Menander Rhetor and Alexander Claudius in a Papyrus Letter

Herwig Maehler

Among the numerous papyri both documentary and literary that came to light in Otto Rubensohn's excavations at Ashmounein (Hermopolis) between 1903 and 1906, there is a letter which turns out to be of considerable interest (P.Berol. 21849). The papyrus is of fairly poor quality and is damaged at the top so that the ends of the first two lines are missing, and at the bottom where the last two lines are incomplete. Its measurements are: height 12 cm., width 17.3 cm. The author started writing his letter across the fibres on the smoother side of the leaf, then turned it over and added a postscript in a corner of the verso side, also across the fibres. On the same side, running more or less through the middle, is the address, written along the fibres in rather stylized narrow uncial letters but probably by the same hand (see Plate 10). The handwriting on the recto is a practised but inelegant cursive which resembles P.Merton II 95. I would assign it to the second half of the fifth rather than to the sixth century.

1 On which see now BGU XII, Introduction xiv ff. The letter published here (P.Berol. 21849) was found on 24 January 1905. It is now in the papyrus collection of the Egyptian Museum in West Berlin (Schloß-Str. 70, D-1 Berlin 19).
Verso (in the top lefthand corner, across the fibres):

\[\text{kai mebόdoς kai έγκώμια ev tάχει}\

Address (along the fibres):

P ΤΥΠΟΜΝΗΣΤΙΚΟΝ ΠΡ(δο) ΘΕΟΓΝΩ-
ΣΤΟΝ Π(αρὰ)ΒΙΚΤΩΡ(ος)

Translation

(Recto) "To my lord and virtuous brother Theognostus, greetings (from) Victor.

"May your eloquence deign to give Elias P..ylus (?), the school-master’s slave, the book which I gave your brotherliness when you were in Hermupolis—for God knows, I am in dire need!—namely (the commentary) on the orator Demosthenes by Alexander Claudius . . . . (and) Menander’s ‘Art’, quickly

(Verso) "and the ‘Methods’ and the ‘Eulogies’, quickly."

(Address) "Reminder to Theognostus from Victor”

Notes on the Text

2. Θεογνώστῳ is supplied from the address on the verso.

4. ἴ σή λογοτήτης: an honorary title often applied to advocates (σχολαστικοί) and defensores (ἐκδίκωι), e.g. in P.Oxy. VI 902; see P. Koch, Die byzantinischen Beamettiteln (Diss. Jena 1903) 84f; O. Hornickel, Ehren- und Rangprädikate in den Papyrusurkunden (Diss. Giessen 1930) 27f; A. Claus, ‘Ὁ Σχολαστικός (Diss. Köln 1965) 59 n.5 and 85. It is also used informally in private letters, e.g. in SB V 8003.8 and P.Ross.Georg. III 9.19.

5. π[..]υλω: this seems to be either Elias’ second name or an adjective used as a nickname. Unfortunately, the letter before υ cannot be identified with certainty: it looks like γ or τ, but κ cannot be ruled out; it was certainly not ο or α. If this is a name it might be π[ε]κυλω, cf. P.Oxy. XIV 1751.2 and P.Berl.Zilliacus 12.14 (the form Πεκυλος is more frequent, see Preisigke, Namenbuch s.v.). If it is a nickname I would suggest π[η]κυλος ‘mad’, ‘raving’ (although in this case one would expect the article), or perhaps π[ω]κυλος = poculum? Slaves often had two names, the second of which was sometimes a kind of pet name like Πολυδευκης ἐπικε-κλ(ημένος) Ἐρως in BGU II 447.25 and Ἰκιδώρα ἴ καὶ Ἰδίττη in P.Meyer 9.12, or Φιλέταρος and Οὐτλος (vitulus) in BGU IV 1114.7–8, or Ἀνιλλα (anilla ‘little mother’?) in P.Oxy. VI 903.32 and P.Mich. IX 546.11, or some
auspicious name like Παύλος διὰ λόγου Εὐτυχῆς and Ἀρπάκσαντος ὑπὲρ λόγου Νικηφόρος in P.Meyer 9.11, or Ἀγαθήμερος and Ἐπόγαθος in BGU IV 1033.10-18, or Αἰλανοῦ ὑπόμαυτος Καλημέρα in SB V 8007.4, or Ἀβδάκκαντος in P.Mich. IX 549.7. Occasionally, however, we do find slaves called by genuine nicknames like Philargyrus in Petronius 70.10 and in BGU IV 1116.40, or Στύππαξ and the slave-girl Ἐμπόριον in P.Lille I 27 (=Wilcken, Chrestomathie 199). Occasionally, however, we do find slaves called by genuine nicknames like Philargyrus in Petronius 70.10 and in BGU IV 1116.40, or Στύππαξ and the slave-girl Ἐμπόριον in P.Lille I 27 (=Wilcken, Chrestomathie 199).

6-7. τῇ κηδελφότητι: this formula does not occur before the fourth century. It does not, of course, imply that Victor and Theognostus were brothers in the literal sense; it does imply, however, that they were Christians: see 1 Pet. 2.17 and 5.9.

8. οἴδεν γὰρ ὁ θεός: this Christian formula of affirmation is found fairly frequently in letters from the third century onwards. άναγκάζομαι: Victor first wrote ἀναγκαζόμεθα, then corrected ἔθ to αὐ but forgot to delete the last α. For the meaning of ἀναγκάζεθαι in its (rare) absolute use, cf. Thuc. 8.99; Sophocles, Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods, s.v., quotes Achmet, Oneirocrit. 186 p.144.24 Drexel ei μέν ἔστι βασιλεὺς ὁ ἱδών, ἀνθρώπους ἴσα ἑαυτῷ νόμους χαροποιήσει ('in distress').

9. ἐκτώ δὲ 'namely', 'to wit', does not affect the syntax (see Mayser, Grammatik der griech. Papyri II 1 §18.3 on ἐκτώ), so the following accusatives still depend on διδόναι in line 3.

10. τω [i.e the uncertain letter is most likely τ (just possibly ψ). There is a blank space after the ω, then a gap for 2-3 letters. One might suggest...
something like τῶ[ν ὑπ(ομηνμάτων), abbreviated ὑπ. Δημοκρῖτην τὸν ῥήτορα τὸ α’ (exempli gratia), although the blank space after τῶ would be against it. Other possibilities involve emendations of τῶ, e.g. τῶ [ὑπ(ομηνμάτων) ἐἰς Δ., or τῶς [ὑπ(ομηνμάτων)] ἐἰς Δ.6 The gap at the end of this line, after ῥήτορα, may have contained 5–6 letters.

11. There is a blank space before Μενάδρου.

That the addressee of this letter, Theognostus, was an orator and a lawyer is indicated by the formula ἡ σοφ. λογιστὴς in line 4 which alludes to Theognostus’ erudition. It is obvious that the writer, Victor, is of the same profession. He had lent some books to his friend and colleague who had stayed with him at Hermupolis, possibly on his way down to Alexandria. But now Victor himself needs these books very urgently (lines 8–9), so he reminds7 Theognostus to send them back through Elias the schoolmaster’s slave. At first he seems to have thought of only one book (τῶ βιβλίων, line 6), namely the commentary (ὑπόμηνμα?, see on line 10) on Demosthenes by Alexander Claudius.

This author is clearly to be identified with the sophist Alexander also called Claudius mentioned in the Suda (A 1128) where he is distinguished from the ‘sophist’ Alexander son of Numenius.8 We now learn that this Alexander wrote a book on Demosthenes which was still found useful, evidently for practical purposes, by lawyers in fifth-century Egypt. Now, the scholia on Demosthenes9 mention a commentator Alexander whom Dindorf10 identified with Alexander, Numenius’ son, also listed in the Suda.11 Although it is of course theoretically possible that this identification is correct, the new papy-

6 For the spelling mistake ω instead of o or ou, see S. Kapsomenakis, Voruntersuchungen zu einer Grammatik der Papyri der nachchristlichen Zeit (MünchBeitr 28, 1938) 117.

7 In the address on the verso, he calls his letter a ‘reminder’ or commitorium (ὑπομηνημετικόν); for the meaning, cf. P.Med. 87.3; P.Vindob.Worp 23.3; P.Gen. 79.1; P.Fouad 74.1; P.Ant. II 92.1. The Latin equivalent commitorium is used by Symmachus (e.g. Ep. 5.21) and other authors of this period in exactly the same way; see S. Prete, “Il commitorium nella letteratura cristiana antica,” Studi e ricerche 6 (Bologna 1962) 8–9 and the passages quoted there.

8 Suda A 1128 ed. Adler: . . . ἐστὶ δὲ κοὶ τὸ ἑπερος Ἀλέξανδρου Ἀθροδικείου, ψευδός χρῆσις καὶ ἄλλος ὁ Νομισμάτων, φιλοσόφος καὶ ἄλλος, Κλαύδιος χρηματικάς, εὐφρατής.

9 Cf. schol. ad 10.131.1 p.191.8 Dindorf (οἱ Κατὰ Φιλίππου δ’): φαίνεται δὲ οἱ αὐτοῖ, Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ Διόκορος καὶ Ζήνων ὁ πολυθρύλητος . . . , and 20.462.13 p.468.10 Dindorf Ἀλέξανδρος μὲν ἐξεγογεμένος φησιν ὅτι ἐδει κτλ.


11 See supra n.8.
rus makes it virtually certain that the commentator quoted by the scholia on Demosthenes is Alexander Claudius and not Alexander, Numenius’ son.

This is obviously the book which Victor needs most urgently. Having asked Theognostus to send it back, he remembers that besides this one he had lent his colleague several other books as well and adds the titles of these in the last line of the recto, which is crammed into the narrow lower margin, and a kind of postscript in a corner of the back side. These other books are apparently all by Menander—no doubt the well-known rhetor from Laodiceia in Phrygia, near modern Denizli, who lived in the second half of the third century—namely the ‘Art’ (Τέχνη), the ‘Methods’ (Μέθοδοι), and the ‘Eulogies’ (Ευκαλύμα).

This is a valuable new piece of information because hitherto we knew very little about Menander’s writings. Only two of his rhetorical treatises have survived, both of them dealing with ‘speeches for display’ (Ἐπιδεικτικοὶ λόγοι). The first is cited as Μενάνδρου ῥήτορος γενεθλίων (πρὸς Γενεθλίων) Διαίρεσις τῶν ἐπιδεικτικῶν, the second as Μενάνδρου ῥήτορος Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν and also as Περὶ τέχνης ῥήτορικής. We may therefore assume that Menander’s Τέχνη which Theognostus had borrowed from Victor was in fact this second treatise Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν.

As for the other two titles, we are in a more difficult position. As they are mentioned separately in the postscript on the verso we must assume that they refer to writings not contained in the Τέχνη. The first one (Μέθοδοι) recalls the title of the then most famous treatise on the subject, Hermogenes’ Περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος. Now, Menander himself in his Διαίρεσις τῶν ἐπιδεικτικῶν refers to a βιβλίον in which he wanted to set out theoretically the ‘method’ which he had

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13 Rhetores graeci ed. Spengel III 368ff, referred to by the Anonymus Περὶ τοῦ τελείου λόγου (Rhetores graeci III 572.22-24 Walz): περὶ λαλάς δὲ καὶ τῶν τοιούτων μᾶθης πλατύτερον ἐν τοῖς τοῦ Μενάνδρου, ἀ ἐπιγράφοντα Μενάνδρου ῥήτορος περὶ τέχνης ῥητορικῆς.

14 Hermogenes ed. Rabe (Leipzig 1913) pp.414ff. The plural μέθοδοι as a title is curious but not unparalleled; see e.g. Aristides’ Τέχναι ρητορικαί.
adopted in composing his hymn to Apollo, and we may now infer from Victor’s letter that Menander did in fact write such a book, probably not only on how to compose ὑμνοὶ κλητικοὶ but other kinds of hymns and speeches as well, and hence known as Μέθοδοι.

The title Ἔγκωμια, on the other hand, suggests at first sight not a rhetorical treatise περὶ ἐγκώμιων like the first chapter of Menander’s Τέχνη or Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν, which deals with the ἐγκώμιον βασιλέως, but a collection of laudatory speeches. If we accept this hypothesis it would mean that the rhetor Menander was famous not only for his theoretical treatises (which does not surprise us) but also for his laudatory speeches (of which so far we had heard nothing), so famous indeed that they still served as models in Byzantine Egypt two centuries later! This seems unlikely when one considers that from Cicero’s time onwards the only orator who became more and more canonical as a model was Demosthenes, a development which culminated in Hermogenes’ evaluation of Demosthenes as ὁ ῥήτωρ. Consequently, I would not rule out the possibility that the title Ἔγκωμια does after all refer to a treatise Περὶ ἐγκώμιων rather than to actual ἐγκώμια, although the form of the title would seem to suggest the latter. In the absence of further evidence, however, it seems unwise to settle on either of these conclusions.

Having discussed what kind of books Theognostus had borrowed from Victor, we may perhaps ask one final question: why did Victor want them back so urgently? He was obviously under pressure and in a hurry to write a speech, and for this purpose a commentary on Demosthenes would have been useful to him in any case, no matter what sort of a speech he was about to write. But with Menander’s writings, which he asks for with equal urgency, it is a different matter: all three of them refer to λόγοι ἐπιδεικτικοὶ, not δικανικοὶ, so that we

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15 Rhetores graeci III 335.23 Spengel: οὗ χειρὸν δ’ ἱερῷ καὶ τὴν μέθοδον, ἦ κεχρήμεθα ἡμεῖς ἐν τῷ κλητικῷ τοῦ Ἀνόρλωνος ὑμνῷ, βιβλίῳ πως βέβαια.
16 Rhetores graeci III 368–77 Spengel; see L. Previale, “Teoria e prassi del panegirico bizantino,” Emerita 17 (1949) 72–105 (esp. 80–83) and Emerita 18 (1950) 340–66; Burgess, op.cit. (supra n.12) 113ff and the passages quoted in 113 n.3.
P.Berol. 21849, recto: Letter of Victor to Theognostus
(Hermopolis, V cent.)

P.Berol. 21849, verso: End of Letter and Address
may suppose that Victor's aim was not to defend someone in court but to write a laudatory speech on some illustrious person, perhaps a prominent visitor to Hermopolis whose visit had been announced at short notice—but this is, of course, only a guess.

AEGYPTISCHES MUSEUM, WEST BERLIN

February, 1974