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A CIRCULAR LETTER AND A MEMO (P. MICH. INV. 6980)

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A Circular Letter and a Memo (P. Mich. Inv. 6980)*

Arsinoite Nome

16.6 x 26 cm.

223 or 181 BCE

Plate IV and V

This light brown papyrus from mummy cartonnage contains two texts, one on each side. The text on the **front** is composed of 17 lines written parallel to the fibres in a very clear and careful style including, however, numerous corrections. The lines leave a wide margin (4 cm.) on the left and on the bottom; the upper margin is 2.2 cm., the right one ranges from 0 to 1.9 cm. The text on the **back** contains 14 narrow lines written across the fibres in a smaller cursive style. There are two vertical folds which produce three segments, the left one being 3.8 cm., the middle one 5.1 cm., and the right one 7.8 cm. wide. The text is placed exactly in the middle segment leaving margins of 0.8 cm. to the left fold and of about 1 cm. to the right fold; the top margin is 2.5 cm., the text breaks off 11.5 cm. from the bottom of the papyrus. This placing indicates that the text was written after the papyrus was folded.

The papyrus is of low quality, as is indicated by damages afflicted before writing. On the **front** side, there is an area of about 1 cm. width between lines 2 and 3, where the horizontal fibres have been ripped off. Avoiding the damaged area, the scribe enlarged the interlinear space between these lines, but used it for his corrections to line 3. Similarly, on the **back**, vertical fibres are ripped off close to the left margin. At the top and in the upper part of the papyrus this area is 2 cm. wide; in the lower part it is smaller (about 1 cm.), and it ends 2 cm. from the bottom, where the fibres are intact. Other vertical fibres are missing on the right side. Close to the bottom, there are slightly ascending lines across the entire papyrus. They start with a single stroke which unfolds into partially two, partially three strokes, and continue on the left and right side, where the vertical fibres have been ripped off. They must have been made after the fibres had been ripped off and when the entire surface of the back was open, presumably before it was folded.

Other damages to the papyrus may have occurred later. In the upper left angle of the **back** are casual offsets of ink made when the text was written or, more likely, when it was used as cartonnage.

This papyrus belongs to a lot of about 100 papyri of mummy cartonnage (P. Mich. Inv. 6972 - 7072). The publication of P. Mich. Inv. 6957, 6961, and 6979 (*ZPE* 76 [1989] 241-254) proved that the lot of P. Mich. Inv. 6951-6971 comes at least partly from the same source, although not necessarily from the same mummy. A third Michigan lot (6925-6950) may also be connected with the same site.¹ Many of these papyri are documents from the financial and police administration of the Arsinoe nome at the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BCE. One of them, P. Mich. Inv. 6959 (unpublished), is also a circular letter featuring very similar formulae and a comparable style of writing.

* This papyrus was presented by Shawn Dry and myself in a papyrology seminar that was taught by Professor Ludwig Koenen during the fall term 1993. I thank Shawn and all other participants for their contributions. I should also mention A. Loftus and G. Schwendner for the advice they gave me. I am deeply obliged to L. Koenen and T. Gagos for introducing me into the important and exciting world of papyrology. My visit at the Department of Classical Studies of the University of Michigan was supported by Professor Joachim Latacz and made possible by grants of the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Max Geldner Stiftung, Basel.

¹ Other recently published mummy cartonnage with papyri from the Arsinoites and the Herakleopolites is at least partially interrelated: *P. Hels.* I 1-47; *P. Rainer Cent.* 46 (and probably more); *P. Köln* V 217, 219-225; VI 258-273, 275; VII 314-316 (cf. *Papyri Helsingiensis* I, ed. by Jaakko Frösén [Helsinki 1986] p. 17); also *P. Heidelberg* V (see R. Duttonhöfer's introduction, p. 3). Other pieces from the same provenance seem to be in yet other collections.

The handwriting on the **front** stands in the tradition of the chancery hands belonging to the office of Apollonios the dioeketes. It features the same use of a very fine reed and a similarly strong stress of the horizontal line on which the broad letters seem to "hang" (e.g. *P. Cairo Zen.* II 59155 pl. VI [of 256 BCE]). In detail, however, *P. Mich. Inv.* 6980 is younger and can be compared to *P. Yale* I 36 (pl. X), which originally was dated to 232 BCE. This letter from the archive of Leon is written with a thicker reed, but otherwise it shows a very similar general style in shaping and connecting letters.² *P. Yale* I 36 has now been correctly redated to 190 BCE, since the dioeketes Athenodoros is now firmly attested for 197-190 BCE during the reign of Epiphanes.³ He occurs twice in one of the lots of Michigan papyri (*P. Mich. Inv.* 6947 of 197 BCE⁴ and 6948 of 193 BCE of lot 6925-6950) which are suspected to come from the same source as the lot to which the present papyrus belongs (mentioned above).⁵ Although this circumstantial evidence is vague, the date of Phaophi 11 of the 25th regnal year (line 1) is most likely either Nov. 16, 181 of the reign of Ptolemy V Epiphanes or Nov. 27, 223 under Ptolemy III Euergetes I. The text on the **back** was written after the one on the front (see above), and the style of the hand is very similar to *P. Tebt.* III (2) 890 pl. IV (2nd. cent. BCE). The strategos Dexilaos (line 2) is only vaguely dated to the 2nd cent. BCE.⁶ This general date suits the cursive hand.

The **front** contains a circular letter.⁷ It first addresses the strategos and then a wide range of the police and the administrative officials of the Arsinoe nome.⁸ The list of addressees is very general; it includes no officials of specific administrative functions like, for example, the *κυτολόγοι*, *φρούραρχοι*, and *τραπεζίται* of *P. Rain.* 46 or 45. The body of the letter mainly consists of an authorization of a Senuchis to act as *antigrapheus* for the collection of a 2.5 wool tax (see note to line 9-10) and to collect arrears of taxes, probably of wool tax owed by the same shepherds. As *antigrapheus* he was to supervise the taxfarmers.⁹ The fact that the letter deals with financial matters and the top addressee is the strategos makes it highly probable that the letter originated from the dioeketes.

² See especially ω with the second part as horizontal stroke; $\alpha\iota$ particular in $\kappa\alpha\iota$; ρ with small circle or open; the late form of α with narrow loop instead of a diagonal stroke; and also κ .

³ See *C. Pt. Sklaventexte* I, p. 59 on *P. Mich. Inv.* 6947; W. Schäfer, *P. Köln* V 221 (introd.); Van't Dack, *Ptol. Sel.*, *Stud. Hell.* 29 (1988) 374 n.1.

⁴ Published as *C. Pt. Sklaventexte* I 9 (see n. 3). R. Scholl's edition is based on a handout which L. Koenen distributed for his paper at the XVII Congresso intern. di papirologia in Naples; see R. Scholl, *C. Pt. Sklaventexte* I, p. 57 n. 1 and his preface (p. IX); also L. Koenen, in *Egypt and the Hellenistic World* (*Stud. Hell.* 27 [1983], ed. by E. Van't Dack, P. Van Dessel, and W. Van Gucht) 151 n. 23 and in *Images and Ideologies. Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (*Hellen. Culture and Society* 12, ed. by A. Bulloch, E.S. Gruen, A.A. Long, and A. Stewart (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1993) pp. 32f. n. 20. L. Koenen's proper edition has not yet been published.

⁵ He also occurs in *P. Köln* V 221.42, a papyrus from cartonnage of probably the same provenance (cf. n. 1).

⁶ *Pros. Ptol.* 239; G. Mussies, *Suppl. à la liste des stratèges*, *Pap. Lugd. Bat.* XIV, p. 38.

⁷ For the so called "Kollektiv-ἐντολαί" cf. U. Wilcken, *UPZ* I p. 457 and *ZSS*, *Rom. Abt.* 42 (1921) p. 132 n. 2. The closest parallel to the present circular letter is *P. Rain. cent.* 46 (cf. n. 1); other circular letters: *P. Rain. cent.* 45, *P. Petrie* 42a, *P. Tebt.* III (1) 709, *P. Grenf.* 37, *P. Mich. Inv.* 6959 (unpublished).

⁸ About the interrelation of the administrative officials see A.E. Samuel, "The Internal Organization of the Nomarch's Bureau in the Third Century B.C.", in *Essays in honor of C.B. Welles* (New Haven 1966) 213-229.

⁹ See O. Montevecchi, *La papirologia* (Milano² 1988) 146; G.M. Harper Jr., *Aegyptus* 14 (1934) 49-64, esp. 52-55.

All circular letters referred to in note 7 start with the author followed by the list of recipients in the dative and *χαίρειν*; they end with *ἔρωσο* and the date. The present letter begins with the date centered on the top line, followed by a list of addressees that begins in the next line. Neither the author nor the final formula *ἔρωσο* appear. Extant letters, even official ones, sometimes omit the sender and correspondingly the greeting formula.¹⁰ Such cases must be explained by individual circumstances. This is certainly true in the present case where the authorization of Senuchis as *antigraphus* depends entirely on the authority of the sender. One possible explanation for the singular structure of the letter is that, despite the folding, it may have been an office copy, i.e. a copy made and retained in some office in the chain of command. This assumption would also explain the low quality of the papyrus (see above).

The **back** seems to contain an incomplete memo or order to write another circular letter or a series of letters to Dexilaos, the *strategos* of the neighboring Memphite nome, and to financial and police officials subordinate to him. All but one are addressed by their name. The last addressee, Phaneias, is a police official with the title *δεκανός τῶν φυλακιστῶν*. This is now the earliest occurrence of this title (see note to line 10). Phaneias is in charge of *ἀνακεχωρηκότες*, people who had left their villages against the law, presumably in the Arsinoites, and were not paying their taxes. As far as I understand the memo, a circular letter or a series of letters was to be written concerning (and on behalf of) one Isidoros and his business partner, tax farmers of the *ἀπόμοιρα* tax.¹¹ The details remain uncertain, but it seems that this firm of tax farmers had reported (?) the *ἀνακεχωρηκότες* who owed them (altogether ?) 550 (silver ?) drachmai (?) for this tax. If this interpretation is correct, the tax farmers had obviously applied for the help of the authorities in collecting the *ἀπόμοιρα* tax. Thus, this memo to write a letter (or letters) reflects the help expected by the authorities of one nome from the authorities of another nome; it is therefore not a request by the central administration in Alexandria as is the circular letter on the front. But this letter (or these letters) to be written would still request the help and cooperation of a number of offices who may have authority in the specific case. The tax farmers could have requested the letter from any subordinate office retaining a copy of the circular letter on the front; but it is much more likely that it was the office of the central administration of the nome that was to intervene.

1. Front (pl. IV)

→ 1 (ἔτους) κε Φαῶφι ια
 τῶι στρα(τηγῶ)ι τοῦ Ἄρσινο(ίτου) νο(μοῦ) καὶ τῶι ἐπι(στάτῃ) τῶν φυ(λακιστῶν)
 καὶ τοῖς κατὰ με(ρίδα) ἄρχιφυ(λακίταις) καὶ τοῖς κατὰ κόμη(ν) ἐπι(στάταις)
 4 καὶ τοπάρχαις καὶ τοπογραμματοῦσι
 καὶ κωμάρχαις καὶ κωμογραμματεῦσι
 καὶ τοῖς φυ(λακίταις) χαίρειν. Σενοῦχιν [ο την]

¹⁰ F.J. Exler, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter. A Study in Greek Epistolography* (Washington 1923) 34, 58f., 61, 66, and 71. He notes (p. 73) that letters "to B" without name of the sender "nearly always" lack the final greetings.

¹¹ The *ἀπόμοιρα* is a tax on the yields of the vineyards and the *παράδεικοι* which was originally collected for the gods, but later assigned to the cult of his deified sister Arsinoe by Ptolemaios II Philadelphos; see *P. Hels.* I pp. 122-126 (J. Kaimio), *P. Heidelb.* V 371, and L. Koenen in *Images* (see n. 4), 66-69.

τὸν τὴν ἐντολὴν ἐπιδεικνύ-
 8 οντα καθεστάκαμεν ἀντι-
 γραψόμενον τὴν τεσσαρακοστὴν
 τῶν ἔρεῶν καὶ ο
 μενον τῶν ἐμ Μούχει κατ[ο]ικο[ύ]ν(των)
 12 ποιμένων καὶ ἐγλογεύοντα
 τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὀφειλήματα τὰ
 ἐπὶ τὴν βα(σιλικὴν) τρά(πεζαν). ἐν οἷς ἂν οὖν ὑμῶν
 ἄχρειαν ἔχηι τῶν πρὸς ταῦτ' ἀνηκόντων,
 16 καλῶς ποιήσετε συνεργοῦντες
 προθύμως.

2 $\sigma\tau\rho$ $\alpha\rho\sigma\iota\upsilon\sigma$ θ ϕ 3 $\mu\epsilon$ $\alpha\rho\chi\iota\phi$ θ 6 ϕ
 -χιν, ν *corr.* ε c 11 κατ[ο]ικο[ύ]ν 14 β

2. There are traces of displaced ink right above line 2. The sender of the letter is not mentioned (see above, introd.).

3. The abbreviation for μερίς occurs also in *P. Lille* I 3.49 (241/240 BCE). See A. Blanchard, *Sigles et abréviations dans les papyrus documentaires Grecs: Recherches de paléographie*, Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin Suppl. No. 30 (London 1974) p. 4 n. 1c. For the whole formula compare *P. Tebt.* III (2) 871.5f.

6. Having finished line 6 the scribe changed the construction from nominative to accusative; he therefore crossed out ὀ τὴν and corrected the final c of Senuchis into a ν.

9-10. τεσσαρακοστὴν ἔρεῶν: the only other reference to a tax of this name is *P. Oxy.* XLIII 3104.17 (228 CE), where the tax farmer is mentioned, but not the person who was paying the tax. Well known is the εἰκοστὴ ἔρεῶν. According to C. Préaux (*L'Economie Royale des Lagides* [Bruxelles 1939] 112f.), the latter tax was paid every fourth day by the weavers at the rate of 5% of wool they processed. The editors of *P. Hibeh* I 115 mention a wool tax of 1/24 in an unpublished Hibeh text, but they are not sure whether it concerns the same tax (pp. 307f.). In the case of the present circular letter, the 2.5% tax is paid by the shepherds, who presumably produced the wool. In *P. Vind. G.* 40589-91 (215-213 BCE; publ. by P.J. Sijpesteijn, *YCS* 28 [1985] 67-71) the shepherds of Muchis are paid for wool and woollen garments which they had delivered. They seem to have acted corporately. Possibly, shepherds were taxed at a lower rate than weavers. For the wool industry in general cf. E. Wipszycka, *L'industrie textile dans l'Egypte Romaine* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1965).

10-11. ολμενον: in the right part of line 10 the horizontal fibres carrying the main part of the letters are ripped off; only traces of the tops and feet of the letters are extant, although partially faded. The ο at the end of line 10 is read with high probability. The preceding traces could accommodate *κτης* (i.e. *κτησολμενον*). Unfortunately, it is very difficult to read the traces before as *πρω*; there is a horizontal line, followed by a triangularly formed slope as in the ρ of 17 προθύμως. But additional traces of the bottom of a letter would not be explainable by this reading. *πρωκτησόλμενον* must therefore be considered a highly tentative reading. Moreover, one would rather expect a financial competence at this place.

11. Μούχις: in the Polemon meris, see A. Calderini and S. Daris, *DIZIONARIO dei nomi geografici e topografici dell'Egitto Greco-Romano* III (Milano 1982) 301f. The papyri show that this village possessed a diversified agriculture including both pasturing and weaving.

12. ἐγλογεύοντα: For the rare use of ἐκλογεύω see *P. Tebt.* III (2) 866.57f. *ὑπηρεταὶ τοῖς ἐγλογεύασσι ...* (237 BCE).

13. τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς ὀφειλήματα: "the debts due by them". For this understanding compare *P. Gur.* 20.3 (3rd cent. BCE) and *P. Zen. Pestm.* suppl. E 46 (229 BCE).

14-16. This formula is also attested in *P. Rain. cent.* 46.21ff., *P. Tebt.* III (1) 709.11ff., *P. Mich. Inv.* 6959.9ff. (unpublished).

17. προθύμως could be a satisfying conclusion of the letter. In *P. Inv. Mich.* 6959 a ὅπως-clause is added, which may also have occurred at the end of *P. Rain. Cent.* 46.24. The present papyrus has no greeting formula like ἔρωσο (see above, introd.).

"Year 25, Phaophi 11. To the strategos of the Arsinoite nome and to the head of the police and to the heads of the police in the meris and to the heads of the police in the village and to the toparchs and to the toparchs' secretaries and to the komarchs and to the village secretaries and to the policemen, greetings. We have appointed Senuchis who presents this authorization to be antigrapheus in the collection of the 2.5% tax on wool, to be ... of the shepherds settling in Muchis, and to collect their arrears to the royal bank. You will do well cooperating willingly in things pertaining to these matters in which he needs your help."

2. Back (pl. V)

↓	1	γρ() Δεξιλάωι τῶι στρα(τηγῶι) Μέμφεωσ									
	4	καὶ τῶι ἐπι(ιτάτηι) τῶν φυ(λακιτῶν) καὶ Θέωνι τῶι ἐπι(ιτάτηι) καὶ Πτολεμαίωι τῶι οἰκον(όμωι) καὶ									
	8	Φανεία τῶι ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνακε- χω(ρηκότων) δεκαν(ῶι) τῶν φυ(λακιτῶν) Ἰκίδωρον καὶ Τωρα()									
	12	τε(λῶνας) ἀπομοίρασ σε() φυ(ον) () ὀφείλον(τασ) καὶ τῶι δι()									
<hr/>											
1	Ἰβ	3	στρ	4	θ	7	οικον ^ο	10	χ		
	δεκαν		φ	11	τωρ	12	ε	13	ε Β ζ ο ς οφειλ ^{ον}	14	Δ

1. γρ: considering the position at the top of the document and the following indirect objects, this abbreviation is best solved as γρ(άψαι), γρ(άψον), or sim. It introduces a short 'Büroverfügung' (cf., for example, *BGU VIII* 1791.2 [54/53 BCE]).

2. Dexilaos, strategos of Memphis in the 2nd century, is known from *P. Tebt.* III (2) 911.16-18 (cf. *Pros. Ptol.* No. 239). Μέμφεωσ is very unusual in a formula like this. The documents have mostly Μεμφίτου.

4. The name of the ἐπιτοῦτος τῶν φυλακτικῶν is—unlike the other addressees—not given (see above, introd.). This inconsistency is probably due to the fact that the text is a very quickly written note. The scribe may not have known this official of the neighboring nome.

5. ἐπιτοῦτος is not further explained, but Theon probably is ἐπιτοῦτος of the nome.

8. Φανεία: the looped second *alpha* occurs also in P. Mich. Inv. 6957 (dated 217 BCE) and P. Hels. I 1 (dated 194/3-180 BCE). For the omission of the iota see Maysner-Schmoll, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der ptolemäischen Zeit* I.1, pp.96f.

9. ὑπὲρ: this construction is quite usual in later occurrences of the δεκανός. Cf. for example *OBodl.* II 2203.1 (94/95 CE).

9-10. ἀνακελιω(ρηκότων): people left their places either when they were threatened by a dangerous situation or forced by economic pressure. Cf. W. Schmidt, *Der Einfluss der Anachoresis im Rechtsleben Ägyptens zur Ptolemäerzeit* (Diss. Köln 1966); H. Braunert, *Die Binnenwanderung* (Bonn 1964) 29-110, esp. 64, 68. This phenomenon occurs as early as the 3rd cent. BCE (cf. *BGU* X 1934).

10. δεκαν(ῶν): a δεκανός τῶν φυλακτικῶν is surprising at this early time. The earliest other reference to this official is P. Tebt. I 27.31 (113 BCE); also see P. Tebt. (descr.) I 251, 1st cent. BCE. Cf. commentary *ad loc.*

11. It seems that the content of γράψων (or sim.; above, note to line 1) starts here with the accusative Ἰκίδωρον. The καί indicates that probably another name follows; the word is clearly abbreviated, presumably because the two men run a joint business of tax farming (see note to next line) and the firm was sufficiently identified by the first name.

12. τε(λῶνας): The abbreviation is ambiguous, but neither τέτακται nor τέταρτον yield any sense in the context and the expression τε(λέεματα) ἀπομοίρα belongs into the 2nd cent. CE (see, for instance, *BGU* IX 1894.156 et al. [157 CE]). The collection of the ἀπόμοιρα was in the hands of tax farmers. For the ἀπόμοιρα see above, introd. n. 11.

13. ce() φϣ οϣ () ὀφείλων(τασ): the traces are relatively clear, but ambiguous. Therefore, the dotted letters indicate my uncertainty of interpretation rather than my inability to see the strokes of ink. Thus, I can only report what, at this point, seems the least objectionable.

(a) In the context, we expect the amount the tax farmers either owe or wish to collect. φϣ may indicate the amount (550). The φ is rather large, and its shape (ϕ) is different from other phis in this papyrus. It begins with what looks like an ε whose middle horizontal is separated from the left part of the letter. After crossing the long vertical stroke the horizontal bar immediately turns backwards forming a semicircle. The combination of these strokes comes close to a *phi* in a shape like ϕ, but the s-shaped curve is clearly written in two strokes. Yet, it would not be impossible to read the left part of the letter as a separate ε (i.e. εϣ).

(b) The preceding letter (ϑ) looks like a θ (or perhaps β). It is open at the top and has a very small middle stroke, just crossing the right part of the curve. It should be the sign for a unit of payment. At the beginning of the 2nd century, a payment of ἀπόμοιρα for a vineyard could still be made in kind, but for orchards it was paid in money from early on. Very soon all payments were in money (J. Kaimio in excursus 1 to P. Hels. I 29, see above, introd. n. 11). The sign cannot be read as με(τρητάσ), but we may perhaps take it as a sign for (δραχμάσ). It would be a variation of the usual shape, somewhat similar to the drachma sign that looks like the lower case letter b with a little slope at the top of its bulge.

(c) The syntax seems to require an infinitive. ce(ε̅) can hardly be taken as ce(χημειῶσθαι), since this verb in the meaning "having signed a receipt in the amount of ..." does not seem to occur before the Roman period and U. Wilcken's remarks in *Griechische Ostraka* (Leipzig-Berlin 1899) 82f. are applicable. I consider ce(χημαγκέναι): "they have reported".

(d) The last abbreviation is οϣ (οϣ̄). The ϣ is a very thin dot and, therefore, may be accidental. The abbreviation mark on top of v is a curved line open at the top. It may well represent μ, and the scribe may have meant ὀνομ(ακτί) (although I cannot identify the second ο).

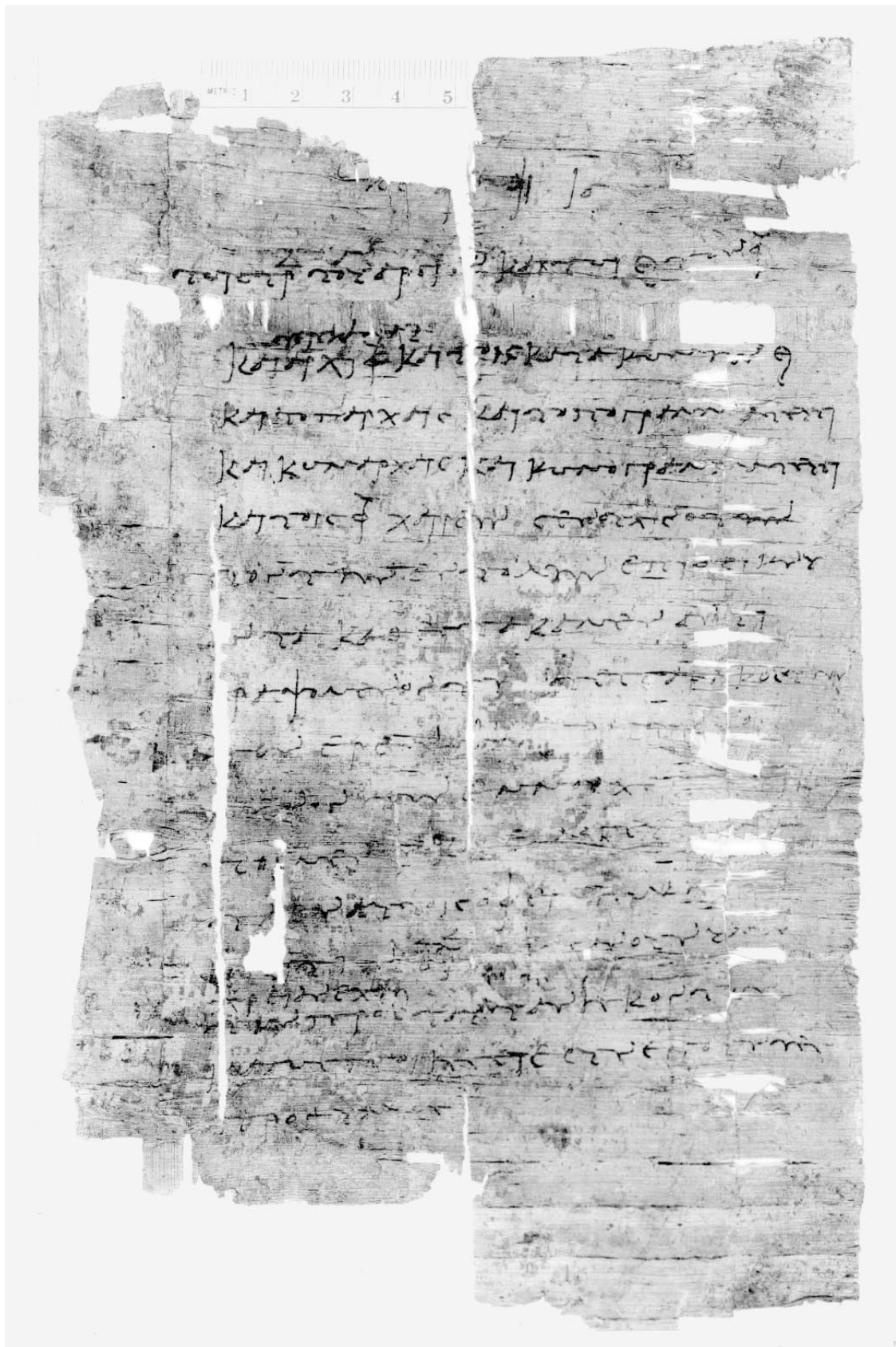
In sum, the scribe may have intended: Ἰσίδωρον καὶ Τώρα() | τε(λῶνας) ἀπομοίρα | σε(χημαγκέ-
ναι) (δραχμάς) φῦ ὄνομ(αετὶ) ὀφείλον(τας), "that Isidoros and Tora(), tax farmers of the apomoira, have
reported people by name who owe 550 drachmai (for this tax)." If, however, I am mistaken, ὀφείλον(τας)
could mean that the tax farmers themselves owe money to the state.

14. καὶ τῶι δι(): For this abbreviation with a subscript ι see *P. Tebt.* III (2) 890.21 (2nd cent. BCE)
and the discussion in A. Blanchard, *Sigles et abréviations dans les papyrus documentaires Grecs: Recherches de
paléographie*, Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin Suppl. No. 30 (London 1974) p. 22 n. 25. The preceding
καὶ τῶι may either introduce another addressee supplementing the initial list, or indicate that another letter
should be written on a different matter. Yet, for some reason, the author interrupted the memo at this point. The
abbreviated τῶι δι() may be the beginning of a title rather than a name. Or the scribe meant τῶι δεῖνι. If so,
he may not have recalled the name of the additional addressee—reason to leave the text unfinished.

"Write (?) to Dexilaos, the strategos of Memphis, and to the head of the police and to Theon,
the head, and to Ptolemaios, the oikonomos, and to Phaneias, the head of policemen in charge
of people who have left their home, that Isidoros and Tora(), tax farmers of the apomoira,
have reported (?) people by name (?) who owe 550 (?) drachmai (?). And to so and so ..."

Ann Arbor—Basel

Martin Müller



P.Mich. Inv. 6980, front; circular letter (223 or 181 BC)



P.Mich. Inv. 6980, back; memo
(after 223 or 181 BC)