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A RHETORICAL FRAGMENT ON MORAL BEHAVIOR

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## A RHETORICAL FRAGMENT ON MORAL BEHAVIOR\*

BL Papyrus 2154  
Provenance Unknown

7.8 cm × 9.8 cm

II century CE

Papyrus 2154 was purchased for the British Museum in 1920 by Bernard Grenfell and Francis Kelsey, as part of Kelsey's first expedition to Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The papyrus, mounted on cardboard, is broken off at both top and bottom: the full width of the column is clear from the upper half of the papyrus (ll. 1–7); ca. 4–6 letters, by contrast, are lost at the beginnings of ll. 8–14; one letter is missing on the right edge of ll. 1 and 3, respectively. No *kollesis* is visible. The papyrus is written along the fibers in a large, clear, and round handwriting, which can be compared with the script of P.Mich. III 202 (105 CE).<sup>2</sup> The letters are well spaced and only occasionally ligatured: see, for example τὰ at the end of ἡτὰλκτικότηας (ll. 2–3) and in l. 14 (ἀπόκειται); εἰ in l. 7 (εἰδόσι) and l. 15 (Ἰαθειω); αἰς in l. 12 (χορούλαις). The handwriting appears careful and deliberate: as in the case of P.Mich. III 202, the scribe has a tendency to lift his pen and to draw letters with more than one stroke. For similar but more “cursive” hands cf. BL Papyrus 2293 (TM 702957, Xenophon, *Memorabilia*)<sup>3</sup> and PSI XV 1489 (TM 63452, philosophic text),<sup>4</sup> both assigned to the II century CE. On the basis of these parallels, the London papyrus can also be dated to the II century CE.

The papyrus contains probably a draft of a speech. In it, a first-person speaker (l. 1 ὅπ' ἐμοῦ) addresses an audience (l. 9 ὑμῶς) on moral topics. He aspires to a sophisticated phraseology, but the result is an awkward and mannered style. The combination of complex syntax and damage to the second half of the fragment hinders a complete understanding of the text. The speaker is probably criticizing a disorderly lifestyle (cf. ll. 2–3 τοὺς ἡτὰλκτικότηας “those who have been leading a disorderly life”). Although much is unclear about the second half of the fragment, in it the speaker refers to forms of entertainment like the circus, music and dance, probably with a critical approach, as the context suggests.<sup>5</sup>

Many authors and philosophers, from Plato to the Church Fathers, condemned spectacles and regarded them as a moral danger.<sup>6</sup> As observed by Kathryn Mammel, opposition to spectacles arose especially within particular groups such as the pagan literary and philosophical elite and the Jewish and Christian intellectuals, and it provided them with means to define and position themselves in relation to the other groups of “spectacle-lovers”: the uneducated and unphilosophical masses, in the case of the pagan elite, and the corrupted and impious pagans, in the case of the Jewish and Christian authors.<sup>7</sup> Among the Roman and Greek critics of spectacles, Varro, for example, warned that a fascination for theater and circus could lead

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the 1920 purchase and the collaboration of Kelsey and Grenfell, see Todd Hickey's introduction to *P.Lond. VIII* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> The papyrus belongs probably to the “dossier of Thermuthas”, cf. Azzarello 2008. A link to an image of the papyrus can be found at [www.papyri.info/ddbdp/p.mich;3;202](http://www.papyri.info/ddbdp/p.mich;3;202).

<sup>3</sup> Published in Funghi 2016. The image is available online: [www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus\\_2293](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_2293).

<sup>4</sup> The image is available online: [www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;15;1489](http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;15;1489).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also the supplement proposed for ll. 9–10 τὰ τῶν μά[ταίω]ν ἰπποδρομιῶν “the things pertaining to futile horse-racing”.

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of pagan and Christian views on the corrupting effect of spectacles on morals see Schneider 1969, Weismann 1972: 69–98, Rambaux 1979: 179–189, Barish 1981: 5–65, Wistrand 1992, Wiedemann 1992: 128–164, Futrell 2006: 165–169, Mammel 2014 (with further bibliography).

<sup>7</sup> Mammel 2014.

Romans to neglect their fields and to a subsequent decline of the economy.<sup>8</sup> In the early empire, Tacitus denounced the corrupting effect of the circus and theater,<sup>9</sup> Pliny condemned the futility of the circus,<sup>10</sup> and Seneca warned against the dangers of corrupting crowds gathered at the spectacles and against the vices of the amphitheater.<sup>11</sup> In the II century CE, approximately the same time period as the papyrus text, Aelius Aristides wrote declamations against comedy and dance and Lucian criticized gladiator combat and the mania for horse-racing.<sup>12</sup> From the middle of the century, Christian authors also began to criticize pagan spectacles as a source of immorality and idolatry. In his *Oratio ad Graecos* Tatian systematically attacked Hellenistic culture, devoting chapters 22–26 to a harsh criticism of mythology, theater, dance, mime and gladiator shows. Towards the end of the century, Tertullian condemned the spectacles in his *Apologeticum*,<sup>13</sup> and then composed an entire declamation on this topic, *De spectaculis*, in which he warned the Christians against attending all sorts of pagan entertainment, including athletic games. He probably also wrote an invective on spectacles, which is now lost.<sup>14</sup> Such criticism continues in the following centuries by the Church Fathers and other Christian authors, such as Novatian and Augustine.<sup>15</sup>

## Text and translation

|    |                          |
|----|--------------------------|
| 1  | τωνυπεμουβλεπωμ[.]       |
| 2  | ωνγ.γονεναιτουσητα       |
| 3  | κτηκοτασουλιπουσινα[.]   |
| 4  | μενλ.γωνκαιεργωνα        |
| 5  | φορμαμητετακακα          |
| 6  | μητετααγαθατωκαιρω       |
| 7  | φερ.ινειδοσιεανυστερον   |
| 8  | [ ±4–5 ] βηςθεμηπρεπον   |
| 9  | [ ±4–5 ] κυμαστατωνμα    |
| 10 | [ ±4–5 ] νιπποδρομιωνπε  |
| 11 | [ ±5–6 ] θησεταιιναμα    |
| 12 | [ ±5–6 ] ιουκανχοραυλαις |
| 13 | [ ±5–6 ] ιθαροδοιχηορχη  |
| 14 | [ ±5–6 ] ονοναποκ.ται    |
| 15 | [ ±15 ] αθειω            |

2 γ : traces of a diagonal at base of letter and of the right-hand extremity of a middle horizontal    4 λ : faint traces obscured by a hole above the letter and abraded fibers    12 ] : right edge of a horizontal at mid-height  
13 ] : traces of the right sides of two diverging diagonals, as of kappa or chi    14 κ : after kappa, traces of an upside-down bowl, followed by the upper extremity of an upright, high on the writing line.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rambaux 1979: 186 with n. 563, quoting Varro, *RR II praef.* 3.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Tac., *Hist.* I, 4, 3; cf. also Rambaux 1979: 185 with n. 554 for further references and Wistrand 1992: 36–38 (on theater) and 42–43 (on circus).

<sup>10</sup> Plin., *Ep.* IX 6 and below comm. to ll. 9–10.

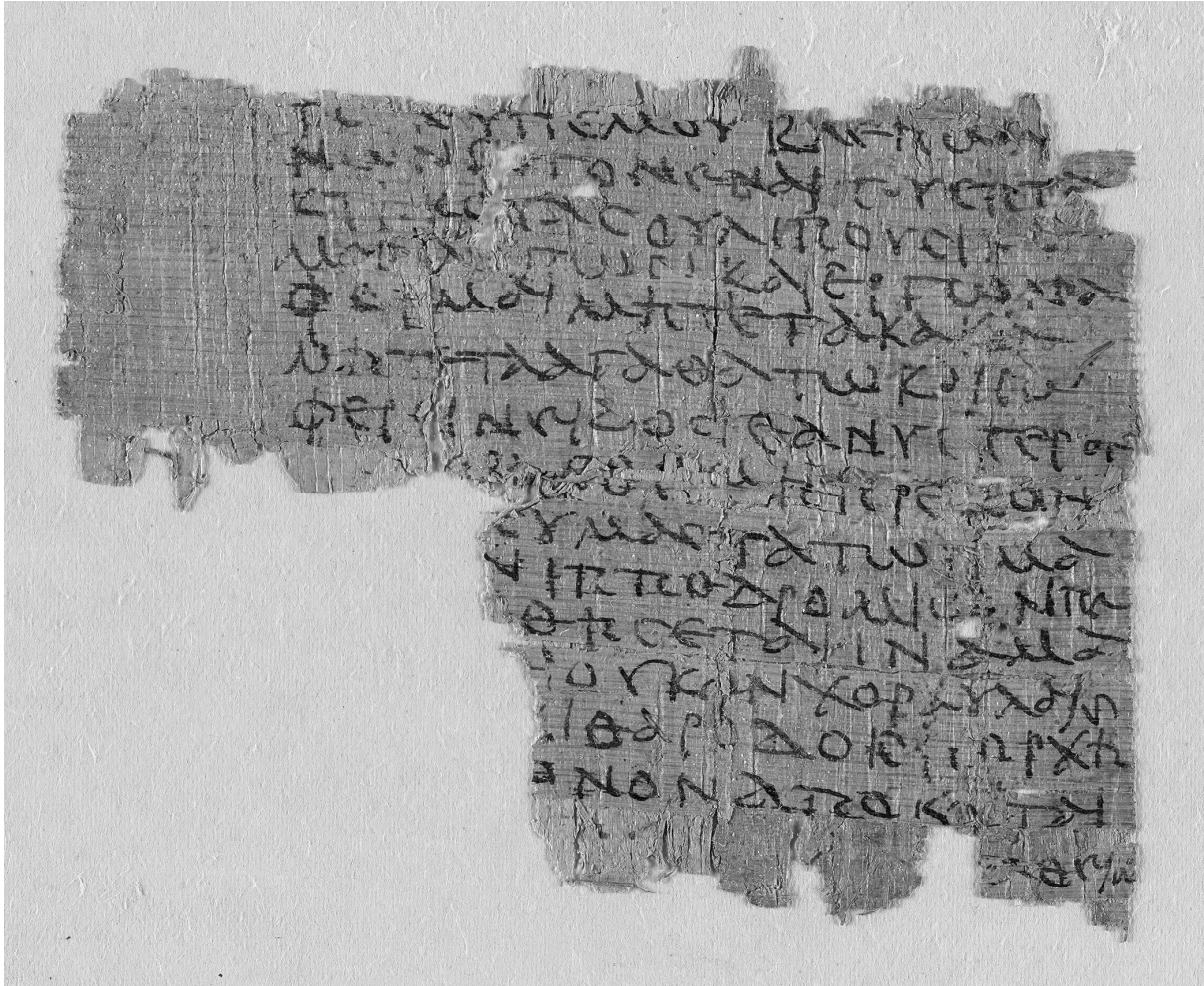
<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sen., *Ep.* 7 and Mammel 2014: 606 (and 615 for further references).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Rambaux 1979: 185 and below comm. to ll. 9–10 (for Lucian) and 13–14 (for Aelius Aristides).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Tert., *Apol.* 38.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Turcan 1986: 44.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Weismann 1972 and Mammel 2014: 610–613.



- τῶν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ βλέπωμ[έ-]  
 νων γεγονέναι τοὺς ἡτα-  
 κτηκότας. οὐ λείπουσιν α[ι]  
 μὲν λόγων καὶ ἔργων ἀ-  
 5 φορμαὶ μήτε τὰ κακὰ  
 μήτε τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῷ καιρῷ  
 φέρειν εἰδόσι· ἐὰν ὕστερον  
 [±4-5] βῆσθε μὴ πρεπον-  
 [±4-5]ς ὑμᾶς τὰ τῶν μα-  
 10 [ταίω]ν ἵπποδρομιῶν πε-  
 [±5-6] θήσεται ἵνα μά-  
 [θητε ὅ]τι οὐκ ἂν χοραύλαις  
 [±5-6] κιθαροδοῖς ἢ ὄρχη-  
 [σταῖς μ]όνον ἀπόκειται  
 15 [ ±15 ]αθειῶ

1-21. βλέπομένων 31. λείπουσιν 131. κιθαροδοῖς

“[– –] of those observed by me ... have become the ones leading a disorderly life (?). For those who do not know how to endure anything – bad or good – (*or*: to bring either harm or good) at the opportune moment, opportunities for speeches and actions are not lacking. If ever, later on, (you) [– –] – – things that do not befit you (?), those of futile horse-racing [– –] – – so that you learn that it is established not only for *choraulai* [– –] for *kitharodoi* or for dancers, (that) [– –].”

#### Commentary

1–3 The exact meaning of the phrase escapes us because of its incompleteness. The infinitive *γεγονέναι* assumes a finite verb and may reflect an indirect statement. The participle *τοὺς ἡτακτηκότας* is either the infinitive’s subject or a predicate. This perfect participle (from *ἠτακτέω*) is attested neither in the extant classical nor in post-classical literature, but is quoted in a passage of the *Etymologicum Magnum* as equivalent to *ἡταιρηκώς* and *πεπορνευκώς* “he who lives as a *ἐταίρα* (male and female)” or “who practices prostitution” (*EM* 385.47–49). The participle *τοῖς ἡτακτηκόσι* is also used in a passage of the Council of Ephesus alongside *παρανομήσασι* (*ACO I, I, 5, 122*). Since the context of the London papyrus is unclear, I prefer to retain here the more general meaning “those who conduct a disorderly life”.

The sentence could be interpreted in two ways:

- a) “those who have been leading a disorderly life have become part of those observed by me”: *τοὺς ἡτακτηκότας* would be the subject of *γεγονέναι*, and *τῶν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ βλεπωμ[έ]νων* would be its predicate, here a partitive genitive (cf. *LSJ, s.v. γίγνομαι II, 3, a*) defining a group of people whose behavior is being scrutinized by the speaker.
- b) “... of those observed by me, [*subjects*] have become the ones leading a disorderly life”: in this case, *τοὺς ἡτακτηκότας* would be a predicate referring to a particular group of people mentioned in the previous part of the sentence. Since ll. 8–14 criticize various spectacles, we can imagine that the “author” is speaking here of those who attend the shows.

3–5 *οὐ λῖπουσιγ ... ἀφορμαί*: despite the asyndeton, *οὐ λῖπουσιγ* probably begins a new period: the nominative *ἀφορμαί* would otherwise lack a finite verb; moreover, a construction in which *οὐ λῖπουσιγ* governs the infinitive *γεγονέναι* does not make sense. For similar constructions with *οὐ λείπω* at the beginning of a sentence cf. Libanius, *Decl.* 36, 1, 55 *εἰσί σοι χεῖρες, ἔστι σοι δάκρυα. οὐ λείπονταί σοι πρὸς ἰκετεῖαν ἀφορμαί* “You have hands, you are capable of tears. You are not lacking the means for supplication” and Choricus 26, 1, 1 *οὐ λείπουσιγ ἄρα τοῖς φιλονεικεῖν βουλομένοις ἔριδος ἀφορμαί* “The opportunities for strife are not lacking, it seems, in those who desire to be contentious.”

5–7 *μήτε τὰ κακὰ | μήτε τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῷ καιρῷ | φέρειν*: this “polar” phrase combines two opposites to convey the idea of a totality, cf. for polar expressions in general Kemmer 1903; also G. W. Bond, comm. to Eur., *Herc.* 647f. and 1106. The opposites *τὰ ἀγαθὰ* and *κακὰ* along with *φέρω* occur also in two anonymous verses quoted by Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophistai* (X, p. 458A = *PCG VIII 121, 1–2*): *ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ λέγοιτ’ ἂν ὁ φέρων τὰγαθὰ | ἀγαθὸς ἂν εἴη χῶ φέρων καλῶς κακὰ* “The man who bears good fortune would be called good, just as the one who bears misfortune well would be good.” The interpretation of *τῷ καιρῷ* in the papyrus, however, remains difficult: an alternative could be to understand it as a dative of manner, “in due measure, appropriately, in an appropriate way”, with analogous function as the adverb *καλῶς* in the quotation from Athenaeus. The sense of the phrase would therefore be “those who do not know how to endure anything – bad or good – in an appropriate way ...” Such people could be the *ἡτακτηκότας* of the previous period and probably those who indulge in the shows and entertainments described in the following lines of the papyrus.

The overall meaning of the statement in ll. 3–7, “those who do not know how to endure anything ... are not lacking the opportunities of speeches and actions”, remains unclear to me. An alternative interpretation could be to take the verb *φέρω* in the sense of “to bring, to produce” instead of “to endure”. The sentence could therefore be understood as follows: “Those who are not able to bring either good or harm (= who are

capable of nothing) at the opportune moment, are not lacking the opportunities for speeches and actions.” The “author” would thus criticize people leading a disorderly lifestyle (τοὺς ἡτακτικότητας) who become idle and incapable of any action, even if they have plenty of occasions to do something (whether in speech or action).

7–11 ἐάν ... [ ±5–6 ]θήσεται: The state of the papyrus impedes a clear understanding of the syntax and of the meaning of this sentence. The conjunction ἐάν introduces a general conditional with subjunctive protasis and, presumably, a future indicative apodosis (πελ[ ±5–6 ]θήσεται in ll. 10–11). A possible interpretation of the sentence, which takes into account the hypothetical restorations discussed below in the commentary to ll. 8–11, could be ἐάν ὕστερον | [προσλ]αβήσθε μὴ πρέπον[τα πρὸς] ὑμᾶς τὰ τῶν μαλ[ταίω]ν ἵπποδρομιῶν, πελ[ριστα]θήσεται ... “If ever, later on, you take part in things that do not befit you, i.e. those of futile horse-racing, it will turn out ....”

8 ] βησθε: the papyrus is heavily damaged here. The fibers before the sigma are not well aligned. Of the eta are preserved the upper part of the left upright and a trace of the horizontal stroke, which, as usual, begins to the left of that upright (cf. μήτε in l. 5). Before eta there are traces of a loop atop another diagonal descending to the right, which are compatible with beta. The previous letter is partially obscured by some fibers folded over. As suggested by Mike Sampson, this verb could be restored with a compound of λαμβάνω such as [προσλ]αβήσθε, with the sense of “to take part in something”: the trace before beta would then belong to the upper extremity of the diagonal stroke of alpha.

8–9 μὴ πρέπον[ ±4–5 ]ς ὑμᾶς: a possible restoration could be μὴ πρέπον[τα πρὸς] ὑμᾶς “things that do not befit you” (cf. a hypothetical interpretation of the whole sentence suggested in comm. to ll. 7–11) or also μὴ πρέπον[τως πρὸς] ὑμᾶς “in a manner not suitable for you”.

9–10 τὰ τῶν μαλ[ταίω]ν ἵπποδρομιῶν: the ca. 4–5 letters missing at the beginning of l. 10 are suitable for the restoration of an expression like τὰ τῶν μαλ[ταίω]ν ἵπποδρομιῶν “the things pertaining to futile horse-racing”. The futility and dullness of shows like horse-racing is pointed out by Pliny the Younger in a letter to Calvisius (Plin., *Ep.* IX 6): he does not understand why so many people attend such monotonous and idle spectacles instead of devoting themselves to more valuable activities, such as literature. Similar views were shared by authors such as Seneca, Tacitus, and Juvenal, cf. Wistrand 1992: 41–47. Later on, Lucian briefly condemned the widespread mania for horses and horse-races in *Nigr.* 29 and Tertullian depicted the circus as a place dominated by fury and violence (*ubi proprie furor praesidet, Spect.* 16).

10–11 πελ[ ±5–6 ]θήσεται: a possible restoration, suggested by Mike Sampson, could be πελ[ριστα]θήσεται “it will turn out, that ...” In this case, ἵνα is equivalent to ὥστε, as elsewhere in imperial-era Greek, for which see LSJ, *s.v.* ἵνα II, 1 and cf. Montanari, *s.v.* ἵνα D.

12 χοράυλαις: the term χοράυλης (= the auletes who accompanies the chorus) appears in the papyri only in P.Oxy. LXXIX 5203 (II century CE, list of songs). It is attested in inscriptions already in the first century BCE, but appears more frequently between the first and third centuries CE, cf. Strasser 2002 and W. B. Henry, comm. to P.Oxy. LXXIX 5203, l. 1.

The term appears in the London papyrus alongside κιθαρῳδοί and ὀρχησται: αὐλός-players, κιθαρῳδοί and dancers formed, for example, the ensemble for the pantomime, cf. Molloy 1996: 74 and 303. Strasser (2002: 128) distinguishes two kinds of χοράυλαι: those accompanying the pantomime and those performing songs written exclusively for αὐλός and the chorus. Interestingly, the three terms occur together also in a passage from Plutarch’s *Life of Antony* (24, 2), where he depicts Antony indulging in the vices and temptations of Asia Minor after Philippi: Ἀναξήνορες δὲ κιθαρῳδοὶ καὶ Ξοῦθοι χοράυλαι καὶ Μητροδώρος τις ὀρχηστὴς καὶ τοιοῦτος ἄλλος Ἀσιανῶν ἀκροαμάτων θίασος, ὑπερβαλλομένων λαμυρία καὶ βωμολοχία τὰς ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας κῆρας, εἰσερρῦη καὶ διώκει τὴν αὐλήν “*Kitharodoi* like Anaxenor and *choraulai* like Xouthos and one Metrodoros, a dancer, and such other troop of Asian per-

formers, who surpass in insolence and vulgarity the pests from Italy, poured into the court and dominated it.”

13–14 ὀρχη[σταις: in the middle of the second century CE Aelius Aristides composed a declamation against dancers, which is now lost. Two centuries later, Libanius responded with an oration on behalf of dancers (Lib., *Or.* LXIV Πρὸς Ἀριστείδην περὶ τῶν ὀρχηστῶν, translated and commented upon by Molloy 1996). He probably read and used Lucian’s *De saltatione*, another defense of dancers, cf. Molloy 1996: 87–89. Aristides’ main argument against dancers, as reported by Libanius, involved immorality and the claim that they led a disgraceful lifestyle, acting like women and prostituting themselves (cf. Lib., *Or.* LXIV 37–38). For a brief account of the term ὀρχηστής in the papyri cf. M. Satama, comm. to P.Oxy. LXXIV 5013, l. 4.

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