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SEMEIA, OLD AND NEW

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H. C. Youtie has shown that in a number of private letters the writer inserts a ‘sign’ (σημεῖον), a reference to a private matter, so that the recipient could recognize that the letter came from the nominal author and not another person.¹ Some additions to and refinements of Youtie’s study are presented below.

I

Youtie identified a number of constructions by which such a ‘sign’ is introduced: σημεῖον χάριν (ὅτι/ ὅτε), σημεῖον ὅτι/ ὅτε. There is one further construction used for this purpose, which seems to have given difficulty to editors: ἐπὶ σημεῖου. It has occurred in three texts.

a. The earliest example of this prepositional phrase occurs in PSI IV 412.7, a document from the Zenon archive. The text has been read as follows:

ὑπόμνημα Ζήνωνι. ἵνα λαλήσῃς | Εὐνόμωι μετὰ Ἰστρου, καθάπερ σοι | Κρίτων ἐνετείλατο, περὶ
Θήρωος | τοῦ ἐν τῷ Βουσιρίτῃ τιτολογούντος | τοπαρχίαν Θελβωντιτῆ, ἵνα κομίσῃται τὴν
τοπαρχίαν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν | αὐτῶν ἦι. ἐπισημειουδερ... αὐτῷ | περὶ οὗ καὶ Αἴγυπτος ἐμνήσθη καὶ
ὠμολόγησεν πάντα ποιῆσειν. ἐντεῖλαι οὖν | φιλοτίμως.

The editors’ note to line 7 considers articulating ἐπὶ σημεῖου δ’ ἐρεῖς. PSI VIII p. xvi records the correction ἐπισημειοῦ δερ[ι]α[ς] ?, but this makes little sense. What I was able to see on the original (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence) is close to the suggestion of *ed. pr.*: between ρ and c there is room for one letter, and the remains may be reconciled with η. I read: ἐπὶ σημεῖου δ’ ἐρής αὐτῷ κτλ. ἐρής is a phonetic spelling of ἐρεῖς,² ‘a standard expression in private letters ... virtually equivalent to an imperative’ (J. R. Rea, P.Oxy. LI 3642.29–30 n.). The author of the note asks Zenon to remind Eunomos of a time when the latter promised to ‘do everything’, in order to convince him to act as desired: this would function as a σημεῖον, which would dispel any doubts Eunomos might have.³ This sense of σημεῖον is much more clear in the texts discussed below.

b. P.Lond. II 480 (pp. 320–21) is a private letter assigned to the fourth century. Its subject ‘is an urgent appeal to hand over some money to the brother, who was presumably the bearer of the letter’. Several corrections to the published text are recorded in BL I 269, but some problems remain unresolved. One of them is the enigmatic ἐπισημιοῦ in line 11, not included in the indexes at the end of the volume. The difficulty may be removed if we opt for a different articulation: ἐπὶ σημεῖου. The writer asks the addressee to give one solidus to a third person, and goes on to say, ἐπὶ σημεῖου, ‘I sent Milon to you and you were not found’. This is the proof (σημεῖον) that it is the nominal sender of the letter who asks that a payment be made to a third person.

Study of the original allows for further improvement on the reading and understanding of the text, and also shows some of the proposed corrections to be wrong. The editor described the document as ‘a private letter from Clematius to Sabinus, whom he calls his bother’. However, the sender is a woman whose name is Sabine, while the addressee is a man called Clematis. A new edition is given below.

¹ H. C. Youtie, Σημεῖον in the Papyri and its Significance for Plato, Epistle 13 (360a–b), *ZPE* 6 (1970) 105–14, reprinted in *Scriptiunculae* II 963–75. A few new examples have accrued since then; for a listing see P.Oxy. LIX 3979.13–14 n. (add SB XX 14101, XXIV 16275). The word also occurs in O.Quseir 28 = SB XX 14263.2, but the context is unclear.

² For εἰ > η before consonants, see E. Mayser, H. Schmoll, *Grammatik* 51; also F. T. Gignac, *Grammar* i 240ff.

³ A σημεῖον occurs in another letter of the Zenon archive, viz. P.Cair.Zen. II 59192.8 (255 BC).

κυρίῳ μου ἀδελφῷ
 Κλεμάτις
 Καβίνη.
 ἀπέστειλα πρὸς καὶ τὸ[ν]
 5 [ἀ]δελφὸν ἡμῶν Ἀσά-
 ειν περὶ τοῦ ὀλοκοτ-
 τίνου, [ὄ]πως σπουδά-
 σῃς τ[οῦ]τον παρασχῆν
 αὐτῷ, ἐπιδὴ πάνη
 10 ἀναγκαίου χρεία ἐστίν.
 ἐπὶ σημίου ἀπέστειλα
 Μίλωνα πρὸς καὶ
 καὶ οὐχ εὑρέθης.
 μόνον μὴ ἀμελήσῃς(c),
 15 κύριε ἀδελφέ, περὶ
 τούτου. ἐρρωσθαί
 σε εὐχομαι πολ-
 λοῖς χρόνοις,
 κύριε ἀδελφέ.

2 l. Κληματίῳ 4, 11 l. ἀπέστειλα 4, 12 l. ἐπὶ 8 l. παρασχῆν 9 l. ἐπειδὴ πάνη 10 l. χρεία 11 l. σημίου

‘To my lord brother Clemati(us), (from) Sabine. I sent to you our brother Asaeis about the *holokottinos*, so that you give it to him quickly, because there is great need of it. As a sign (that this letter comes from me I remind you that) I sent Milon to you and you were not found. Just don’t forget, my lord brother, about this (matter). I pray that you may be well for many years, my lord brother.’

- 2 Κλεμάτις (l. Κληματίῳ). The name of the addressee is in the nominative, which is not uncommon in private letters. A Κλημάτιος is the sender of P.Abinn. 33.2 (= P.Lond. II 232), and the editors considered him as ‘possibly identical’ with the individual addressed to here.
- 3 Σαβίνη: Σαβινῶ *ed. pr.*
- 5–6 Ἀσάειν: ασκειν *ed. pr.*
- 8 τ[οῦ]τον. λ[ό]γον, recorded in BL I 269, cannot be confirmed. τ[οῦ]τον picks up ὀλοκοττίνου from above.
- 9 πάνη (l. πάνη): παν . . . *ed. pr.* The correction πάντη (BL I 269) receives no support from the original.
- 10 ἀναγκαίου perhaps stands for ἀναγκαίως, and is not the genitive singular of ἀναγκαῖος/-ον. For the formulation compare P.Sorb. I 62.5 (VI) ἐπειδὴ χρεία ἐ[στίν] ἀναγκαίως, P.Vind.Worp 23.6 (VI/VII) ἐπειδὴ ἀναγκαίως χρεία ἐστίν; cf. also P.Oxy. I 116.16f. (II), P.Mil.Vogl. IV 256.23 (II/III), SB VI 9139.11 (VI), SPP XX 254.4 (VI). In Ptolemaic papyri we find the expression ἀναγκαία χρεία; see P.Rain.Cent. 42.6 (259 BC), P.Zen.Pestm. 37.3 (257 BC). For the juxtaposition with πάνη cf. P.Lond. VI 1916.16 (330–40) ἀναγκαίως οὖν πάνη σπουδάσατε.
- 11 ἐπὶ σημίου: ἐπισημιο^υ *ed. pr.* For the absence of the connective ὅτι compare PSI IV 414.7 (discussed above).
- 12 Μίλωνα: Αἰλωνα *ed. pr.*
- 14 ἀμελήσῃς(c) with BL I 269: ἀμελησι *ed. pr.*
 μόνον μὴ ἀμελήσῃς(c). This collocation occurs only here and, preceded by ἀλλά, in P.Oxy. XIV 1775.15 (IV) and PSI XIII 1366. 9 (IV/V); possibly also in O.Douch I 46.4 (IV/V), if we punctuate differently from *ed. pr.* (there are similar problems in O.Douch V 635.6 and O.Oasis Bahria 10 = SB XX 14892.3, where new periods should start with μόνον). Generally, the use of μόνον with prohibitions is rare in the papyri (it is not uncommon in Modern Greek).

c. A further example of this construction occurs in SB XVI 12623, ‘an order to pay couched in the form of a letter’, addressed by Isidoros to his ‘lord brother’ Makarios; it was assigned to the later fourth century.⁴ The main part of the text was read and translated as follows (lines 4ff):

⁴ Ed. pr. H. C. Youtie, *ZPE* 37 (1980) 220, reprinted in *Scriptiunculae Posteriores* II 584.

ἐπὶ ἐξιμιοῦ ὅτει δέδωκεν | Δημήτριος εἰς ἐμὲ ὑπ(ἐρ) Ἄϊον | ἀργυρίου (δηναρίων) (μυριάδας) ψν,
παράκλητος Ἄϊων τὰς ἄλλας | (δηναρίων) (μυριάδας) τ.

‘Since you noted that Demetrios has given to me 750 myriads of denarii in silver, hand over to Aion the other 300 myriads of denarii in silver.’

The dotted ε of ἐξιμιοῦ is hard to make out on the published photograph; many years ago, the late Traianos Gagos checked the original at my request and confirmed my suspicion that the papyrus had ἐπὶ τιμίου.⁵ Isidoros provided Makarios with a *σημεῖον*, and proceeded with instructions about a payment. The purpose of the *σημεῖον* was to show that the authorization for payment stemmed from Isidoros himself and not from anyone else. P.Lond. II 480 (discussed above) offers a close parallel.

II

We may now have a fresh look at the function of these ‘signs’. It is remarkable that many of the texts referring to *σημεῖα* concern money payments. We have seen P.Lond. II 480 and SB XVI 12623; we may cite a few other examples:⁶

P.Prag.Varcl 38 = SB VI 9415(17) (mid III),⁷ a letter from the archive of Heroninos (ll. 3–9, 14–15):

καλ[ῶς] ποιήσεις, ἀδελφέ, | δύο [ἀ]πλᾶ μονόχωρα | οἴν[ου] διαπεμψάμενός | μοι διὰ τοῦ ἀναδιδόντι | κο[ι] τῆ
γράμ(ματ)α κομικάμεινος παρ’ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν | τι[μ]ὴν αὐτῶν (δραχμάς) κ. (...) ¹⁴ σημίου χάριν, ὅτε συνεζήτις
πρὸς Γραφίαν (?) | κο[. . . .] χάριν

‘You will do well, brother, to send me two simple single jars of wine through the person who delivers you these letters, after you receive from him their price, 20 drachmas. By way of sign (that this letter truly comes from me, I remind you that), you were quarrelling with Graph(e)ia(s ?) about ...’

P.Oxy. LIX 3979 (266), described as ‘a business letter which also serves as a note of credit for the transfer of funds’. An elaborate request of payment is followed by a period introduced by *σημεῖον* (ll. 3–17):

καλῶς ποιήσεις μεταβαλλόμενος | παρὰ σοὶ ἐν Ὀξυρυγγεῖτῃ Αὐρηλίῳ Ἡρακλείδῃ υἱῷ Κεφάλωνος
ὀρθιῶτος συναυρεῖτῃ Λεωνίδου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ | ἡμῶν ἀργυρίου Σεβαστοῦ | νομίματος δραχμάς ἐννα-
κοκίας, ἀνθ’ οὗ ἔχον τὰς ἴσας | πλήρης δραχμάς ἐννακοκίας | ἐνθάδε ἐν κόμῃ Σέφθα, ἀλλ’ οὐ | μὴ αὐτὸν
κατάσχῃς. σημεῖου | χάριν ὅτι ἐνεβαλλόμεν | σοι λινᾶ τέμετα τριακόσια ὅτε ἐνέβης μετὰ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ
ὀθονιακοῦ. (...)

‘Please pay over at your place in the Oxyrhynchite to Aurelius Heraclides, son of Cephalon the poulterer, who lives in the same street as our brother Leonides, nine hundred drachmas of money of imperial coinage, in lieu of which I have received the equivalent amount in full of nine hundred drachmas here in the village of Sefthta, but do not detain him. As proof (that this instruction comes from Sinpsansneus): I loaded for you three hundred linen *semesta* when you embarked with Alexander the linen-dealer.’

P.Oxy. XIV 1683 (IV), ‘a very illiterate letter [in which] Probus requests his ‘sister’ to collect some money which was due to him and pay over to his wife. He proceeds to recall a recent occasion when the sister had refused to let him have some of his money’ (ll. 9–21):⁸

ἄπελθε | πρὸς Πετρῶνιν τῶν ἐγγυησάμενόν μου· δέξε ἀ[π’] αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ | μισθοῦ μου ἕνα ὑμικ, (τάλαντον ?) α.ζ. //, | οἶδες γ[ὰ]ρ καὶ σὺ ὅτι [ο]ὐδὲν ἔχωμεν | μάρτυρων ἐ[ἰ] μὴ ὁ θε[ὸς] καὶ σὺ καὶ ἡ | γυνή μου. ἀπόδος οὖν αὐτὰ | τῇ γυναικί[ν] μου. μὴ λυπήσῃς οὖν | ἐμένα. δὸς οὖν αὐτὰ, ἐπιδὲ χρίαν αὐτὰ ὁ υἱός μου (ἔχει). σημίου δὲ χάριν ὅπου ἠπάντηκά σου ἰ[σ] τὸ Κησάριον καὶ εἴρηκά σου ὅτι δὸς ἐμοὶ κέρμα ἀπὸ τῶν ἔχῃς ἵνα ἀγοράσω | ἐματῶ ἕνα λεβιτῶν ..., καὶ εἶπές | με ὅτι κτλ.

‘You should go to Petroni(u)s, my surety; get from him out of my pay one talent (?) and a half, 1 ½ tal. For you too know that we have no witness at all besides god and you and my wife. Give them then to my wife. Don’t vex

⁵ This goes back to winter 1996/7. An image has since been posted on line, accessible through APIS or the HGV link.

⁶ Here and elsewhere I reproduce the orthography of the original without recording regularized forms.

⁷ On this text see J. R. Rea, *ZPE* 26 (1977) 230, whose interpretation and translation of l. 14 I follow.

⁸ The text is after ed. pr. Naldini, *Il Cristianesimo in Egitto* no. 65, offers a slightly different text.

me; give them to her, since my son needs them. By way of a sign, when I met you at the Caesareum and said to you “Give me some money out of what you have of mine in order that I may buy myself a kettle”, you said ...’

SB XXIV 16275.2ff. (V):

σιμίου χάριν ὧν ἔσχον παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀπὸ τιμῆς σιππίων· τὸ πρῶτον ἔσχον παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀργυρίου (τάλαντα) Ἄζ, τὸ δεῦτερον ἄργυρίου τάλαντα (τάλ.) Ἀ, τὸ τρίτον παρὰ Ὠρίων ἰμόνος ἀργυρίου (τάλ.) ρ μόνας. ἰ νῦν σὺν ἄρτι δὸς τῷ ἀδελφῷ μου Σαραποδώρου τὰς λυπαετίσας παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀργυρ(ί)ου ἰ τάλαντα (τάλ.) χλ (m.2) καὶ τῇ γυνεκί μου Θερμουθίς (τάλ.) χ’.

‘As a proof of what I received from you from the price of hemp: the first time I received from you 1900 tal. of silver, the second time 1000 talents of silver, the third time from Horion only 100 tal. of silver only. Now then give my brother Sarapodoros the remaining 630 talents from (owed by) you, and to my wife Thermouthis 600 tal.’

SB XVI 12265.2ff. (late V):

δὸς Δωροθέου προνοητῆ οὐσία Διοσκόρου ἀπὸ λόγου ἰ τιμῆς ἐρίου χρυσοῦ νομιματίων ἐν (ἡμῖν), σιμίου χάρις ὅται ἀπέτειλα ἰ τὴν ἀδελφή μου Ἀπία καὶ δέδωκες αὐτήν τὸν νομιματίων.⁹

‘Give to Dorotheos, steward of the estate of Dioskoros, on account of the price of wool, one-and-a-half solidus of gold; by way of a sign (that this comes from me, I remind you) when I sent my sister Apia and you gave her the solidus.’

A *σημεῖον* was introduced into a letter so that the recipient would be assured that it came from the nominal sender. In many cases, the recipient of a letter that included a *σημεῖον* was asked to proceed with a financial transaction, most often a payment of money.¹⁰ To use a modern parallel, though the practice is quickly disappearing, the *σημεῖον* often had a somewhat similar function to a cheque-card guaranteeing a cheque. The *σημεῖον* offered ‘proof of identity’.

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⁹ In normalized spelling: δὸς Δωροθέῳ προνοητῆ οὐσία ... σημεῖου χάρις ὅτε ἀπέτειλα τὴν ἀδελφὴν μου Ἀπία καὶ δέδωκες αὐτῇ τὸ νομιματίων. Ed. pr. articulates δέδωκε ἰ αὐτήν τὸν νομιματίων (c = εἰς in Modern Greek), but here we probably have an example of the interchange of dative and accusative in the personal pronouns; see S. Kapsomenakis, *Voruntersuchungen zu einer Grammatik der nachchristlichen Papyri* (1938) 24 n. 2, and *Ἀθηνᾶ* 73–74 (1972–1973) 563.

¹⁰ Financial affairs also concern P.Oxy. XLI 2996, one of the letters discussed by Youtie, while financial interests may underlie the use of the expression in SB V 7574; cf. also the use of the word *μυκτήρια* in SB XVI 12496.11. However, it should be noted that not all letters that mention *σημεῖα* concern financial affairs: see P.Cair.Zen. II 59192 = Sel. Pap. I 92, P.Petaus 28, P.Oxy. VII 1068 (to be read with J. R. Rea, *ZPE* 21 (1976) 116), SB V 8005 (with J. R. Rea, *ZPE* 14 (1974) 14).