

# 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,<sup>1</sup> 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);<sup>2</sup> *P.Col.* 211 was purchased by Columbia

<sup>1</sup> For the archive of Isidoros of Psophthis see A. E. Hanson, "A New Letter from the Archive of Isidoros from Psophthis, Memphite Nome," *Pap.Congr.* XXVI (Geneva 2012) 323–329; "Isidoros of Psophthis, Augustan Cultivator: An Update," *Pap.Congr.* XXI (Berlin 1997) 413–429; J. Hengstl, "Das Archiv des Isidoros aus Psophthis aus rechtshistorischer Sicht," *Pap.Congr.* XXIII (Vienna 2007) 273–278.

<sup>2</sup> Information from APIS: for *SB* XVI 12713 see [quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1434/1440R.TIF](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1434/1440R.TIF), for 12714 [quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1432/1436R.TIF](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1432/1436R.TIF), for XXIV 15910 [quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1433/1438R.TIF](http://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](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-4047/1430R.TIF), for *SB* XVI 12835 [quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1505/](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-1505/)

University in July 1923;<sup>3</sup> *P.NYU* 18 was probably purchased around the same time.<sup>4</sup>

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,”<sup>5</sup> 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,<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> that Proklos is the author of both *P.NYU* II 18 and *P.Col.* VIII 211, which Hanson rejected<sup>8</sup> 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 5½ arouras of land on the estate of the empress Livia at Philadelphia. Isidoros

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1674R.TIF, for XXIV 15909 [quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1504/1673R.TIF](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/X-1504/1673R.TIF). See also Hanson, *Pap. Congr.* XXI 416 and XXVI 327–329.

<sup>3</sup> Information from APIS: [wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=columbia.apis.p246](http://wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=columbia.apis.p246).

<sup>4</sup> The exact year is not given in APIS: [wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=nyu.apis.4790](http://wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/apis/item?mode=item&key=nyu.apis.4790).

<sup>5</sup> *New Palaeographical Society, Indices to facsimiles of ancient manuscripts*, second series, parts viii–ix (London 1924) no. 136, introduction.

<sup>6</sup> *The Form and Structure of the Familiar Letter of Recommendation* (Missoula 1972) 205.

<sup>7</sup> *P.NYU* II 18.3–4n. = *ZPE* 136 (2001) 138–139.

<sup>8</sup> *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;<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

*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.

<sup>9</sup> Hanson, *Pap. Congr.* XXI 421–423.

<sup>10</sup> 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).

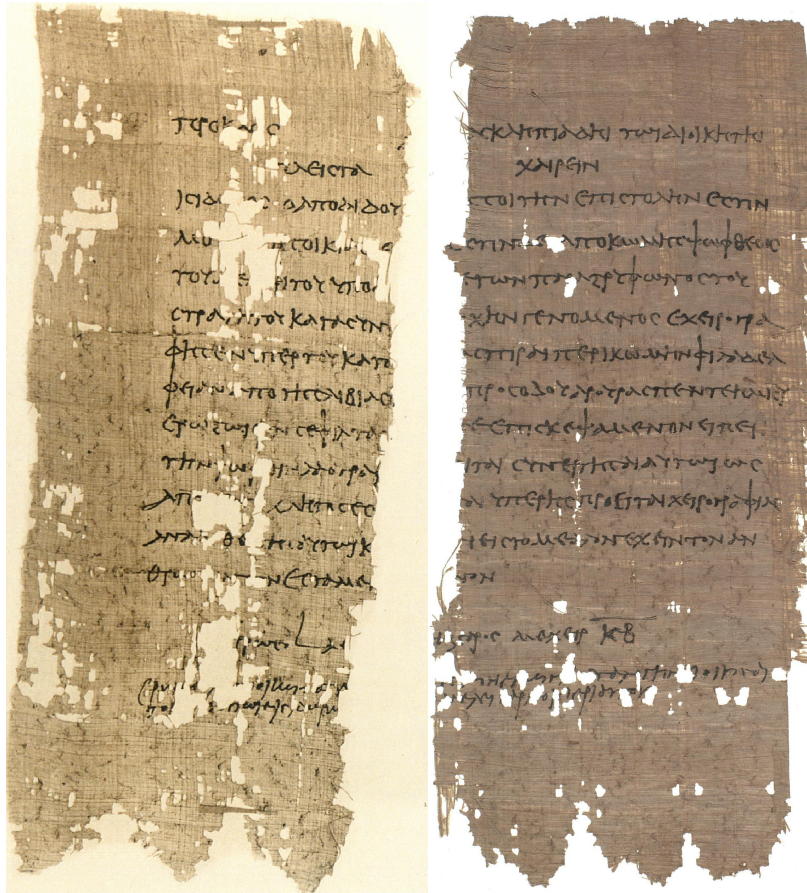


PLATE 1: P.Lond.inv. 2553, P.Col. VIII 211

Πρόκλος Ἀσκληπιάδῃ τῷ διοικητῇ  
 πλείστα ἰ χαίρειν  
 Ἰσίδω[ρ]ος ὁ ἀποδιδούς σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἔστιν  
 μου [ἐκ τ]ῆς οἰκίας, ἔστιν δὲ ἀπὸ κώμης Ψώφθεως  
 5 τοῦ Μεμφίτου· ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν παρὰ Τρύφωνος τοῦ  
 στρατηγοῦ κατὰ συνίχην γενόμενος ἐχειρογρά-  
 φησεν ὑπὲρ τοῦ καταλίσπειν περὶ κώμην Φιλαδέλ-

- φειαν ἀπὸ τῆς Λιβίας | προσόδου ἀρούρας πέντε ἡμισυ.  
 ἐρωτῶ ὄν σε φίλτατε ἐπισκεψάμενον εἰ περὶ  
 10 τὴν Ψῶφθιν λαογραφεῖται συνεργῆσαι αὐτῶι ὡς  
 ἀπα[ρ]εν[ό]χλητος ἔσται ὑπὲρ ἧς προεῖται χειρογραφίας  
 ἀναδ[ο]θε[ί]σης αὐτῶι καὶ εἰς τὸ μέλλον ἔχειν τὸν ἄν-  
 θρωπον συνεσταμέινον.  
 ἔρρωσο (ἔτους) λε | Καίσαρος Μεχειρ κβ.  
 15 (Hand 2) ἐρωτῶι [σ]ε [δ]ιοικητὰ εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν [κα]ταλογὴν  
 ποιῆσαι  
 τὸ π[α]ν τῶι Εἰσιδώρω· | μέλει γάρ μοι περὶ αὐτοῦ.

7 l. κατασπεῖραι 9, 15 l. ἐρωτῶ 11 προεῖται corr. ε ex ι 16 l. Ἰσιδώρωι

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 τ]ῆς οἰκίας. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 it was given as μου [ . . τ]ῆς οικιας. Nielsen and Worp (*P.NYU* II 18.3–4n.) correctly proposed this supplement, [μου 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 τουμε π[ε]ρι του.

6 συνλοχὴν. In *P.Col.* VIII 211 the word was restored as κατ[ο]χὴν, 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 | προσόδου. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 this was read as λιβιας τ[.

9–10 ἐπισκεψάμενον εἰ περὶ / τὴν Ψῶφθιν λαογραφεῖται. As shown by D. Hagedorn,<sup>11</sup> in the first century *διοικῆται* were lower-ranking members of the local administration, without excluding the possibility of private managers. Here, it seems that this *διοικητες* would be able to check if Isidoros indeed paid his taxes at Psophthis. Compare *SB XVI* 12835.4–5 ἐ[ρω]τῶ οὖν σε ἐπιγνόντα εἰ ταῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει ὑπὲρ / τοῦ αὐτὸν εἶναι ἀπὸ τοῦ Μεμφίτου, “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 / ἀπα[ρ]εν[ό]χλητος ἔσται ὑπὲρ ἧς προεῖται χειρογραφίας / ἀναδ[ο]θε[ί]σης αὐτῶι. The two basic requests in all the letters and draft petitions in support of Isidoros are for Tryphon to leave Isidoros free from any trouble with regard to the sworn declaration and to give the sworn declaration back to Isidoros. The phrasing of the requests, however, has small variations: in the draft petition to the prefect (*SB XVI* 12713 and 12714 are two drafts of the same petition) it reads μὴ [π]αρενοχλεῖν [μ]ε περὶ τούτων / [ἀναδοῦναι δέ μοι τὴν] δηλοῦμ[έν]η[ν] χειρογ[ρ]αφίαν / [καὶ εἰς τὸ] λ[οιπὸν ἀπέχεσθαι] μου (12713.15–17), “that [Tryphon] not disturb me about these matters, but to turn over to me the *cheirographia* referred to, and in the future to keep away from me”; in the letter from Tryphon to his father Tryphon it is phrased πόησον (l. ποιήσον) [α]ὐτὸν ἀπαρενόχλητον, ἀν<α>δοθεί/σης αὐτῶι κ[αὶ] τῆς χειρογραφίας, “make him free from trouble, with his sworn declaration also having been returned to him” (*Pap. Congr.* XXVI p.323.12–13); in the letter of Proklos to Tryphon, ἀπαρενόχλητον αὐτὸν διατήρησον καὶ προνόησον / ὡς ἀναδοθήσεται αὐτῶι ἢ χειρογραφία, “leave him undisturbed and

<sup>11</sup> “Zum Amt des διοικητής im römischen Aegypten,” *JCS* 28 (1985) 188.

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

14–16 ἔρρωσο (...) αὐτοῦ. 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 (...) αὐτοῦ. In the ed.pr. of P.Lond.inv. 2553 the left part of these lines was read as Ἐρω . . . [ . . ] . . οικητα ε[ / τοι[ . . ] . . [ . ] . τωι εισιδωρω[. The content of the postscript closely resembles *P.NYU* 18.10–14 ἐρωτῶι ο[ὗ]ν σε καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν κα[ταλογὴν] (...) τοῦτο δὲ ποιήσας ἔση μοι κεχαρισμένος, “I ask you therefore also on my account ... and

<sup>12</sup> *Pap. Congr.* XXI 415 n.5.

<sup>13</sup> See R. S. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt* (Ann Arbor 2006) 46–48; A. Sarri, “Handshifts in Letters,” paper presented at *Pap. Congr.* XXVII (forthcoming)

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]ν. ν is clear in the reproduction of the papyrus in *New Palaeographical Society* plate 136a, but it is now damaged (personal inspection).<sup>14</sup>

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