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AN ‘OUR FATHER’ WITH PROBLEMS


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AN ‘OUR FATHER’ WITH PROBLEMS

This sheet (probably an amulet) with the Lord’s Prayer, held in the Beinecke Library, was published very recently in this fashion:1

1 πατερ υμων [ο] ε υι[ρανος αγιαϲθητω]
   το ονομα σον ελθετο η βασιλεια σου
   κενηθητου = το θελημα σου ακ εν ωυρανω
   και επι κης τον αρτον [ημων τον ευποιουν]

5 δοκ υμιν εμερον = και ε[φες ηιν το οφειλη-]
   μετα υμων = ακ και υ[ιες αφηκαμεν]
   οφητης υμων = και [η εικενεγκηκη]
   υμως εις πιραμον και ρυϲαι
   υμων ακο τον πονηρον[ς........................]

10 το κυριω υμων - [.............................]

The purpose of this note is to discuss the textual problems raised by this piece, in part due to its spelling, which the editor calls ‘barbarous’. Whether the erratic Greek in the restored parts of the text was intentional, is impossible to tell, but we may exonerate the scribe for what he wrote but has not survived: so, in line 2 for ελθετο read ελθετα, in line 5 for τα, and add the article τοις (however spelled) at the end of line 6, which goes with οφητης = οφειλαται in 7 (the only veritable ‘barbarism’ in this text). It is more difficult to judge when an idiosyncratic text is further obscured by a break; in informal texts of this kind, the text is often fluid, and textual variation defies expectations. Thus in line 1 the papyrus was thought to have [ο] ε υι[ρανος in place of ό εν τοις ωυρανοις: the loss of the nasal (έν > ε) can be paralleled from elsewhere, but the omission of the article does not seem to have any counterpart in the rest of the tradition. The editor asserts that ‘there is just sufficient space in the line for ό before the epsilon’, but the on-line image reveals ink traces there, which do not suit omicron; omega would be a better reading. This could be ω in phonetic spelling, but the letter immediately before hardly reminds one of nu, while it seems that something was corrected. Furthermore, the reading of the letter on the edge as upsilon is very dubious: what is visible is a short oblique rising from left to right, with no trace whatsoever to its left. Upsilon has two forms in this hand (the open bowl and the y-shaped one), and neither can match what we have here. This oblique could be the left-hand leg of mu or nu, but neither letter immediately suggests itself in the context.2 An additional difficulty is that there does not seem to be enough room for all of τοις ωυρανοις ἀγιαϲθητω in the break. All in all, a crux, and not the only one in this text.

As the editor notes, και ρουϲαι] (kappa is dotted, but the reading is secure) in line 8 ‘would be unique in the textual tradition (all other witnesses reading ὁλλαὁ’) (p. 64); it is also awkward that the line is rather short as restored. The solution to this problem is offered by three other witnesses to the text, BGU III 954 (van Haelst 720), P.Bad. IV 60 (van Haelst 346), and P.Duk. inv. 7783, which have κυριε at this point.4 Thus

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1 P.CIYBR 4600: B. Nongbri, The Lord’s Prayer and XMΓ: Two Christian Papyrus Amulets, HThR 104 (2011) 59–68, at 59–64, with a plate on p. 61; for digital images, see http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/papyrus/oneSET.asp?pid=4600. The ‘ς’ signs in the transcript, called ‘double line mark[ς]’ (p. 61), could also have been rendered as short oblique strokes.

2 For some time I toyed with the idea that the papyrus had ε ου [τοις ωυρανοις, with the vowels ε and ο having changed places, but this will be impossible if ω = ω is read before this sequence.


4 Th. J. Kraus, Manuscripts with the Lord’s Prayer – they are more than simply Witnesses to that Text itself, in Th. J. Kraus – T. Nicklas (eds.), New Testament Manuscripts. Their Texts and Their World (2006) 225–66, at 247 and 250, states that in these three texts (BGU III 954 only implicitly) the Lord’s Prayer ends with the vocative, but this is not the case, and only holds for an ostracon from Greece (full references in Kraus, 237f.), which has κυριε after πονηρού.
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the Beinecke piece probably had κύριε, written out in full or, less likely (there is no trace of a supralinear bar) as a nomen sacrum (κε); this would have been followed by ἀλλὰ ῥῦϲαι.

The last line throws up another serious problem. The Paternoster proper ends with πονηρο in line 9, but there is one further line, possibly the last line written on this sheet. The editor is not comfortable with το, but the reading is beyond doubt. He further notes that another such text ends with the vocative κύριε,5 but we do not have a vocative here, no matter how idiosyncratic the Greek could be. As with large parts of the indirect tradition, several Egyptian texts of this type add a doxological formula after the prayer (BGU III 954, P.Bad. IV 60, P.Duk. inv. 778, P.Iand. I 6 = P.Giss.Lit 5.4 [van Haelst 917], P.Köln IV 171). In one of them, the doxology is preceded by the phrase διὰ τό (l. τόν) μονογενή υἱόν (P.Duk. inv. 778.21f.), which recurs in a papyrus that does not have the doxology: P.Köln IV 171.6f., διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς (ε)ου Ἰη(ϲο)ὗ του Χρ(ιϲτο)ου.6 None of them refers to ‘the Lord’, but Christ can also be called ‘the Lord’, and we may consider whether the Beinecke papyrus had δια l το κυριου υμων, i.e., δια του κυριου ημων. A reference to the ‘Lord’ as intermediary introduces a doxology in P.Oxy. III 507.5f., though the wording is not the same as here: διὰ τοῦ κυρίου κα[ἰ] κοσμητὴς ήμων Ἰηϲοῦ Χριϲτου. The horizontal trace at the end of line 10 would suit a cross or staurogram, which would suggest that this is the end of the text, i.e., that no other word was written after υμων; however, the phrase δια τοῦ κυρίου ημων without any further qualification would hardly be an ideal closure. Alternatively, it is eminently possible that το κυριω is to be read as τῷ κυρίῳ; a dative in this context might occur in P.Köln VIII 336.4, του πονηρο (l.-οῦ) εν χ, where the editor tentatively proposed to restore ἐν ὧν. Whatever the case, we are dealing with a novelty, though one whose exact wording is at present impossible to reconstruct. See below.

Finally, a note on the palaeography and date. The editor observes that ‘while [the hand] shows some affinity to documentary hands, the letters are generally less crowded and better defined than those of documents’. He compares it with P.Vindob. G 39736 = SB VI 9576 of 643, reproduced in H. Maehler – G. Cavallo, Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period (1987), pl. 43c,7 and concludes that a date ‘in the sixth or early seventh century … seems likely, although precision in these matters is always difficult’.8

That such precision is hard to come by is surely true, but it is unclear how a palaeographic parallel that dates from the mid seventh century would suggest a date-range that starts from the sixth and does not go beyond the middle of the seventh century. The script is a mixture of the minuscule usually found in Greek official documents of the late seventh and earlier eighth centuries, and of the ‘sloping majuscule’ or ordinary Coptic writing of the time; for example, line 7 has a mostly Greek look, while line 6 starts with a mu of the minuscule type but the letter forms that follow are of the kind common in Coptic texts of the period. The handwriting is that of a trained scribe, but it should cause no surprise that the spelling is erratic; cf. e.g. MPER XV 4 (8th cent.), written in an ambitious hand but with horrendous spelling.

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9–10 Probably ἐν Χριϲτῷ Ἰηϲοῦ l το (l. τῶ) κυρίῳ υμῶν (l. ημῶν); see H. Quecke, Untersuchungen zum koptischen Stundengebet (1970) 438f. (cf. 334ff.).

5 See above, n. 3.
6 Christ appears as the mediator for the doxology; see F. H. Chase, The Lord’s Prayer in the Early Church (1891) 171.
7 This document is called a ‘letter’, but is in fact a receipt.
8 Text quoted from pp. 61 and 62.