Your Wife in Your Name: *P.Oxy.* LXII 4340

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AMONG THE DIVERSE GROUP of documentary papyri prepared by the late John Shelton and published in *P.Oxy.* LXII,[1] pride of place may perhaps go to a third-century papyrus with a pair of letters about business matters, one each from Petosiris and Thaesis, written in the same hand and addressed to a woman named Didyme. They raise a number of difficulties, most saliently an apparent reference to "your wife" in a letter addressed by a woman to a woman. That apparent reference stimulated a query to the on-line papyrology discussion group from Bernadette Brooten, who had recently argued for the existence of marriages between women in the Roman period,[2] wondering whether papyrologists thought that the newly-published Oxyrhynchus papyrus might reflect such a marriage. (The edition had, without argument, suggested that the reference was just a slip.) Subsequent discussion with Professor Brooten stimulated the writing of the remarks below, which try to provide a fuller argument that the editor was essentially correct in seeing an error on the writer's part in

[1] See my review of this volume in *CR* n.s. 48 (1998) 149–153. In what follows I consistently refer to "the editor," not to disguise his identity, but because in a posthumous publication of this sort I cannot distinguish Shelton's work from the alterations of the general editors.

[2] *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago 1996).

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speaking of "your wife."[3] First, however, I seek to provide a more secure date for the papyrus, to explain why the Greek of the letter might justify the supposition of an error, and to clarify some problems in the business dealings at stake.

1. Date

The letters have been dated to the late third century by the editor on the basis of a price of wine. His argument runs as follows: "Line 21 mentions wine bought at sixty-four drachmas per μετρητής. Comparable prices refer to κεράμια, but the two terms are considered synonymous, see U. Wilcken, *Gr. Ostr.* I 761; a modification offered in P.Köln V 220.7 n. deals with the tone of the words, not their metrological identification. Assuming that this is in fact the case here, the price is well above the eleven drachmas charged per ceramion in VII 1055 (AD 267) but should be from a time earlier than 300/1, when three hundred drachmas is attested in CPR VI 12. ... Despite the fact that prices can fluctuate considerably in a comparatively short time, *cf. e.g.* LIV 3773 introd. and lines 22–4 below, the differences in the amounts just cited are probably substantial enough to require a period of inflation to explain them."

Wilcken's great work on ostraka has kept its value remarkably well over the course of a century; what he actually says, however, is more complicated than this citation would suggest. On the next page, in fact, Wilcken concludes, "Ich setze hiernach 1 κεράμιον = 1 μετρητὴς ὀκτάχους = 2/3 μετρητὴς δωδεκάχους." He takes the 12-chous metretes to have been 39.39 liters, and his keramion is thus 26.45 liters. But Wilcken was primarily concerned in this discussion with the Ptolemaic period, as is the note to *P.Köln* 220, and it is hardly to be as-

[3]Even more than usual I must stress that Professor Brooten must not be taken to agree with what follows, but I am grateful for the stimulus of our conversations "both electronic and ordinary" about this papyrus. I am also indebted to Alan Cameron for many observations in the discussions that accompanied the writing of his article (137–156 *supra*) and this one, and to Raffaella Cribiore for comments on an earlier draft.

sumed that the keramion was an unvarying amount through the centuries of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Indeed, Dominic Rathbone pointed out in 1991 that "The name 'keramion', which just meant 'jar, amphora', was used of several different containers-cum-measures in Roman Egypt—hence the use of the adjectives 'monochoron' and 'dichoron'—and there co-existed choes and kotulai of varying sizes too."[4] Rathbone indeed argues that "keramion" in the Heroninus archive normally refers to the monochoron, and that the capacity of this keramion "cannot have exceeded about 7.3 litres." He uses 7 liters as a rough equivalent.

Such a figure is actually rather close to 2 choes (12 sextarii), which would measure about 6.5 liters, or one-sixth of the 12-chous metretes that Wilcken was discussing. Other keramia were in use in Egypt at various places and times; that in the fourth-century Dakhleh Oasis was probably 3 choes (9.72 liters).[5] But generally we may suppose that the figure for the metretes given in *P.Oxy.* 4340 must be divided by somewhere between 4 and 6 in order to get a price for the keramion. That operation yields a figure in the range of 10.67 to 16 drachmas per keramion. A comparison with Rathbone's table of prices in the Appianus archive (466) and in other contemporary sources (467) shows that this range is consonant with the prices prevalent in the 250s and 260s, at all events before the large change in prices that occurred sometime not long before 276 (Rathbone 465). It is not certain that all of the non-Heroninos prices refer to the same size keramion that the Heroninos prices do, but most of them are not far from the 10–11 dr. range that the 2-chous keramion would cost if the 12-chous metretes were 64 dr. It therefore seems reasonable to assign the date *ca* 250–275 to

[4] *Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third-Century A.D. Egypt* (Cambridge) 469.

[5] See R. S. Bagnall, *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book* (Oxford 1997) pp.47–51.

P.Oxy. 4340, with the *terminus ante quem* firm and the *terminus post quem* approximate.[6] At all events, a date in the late third century, after the rise in prices *ca* 275, is out of the question.

2. Handwriting and Language

The hand of the letters is the same throughout, although the greeting at the end is written much faster than the body, as is normal even where the same person has written the whole text. Most letters are well formed or at least fluent. Ligatures are not numerous, although connecting strokes from *epsilon* to *iota* and *rho*, for example, are common. The lines are reasonably straight. Overall, one forms the impression of an experienced writer, although certainly not a professional scribe.

What is written in this form is another matter. The writer is by no means in flawless command of educated Greek; whether it is Petosiris or Thaesis, he/she omits syllables at least three times (1, 11, 31) and a relative pronoun once (23), as well as repeating one syllable in line 19.[7] Violations of standard grammar are frequent: ἔπεμφες (2), article for relative (6), mistaken cases (20, 25), ἀσπάζω for ἀσπάζομαι (29), παρά with both sender and recipient in the botched address. There are of course numerous phonetic spellings, and many remakings or corrections of letters, not all noted by the editor.[8] In the construction under discussion in section 4 below, the placement of δέ (21) is anything but felicitous, no matter how we take ἔγραψες.

[6] There is one other imperfectly preserved price in the papyrus, of 40+, perhaps 48, dr. for a μαφόρτιον. We do not have other strictly comparable prices, as a look through the list in H.-J. Drexhage, *Preise, Mieten/Pachten, Kosten und Löhne im römischen Ägypten* (St. Katharinen 1991) 353–363, shows. But the valuation of two elaborately bordered maphortia in *P.Oxy.* X 1273, of A.D. 260, at 100 dr. each, shows that 48 dr. for an ordinary maphortion in that period would not be out of line.

[7] That του at the end of line 5 is to be taken as superfluous, however, is by no means clear to me. Could one not end the sentence after χρῶμα and read τοῦ|το μαφόρτιον? Gignac, *Grammar* II 174, notes that the definite article is sometimes omitted with forms of οὗτος, "probably through haplography," citing precisely an instance where ταύ stands in one line, την in the next.

[8] In 5, σου < του; in 29, ὑμῶν, ω corrected (from ι?).

In sum, the letter displays a vigorous but sloppy, colloquial, and perhaps Egyptian-tinged (the active of ἀσπάζομαι is suggestive) use of Greek, written in an experienced hand; there is a disparity between writing and composing ability. Such disparities are found elsewhere in the letters; a good example is *P.Oxy.* XXXI 2599, again a pair of letters, both from a woman, written in a well-practiced hand, considerably more ligatured than that of the letters addressed to Didyme. Its language is similar to that of Petosiris and Thaesis; for example, τὸ πορφύρειν τὸ ἔλεγες ὅτι ἀγοραννο (l. ἀγοράζω) ἀγόρασον· εἰπὲ οὖν τὴν ἀδελφὴν τῆς γυνεκὸς Διοσκόρου λέει (l. λέγειν) Διδύμης ὅτι καθὼς εἴρηκες δικαρυτιδα εἰ ποιεῖς, αὐτὰ ποίησον, εἰ οὐ ποιεῖς, τὸ πορφύριν καὶ τὰ σιππῖα τοῦ πατρός μου (ed.: "Buy the purple of which you used to say, 'I shall buy it.' So then, tell the sister of Dioscorus' wife to say to Didyme, 'If, as you said, you are working on ..., go on working on them, if you are not, work on my father's purple and tow.'").

The numerous omissions and the one duplication in 4340 seem more likely to result from the fact that one of the authors has written the letter himself or herself, rather than from dictation to a trained writer, who would most likely have cleaned up the language at least somewhat. But that is not certain; the writer could be a relative or servant with a good hand who was not capable of improving the language at the same time as he took it down. But we are, at least, warned that there is a possibility that the writer may not be in full control of the verbal expressions in the letter; this point will be important in considering the central problem below.

3. Business matters

The first part of the text, the letter from Petosiris to Didyme, begins with the information that "the purple material which you

sent to us has not been made up."[9] The writer proceeds, πέμψον ἡμεῖν [..]...νον κύκλον δέσμας δέκα Δάφνῃ ὡς τὸ τοῦ μαφορτίον σου χρῶμα {τοῦ}, rendered by the editor as "Send to us for Daphne ten bundles of balls of ... yarn(?), about the colour of your cloak." In the note, he comments "Despite ἡμεῖν (3), δάφνη is grammatically simplest if taken as a name in the dative, 'send us for Daphne'. Grammar aside, δάφνη as a colour term for dark green would also be attractive. If δαφνη is a proper name, the following words, 'about the colour of your cloak', give the colour desired; if δαφνη itself is a colour, they define the shade more closely." The placement of δάφνη in the sentence must surely be counted against the likelihood that it is a personal name, for one would expect it closer to ἡμεῖν.[10] Moreover, Daphne is a rare name in Egypt.[11] A place-name is also conceivable (see Calderini/Daris, *Dizionario* II 93: an epoikion in

[9]The editor's translation reads "The purple which you were sending us has not been done," but in the note to lines 2–3 he suggests that cloth or yarn is meant. The lexica treat πορφύριον as meaning purple-dyed material, not purple coloring matter itself, and there seems no reason not to follow them in this. For a listing of parallels, with inconclusive discussion, see K. A. Worp, "On the Meaning of πορφύρα/πορφύριον in Greek Documentary Papyri," *MBAH* 16 (1997) 57–66. Worp points out (57) that πορφύριον is a term "used almost exclusively in private letters." The passage from *P.Oxy.* 2599 quoted above is one of the two best parallels I have seen for the use of ποιέω with πορφύριον; it seems (as the editor of 2599, John Rea, observed) to mean making the purple (cloth) into something, *cf.* line 32, ποίησον αὐτὸ φακιάριον, make it into a facecloth. Similarly in the other parallel, *P.Lond.* III 899 (p.208): τὸ πορφύριόν σοι ἔπεμψα, τὸ οὖν βαθύτερον πεποίηται εἰς τὸ σπανόν, καὶ τὸ ὀξύτερον εἰς τ[ὸ] ἄλλ[ο], "the purple which I sent you, the deeper has been made into the gray [garment], and the brighter into the other." (On σπανός as a color term, Spanish gray, as a description of garments, see *P.Hamb.* I 10.17f., note.) As to the verb ἔπεμφες, it is surely more likely to be an example of the replacement of reduplication by the syllabic augment in the perfect, described by Mandilaras, *The Verb* 200–201 §418.

[10]It can be argued that in lines 26–28 we have a similar construction, πέμψον ἐπ' ἐμ(ὲ) κόκομαν ἐλάου τῷ Ἡρακλείδῃ Σελμων. But even if the doubtfully read ἐπ' ἐμ(ὲ) is right, we would not have a sequence of two datives as is supposed by the editor's text concerning Daphne.

[11]Once in *LGPN* I, 16 times in III.A (most in southern Italy); only two clear attestations in the papyri (*Chr.Mitt.* 155; *P.Oslo* II 34), if one leaves *P.Mich.* III 201 aside.

the Herakleopolite would not be impossible here), but the absence of a preposition and, again, the placement of the word both weigh against it. Color, by contrast, is indeed attractive: ten bundles in green about the color of your cape.[12]

The major crux of the business comes in the second letter, that from Thaesis to her "daughter" Didyme:

παρέδωκα Ἡρακλείδης Σελ-
μων καὶ Καπειδώλει οἴνου μετρη-
τὰς ζS/ καὶ τὸ πρόλυπον κέρματος ἀπο-
{πο}κατέστεκα αὐτοῖς σὺν τιμῇ
μετρητὰς ιηS/ ὡς τοῦ μετρητοῦ
ἑνὸς (δραχμῶν) ξδ. ἔγραψές μοι δὲ ἡ γυνή
σου ἐξ ξοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ πέπρα-
κα τὸν οἶνον ἐκ δισσοῦ ⟨οὖ⟩ ἠγόρα-
κα καὶ σεσειμίωμε (δραχμὰς) . .

This is translated, "I turned seven[13] metretae of wine over to Heracleides Selmon and Capitolis (or Capitolinus?) and paid them the rest of the money together with the price for 18 metretae at 64 dr. per metretes. Your wife (*sic*) wrote in your name, 'I sold the wine for twice what I had paid for it and have signed for 15(?) dr.'"[14] In the note, the editor comments, "Thaesis turns wine over to these men, yet buys wine from them too. Possibly the first lot was only on consignment and went

[12]On maphortion see *P.Oxy.* LIX 4004.15n. The bay tree, δάφνη, is not frequently mentioned in the papyri. In *P.Mich.* XIV 680, a memorandum concerning goods to transport, δάφνη occurs twice: line 4, τὰς δύο δάφνας, and lines 20–21, δάφνην ξηρὰν ἄλλην. The editor does not comment, but he treats the references in the translation as referring to trees, rendering 20–21 as "another dry bay-tree." What this is supposed to mean, I do not know. "Dry" could suggest that it is the leaves rather than the tree which are to be transported, but if so one might expect a quantity to be given. *SB* XVI 12246 also mentions δάφνη, but in an uninformative list. In *P.Mich.* 201.20 the editors print Δάφνης, taking it as a name, but it seems conceivable that τὼ παλλι (= τὸ παλλίον) δάφνης might mean a pallium of the color of the bay.

[13]Evidently the editor took S/ entirely as a numeral marking; but it is much more likely that the S/ is the sign for a half, both here and in 20.

[14]For the amount in line 24, I prefer reading κ̄.

unsold; or it was unsatisfactory and returned for replacement, a possibility commonly specified in wine sales in advance. There may be other explanations."

Much in our understanding of the transaction must depend on whether the editor is correct in assuming a quotation where he does, in the absence of a ὅτι to indicate quotation; unfortunately he provides no note to justify the interpretation that the translation indicates. In particular, as καί is not translated inside the supposed quotation, it is not evident if the editor took it to be functioning in place of ὅτι. Such usage is known,[15] but it is not a necessary reading of the text here. One could instead suppose that the flow of sense is that you (your wife) wrote to me [*i.e.*, with instructions to sell], and I [therefore] sold the wine. If so, the wine-buying and wine-selling is entirely the work of Thaesis, and it becomes most natural to suppose that the actions described here are connected to those in the previous sentence. This seems to me the more logical interpretation.

The editor's conclusion that Thaesis is buying wine from these two men is unfounded. What she says, rather, is that she has turned 71/2 metretai of wine over to them, plus the rest of the money, along with the price of 181/2 metretai. If we take her statement that she has sold wine for twice what she paid together with this, it appears that the two men had provided her with a sum of cash, out of which she bought 26 metretai, evidently at 32 dr. per metretes; but she did not spend all of the money, perhaps not finding enough wine available at an advantageous price. She then sold part of the wine for 64 dr. per metretes; she now has turned over to them the remaining wine, the proceeds from what she sold, and the money that she never invested. In effect, one would suppose that Selmon and Capitoli(n)us[16] have speculated in wine through Thaesis.

[15]See, *e.g.*, W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*[2], transl. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago 1979) 392 *s.v.*, 2.b.

[16]See note to line 17 on the name. The form in the text seems most plausibly to be taken as a dative of Καπιτώλιος turned into Καπιτῶλις in the charac-

4. Your wife

Still more difficult than the business transactions is the personal dimension. The editor renders ἔγραψές μοι δὲ ἡ γυνή σου ἐξ ξοῦ ὀνόματος as "Your wife (sic) wrote in your name," thus interpreting (by the correction of ἔγραψες to ἔγραψεν) the apparent change of construction in the Greek to be only a spelling error.[17] One might instead take the ἔγραψες seriously and render, "You wrote to me—your wife in your name." About the phrase, the editor comments only (note to line 21), "ἡ γυνή seems an unavoidable reading, though the letter is to a woman. The writer must be thinking of her husband." About the reading he seems to be correct.[18] But to suppose γυνή simply a slip for ἀνήρ is in itself rather extreme and seemingly unmotivated. It is a natural question whether there are more cogent explanations, whether for this or any other understanding.[19]

(1) One might very literally suppose that Didyme had someone she referred to as wife. No parallel in the papyri is known to me. Professor Brooten has argued that there are a few passages in literature where "wife" and "marry" are used in reference to the relationship of one woman to another. But these are all doubtfully understood or reflect figurative or polemical usage, and no instances of such usage occur in plain descriptive passages, where tendentious representation is not in question.[20]

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teristic fashion of imperial Greek; but the editor rightly points out that it is Καπιτωλεῖνος which is found in the papyri as a personal name.

[17]Such things can occur, see Gignac, *Grammar* I 132, with a handful of examples of -ν > -ς, none from verb forms; he suggests that the cause is the fact that both letters were sometimes omitted in pronunciation. In itself, however, ἔγραψες for ἔγραψας is a much more common alteration; see Gignac II 348.

[18]I thank Revel Coles for an excellent color photocopy.

[19]It does not seem possible to construe ἡ γυνή σου ... as part of what was written (by Didyme, presumably), for it would then have no predicate and nothing to lead into πέπρακα.

[20]For detailed discussion and argument see Brooten (*supra* n.2) 320–336. For an opposing view, Alan Cameron, "Love (and Marriage) between Women" (*supra* 137ff), showing that none of them is good evidence for Brooten's thesis.

The private letters of Roman Egypt are notoriously reticent about sexual and affectional matters, in part no doubt because they were not at all unlikely to be read by someone other than the recipient.[21] To find a plain reference to behavior that to most ancients would have seemed an outrageous travesty of normal canons of respectability, delivered in a matter-of-fact tone in a business letter which barely finds time for greetings, does not seem to me very likely. But it must be admitted that there are letters in which sarcasm, a joke, or elliptical allusion comes into play,[22] sometimes to our puzzlement, and perhaps we should not *a priori* exclude that possibility here.

(2) Could γυνή have a meaning other than "wife"? Could it mean a female servant, for example, or some other family relationship? Two difficulties arise: (a) For a female servant or slave to write in her mistress's name would suggest a spread of literacy that is otherwise hardly indicated in the papyri, where even free women of middle-class origin do not often write for themselves or avow literacy; and (b) the dictionaries know of no such usage; LSJ do cite examples where with a second substantive it can mean a female holder of some position, but no such second noun stands here. This possibility thus seems to me more remote than the first.

(3) Something could have gone wrong with the construction. What could this be? In the direction of the editor's suggestion, but without claiming a simple verbal slip, it is quite possible that something like the following happened: Didyme wrote a letter in her husband's name—even one part of a pair like those here, with one in his name preceding and one in hers following? —to Petosiris and Thaesis, or to whichever one of them is ac-

[21] For a discussion of the problems offered by the letters to a student of sexual behavior, see Dominic Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London 1996) 6–10.

[22] It is possible that *P.Oxy.* VIII 1160 is an example; see on this Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 195–196 n.80; Montserrat (*supra* n.21) 153–154.

tually doing the writing here. Responding, the writer addresses the letter to Didyme, but drifts into actually thinking of her husband, in whose name the previous letter was written, as the recipient—he was, after all, the supposed author, and probably the business being discussed here was in the letter written in his name. He can then refer to Didyme as "your wife" because he is thinking of her husband as the addressee. There can in the nature of things be no direct evidence for this hypothesis, but it may be psychologically more likely than the private joke suggested in (1) above, and socially more probable than taking the phrase literally. It also fits very well the actual character of letter-writing, in which the person in whose name the letter was written was often not the one doing the actual writing. The business relationship revealed by these letters is clearly one in which the parties would know one another's handwritings well.

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