

LAURENCE E. WINKWORTH

A REQUEST FOR PURGATIVES: P.OXY. I 187

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 91 (1992) 85–87

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn



## A Request for Purgatives: P.Oxy. I 187

The following letter, P.Oxy. I 187, was first published as a description, without translation or commentary, by B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt in the first volume of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. When some of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* were distributed from Oxford worldwide in the second decade of this century, P.Oxy. 187 was acquired by the University of Melbourne, where it was inventoried as Papyrus 2. It has since been lost.<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Prof. M.J. Osborne, former Professor of Classics at the University of Melbourne, for permission to republish the text in full with a photograph.

This perfectly preserved letter forms part of a small archive documenting the activities of a certain Eirene in which the other texts are P.Oxy. I 115 and 116. P.Oxy. 115 is a letter of condolence on the death of an unnamed person;<sup>2</sup> P.Oxy. 116 is the counterpart to our text, a letter written on the same day to Taonnophris and Philon and dealing with the same matters as P.Oxy. 187. In 116, Eirene requests Taonnophris and Philon to arrange for 340 drachmae to be given to the workman Parammon; 187 is a letter to Parammon himself confirming these arrangements and repeating Eirene's dire need for purgatives (line 8: see note ad loc.) The fact that all these texts were found together, although destined for different recipients, may indicate that they were never delivered.

The main interest of the papyrus is its close relationship to P.Oxy. 115 and 116 and the lexical rarities ἱματιοφορῖς and καθάρια, which are discussed in the notes. The hand is a fluent but neat cursive, bilinear except for φ, ψ and ρ, of a type very common in the mid-second century AD. One may compare VBP IV 74 (138 AD) or VBP IV 75b (147 AD)<sup>3</sup>, which has some very similar letter forms though written with a rather blunter pen. The text was mounted before the photograph reproduced here was taken, and no record exists of whether the back bore an address: it is now impossible to ascertain this since the papyrus has apparently disappeared.

P.Oxy. I 187 = Melbourne, Papyrus 2                      9.0 x 6.7 cm.                      c. 150 AD

1            Εἰρήνη (vac.) Παράμμωνι χαίρειν.                      cf. Tafel Ia

2            Ἔγραψα Φίλωνι δοῦναί σοι ἄς

3            ἔδωκα Καλοκαίρωι (δραχμὰς) τμ καὶ

4            ὅσον ἄλλο' ἐὰν θέλῃς. καλῶς οὖν

5            ποιήσεις λαβὼν παρ' αὐτοῦ

6            καὶ τὴν ἱματιοφορίδα μου

7            ἣν ἔδωκα Κολοκαίρωι ἐν ἧι

8            ἔγραψα πεμφθῆναί μοι καθά-

9            ρια διδράχμου. καὶ ταχέως

10          πέμψον) τὰ καθάρια' ἐπεὶ χρεία μοί ἐστιν

11          Φίλωνι. ἔρρω(σο). Ἄθῦρ λ̄.

3 ὃ pap.                      11 ερρ<sup>ω</sup> pap.

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication from Professor Osborne, August 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See Adam Bülow-Jacobsen's remarks about the significance of ὁ εὔμοιρος in P.Haun. II 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Seider, *Paläographie I*, nos. 34 and 35.

*Eirene to Parammon, greetings. I wrote to Philon asking him to give you what I gave to Kalokairos, namely 340 drachmas and whatever else you want. So please bring with you my portmanteau, which I gave to Kalokairos, in which I wrote asking to be brought to me two drachmas weight of purgative. Send the purgative quickly, because I have need of it, to Philon. Farewell. Hathyr 30.*

3 Kalokairos is an uncommon name. Other Oxyrhynchite examples of the same approximate period, probably unconnected, occur in P.Oxy. III 526r,1 and P.Princ. II 33,9 (126 AD).

6 The latter half of this line is written over an erasure, now illegible.

ἱματιοφορίς: a rare word, only occurring here, P.Oxy. I 116,11 and P.Princ. II 82r,36 in the papyri; but cf. ἱματιοφορίς in P.Oxy. XLII 3057,4 and εἱματιωφόριον in P.Cair. Mus. inv. S.R. 3805,16 (Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology II, p. 85). Ammonius (Περὶ ὁμοίων καὶ διαφορῶν λέξεων, 492) explains the word as φάσκαλος μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ ἱματιοφορίς, φασκώλιον δὲ ἐστὶ δερμάτιον, a portmanteau rather than a wallet. In Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum V 645, *pasceolus*, the Latinization of φάσκαλος is glossed as *alutacius sacculus*, indicating that these items were customarily made of leather, not basketwork as one might expect for large clothes hampers.

8-9 καθάρια is an unusual word, also occurring in SB I 5730,3, P.Haun. II 18,19 and SB XIV 12090r,15. In all these instances it seems to have the meaning ‘pure bread’, that is, bread made from fine-milled wheat flour as opposed to the coarser everyday bread; cf. P.Oxy. IV 736 iii 26 (ἄρτου καθαροῦ παίδων), P.Oxy. XIV 1656,19 (καθαρῶν), P.Oxy. XLVIII 3414,3 and 3425,4. If ‘white bread’ is the correct meaning here, the term δίδραχμον in line 9 would have to mean ‘two drachmas worth’, which I have not been able to parallel elsewhere in the papyri. However, δίδραχμον is commonly used to mean ‘a two drachma weight’ of some expensive commodity, usually precious metal or jewellery (cf. SB VIII 9882r,2 τὸ δακτυλίδιον τοῦ διδράχμου), but sometimes of *materia medica*: see LSJ s.v. διδραχμία II for references in Galen and other writers. Accordingly I would agree with the original editors and translate καθάρια διδράχμου as ‘two drachmas’ weight of purgative’, with the proviso that the most usual words for purgative in the papyri seem to be καθάρσια or κάθαρσις.

Purgatives were an important feature of ancient medicine and had a wide range of applications, from general laxatives to abortifacients (Soranus I, 64) and cures for hysteria (Hippocrates, *de Morb. Mul.*, 201). Indeed, the use of purgatives was one of the most significant legacies of traditional Egyptian medicine to the Greek physicians. The Egyptian idea of “corrupt residues”, whereby gases exhaled by putrefying food in the bowel permeated the body, causing disease, led to the widespread use of evacuants in Egypt. Herodotus (ii, 77) says that the Egyptians regularly purged themselves for a three day period every month, hoping to avoid disease by the use of laxatives and enemas, since all disease originated in their food.

There are a number of recipes for purgatives extant on papyrus. P.Oxy. XI 1384 is a list of ingredients for a ‘cleansing draught’ (φούσκα καθαρσίου) including astringents like mastic and vinegar, and P.Ryl. III 531 (= Pack<sup>2</sup> 2418) col. II, 10-11 gives the following recipe: “*to make a purge, give* (sc. the patient) *the fruit of the fennel and the outer leaf of the samphire, to be taken in wine*” (κάθαρσιν ποιεῖν μαθαρου καρπὸν κρήθμου φλοιὸν ἐν οἴνῳ δίδου πιεῖν). Although occasionally administered as dry suppositories, ancient purgatives were generally taken as draughts, which makes the reference in our papyrus to a two drachma weight of it to be carried in a portmanteau somewhat surprising. Perhaps Eirene did not request a liquid purgative, but some sort of solid concentrate which could be reconstituted in wine or water: cf. P.Oxy. VIII 1142,1 a list where 16 drachmas’ weight of ‘good quality

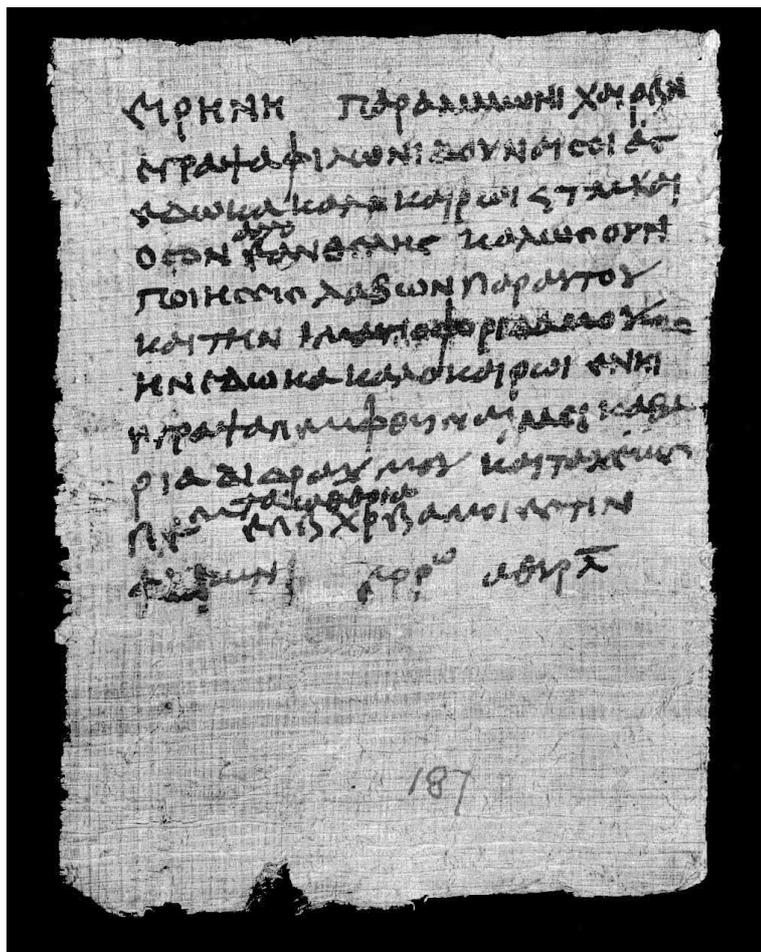
concentrated perfume precipitate' (ὑποστάθμιον ἀγόρασον ἡμικοτύλην ξυρομόρου καλόν) appears among other *materia medica* to be purchased.

10-11 It seems that the words πέμ(ψον) τὰ καθάρια and Φίλωνι are a later addition; the sentence originally ran as follows: καὶ ταχέως, ἐπεὶ χρεῖα μοί ἐστιν. When Eirene noticed that this was not clear enough she added the words πέμ(ψον) τὰ καθάρια Φίλωνι as a supplement to ταχέως. Because the space before ἐπεὶ was not sufficient she continued between the lines until καθάρια and wrote Φίλωνι before the following line.

11 Hathy 30: November 26 or 27.

London

Laurence E. Winkworth



P.Oxy. I 187