Ἁμφίτου, “I ask you therefore, after you ascertain if the matter is so regarding his being from the Memphite,” where the addressee is not known, but it should be someone who would be able to verify that Isidoros was from the Memphite nome.

10–12 ὡς ἀπαρενοχλεῖν ὑπὲρ ἡς προεῖται χειρογραφίας ἀναδοθῆσαι καὶ ἐπισκέψαβεν εἰπεὶ εἰπερ ἡς ἐπὶ τῆς Ψωφθίν λαογραφίας ἐῖται. As shown by D. Hagedorn, in the first century dioiketai were lower-ranking members of the local administration, without excluding the possibility of private managers. Here, it seems that this dioiketes would be able to check if Isidoros indeed paid his taxes at Psophthis. Compare SB XVI 12835.4–5 ἐφόρτοι ὕστερ αὐτῷ ἐξεῖ υπὲρ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἁμφίτου, “I ask you therefore, after you ascertain if the matter is so regarding his being from the Memphite,” where the addressee is not known, but it should be someone who would be able to verify that Isidoros was from the Memphite nome.

take care that the declaration on oath be returned to him” (*P.NYU* II 18.12–13).

14–16 ἐρωτῶι (...) αὐτῶ. The letter closes with a farewell and the date, and below this is a two-line postscript with a personal note for the dioiketes. As the editors of *P.Col.* VIII 211 suggested, the farewell and dating clause were apparently written by the first hand, while the postscript seems to be by a second. Hanson, however, suggested that “this [the second] hand writes the three lines 14–16—that is, the closing greeting and date, as well as the postscriptum.”

In the Roman period, the closing farewell and the date are often more cursive and rapid than the letter above, but this is usually a change in the style of handwriting rather than a change of hand. If we compare the writing of the farewell and date with that of the postscript, it appears that they are by two different hands. The farewell and date are written upright, like the letter above; the script is not continuous but the letters tend to be separate, and the ends of the descending uprights have serifs. The postscript, on the other hand, has a rightward inclination, it is continuously written without raising the pen to separate letters, and the uprights do not have serifs at the end. Perhaps the body of the letter and the farewell and date were written by a secretary, while Proklos, the author, wrote a personal note at the end. Similarly in *P.NYU* 18 there is no change of hand at the closing farewell and dating clause.

15–16 ἐρωτῶι (...) αὐτῶ. In the ed.pr. of *P.Lond.* inv. 2553 the left part of these lines was read as ἔρωτι [. . .] οἰκητ[. . .] τω[. . .] ε[. . .] τωι εἰσίδωρω[.]. The content of the postscript closely resembles *P.NYU* 18.10–14 ἐρωτῶι οὐ̣ν σε καὶ εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν καὶ[ταλογήν] (...) τοῦτο δὲ ποιήσας ἐσή μοι κεχαρισμένος, “I ask you therefore also on my account … and

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12 Pap.Congr. XXI 415 n.5.

by doing this you will gratify me.” In both this letter and
_P.NYU_ 18, Proklos expresses his care for Isidoros, and mentions
that the favour he requests will be on his own account.

16 π[α]yper. γ is clear in the reproduction of the papyrus in _New
Palaeographical Society_ plate 136a, but it is now damaged (per-
sonal inspection).\(^\text{14}\)

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