

AN OFFICIAL LETTER FROM OXYRRHYNCHUS MENTIONING A *COMMONITORIUM*

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Abstract. — Edition of an official letter, probably concerning fiscal matters. The papyrus provides a new attestation for the rare term κομμονιτώριον, “letter of instruction.”

Keywords: *commonitorium*, official letter, letter of instruction, legal procedure, taxes

The papyrus published here¹ preserves the middle third of a letter written against the fibers (*transversa charta*) in horizontal format.² The *verso* is blank. Upper and lower margins are preserved.³ The fragment is damaged in its middle part with a major loss, which obscures the readings of ll. 4, 5 and especially 6. In addition, in ll. 5 and 6 the writing is in some places abraded (see for example the sequence λιπιζεγ δια in l. 5).⁴ Four horizontal folds can be seen at a distance of ca. 2 cm from one another. A vertical fold runs through the middle of the papyrus. No *kollesis* is visible.

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² This is the common letter format from the fifth century onwards, see J.-L. Fournet, “Esquisse d’une anatomie de la lettre antique tardive d’après les papyrus,” in R. Delmaire, J. Desmulliez, and P.L. Gatier (eds.), *Correspondances. Documents pour l’histoire de l’Antiquité tardive* (Lyon 2009) 23–66 (esp. 28–32).

³ It could be questioned if the upper margin is preserved, but I do not see any traces of ink here coming from a possible line above.

⁴ When I started working at the piece, the papyrus surface of ll. 5–6 needed new conservation measures: fibers were not aligned and some small portions of papyrus were misplaced (for example the small scrap of papyrus bearing ελϙ in l. 5). The interventions of Jamye Jamison, to whom I express my gratitude, improved the quality of the surface. Despite this, the decipherment and interpretation of the papyrus text remains here quite challenging, see my commentary to ll. 5 and 6.

The text is written in an upright, irregular hand. The letters are in places small-sized (see e.g. ll. 5–6), in other places broader (see e.g. l. 2, especially the *deltas* of ἐδίδαξεν). The last line is divided from the rest of the text by a larger interlinear gap of ca. 1 cm, and the script of μ<ε>θοδευθῆναι, the last visible word on the line, is looser: this line may belong to a subscription and may have been written by a second hand. The handwriting can be compared with the script of documents dated between the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century CE, such as *P.Rain.Cent.* 99 (451 CE),⁵ *P.Wisc.* 1.10 (468 CE),⁶ and *P.Oxy.* 62.4349 (504 CE).⁷

The papyrus contains an official letter which deals probably with an admonitory or legal procedure concerning fiscal matters.⁸ The rare term κομμονιτώριον in l. 1, a transliteration of the Latin *commonitorium*, denotes a letter of instruction sent by a higher official to a subordinate indicating how he should proceed in a particular legal or fiscal matter. A *commonitorium* can contain for instance an order to bring an offender before court or to exact taxes from a reluctant taxpayer.⁹ The Greek term is attested so far in eight papyri (including the present one):

<i>P.Mert.</i> 1.45 r° (fifth-sixth century CE)	<i>Commonitorium</i> to the official Gerontios with order to exact taxes.	Originals or copies of <i>commonitoria</i>
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 8.1106 (sixth century CE)	<i>Commonitorium</i> to the <i>singularis</i> Paulos with instructions to protect the inhabitants of a village from their neighbors who attacked them.	
<i>P.Cair.Masp.</i> 3.67282 (sixth century CE)	Duplicate (ἴσον) of a <i>commonitorium</i> with order to arrest Hermaous.	
<i>P.Lond.</i> 5.1680 (sixth century CE)	Duplicate (ἴσον) of a <i>commonitorium</i> , fragmentary.	

⁵ The image is available online: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00002374>.

⁶ The image is available online: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-5386>.

⁷ The image is available online: <http://www.papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;62;4349>.

⁸ The letter lacks an address at the beginning. On the disappearance of the prescript from letters from the fifth century CE onwards see Fournet (n. 2) 37–46. No trace of an address is visible on the *verso*.

⁹ See H.I. Bell, *P.Lond.* 5.1679 (p. 74–75); H.I. Bell and C.H. Roberts, *P.Mert.* 1.45 r° (p. 146); J. Gasco and K.A. Worp, “CPR VII 26: reedition,” *Tyche* 3 (1988) 108; D. Feissel and I. Kaygusuz, “Un mandement imperial du VI^e siècle dans une inscription d’Hadrianoupolis d’Honoriate,” *TMByz* 9 (1985) 407–410; P. Cugusi, *C.Ep.Lat.* 2 (p. 373, note to l. 40). Another late antique term related to κομμονιτώριον is ὑπομνηστικόν, see F. Mitthof and A. Papathomas, “Zwei *officiales* in Nöten,” *BASP* 45 (2008) 131.

SB 20.14674 (fifth-sixth century CE)	Short summaries of administrative documents, the second one concerns a <i>commonitorium</i> .	Mentions
P.Wash.Univ. inv. 146 (fifth-sixth century CE)	Official letter mentioning a <i>commonitorium</i> .	
<i>P.Cair.Masp.</i> 3.67330 (545–546 CE) ¹⁰	Two accounts relating to the expenses of Aphrodito with mentions probably of two payments made as a consequence of <i>commonitoria</i> .	
<i>P.Cair.Masp.</i> 1.67058 (549–550 CE) ¹¹		

The Latin term is attested in a papyrus from Ravenna (*P.Ital.* 1.1 = *C.Ep.Lat.* 1.240, 445–446 CE) containing four documents: the first one is a *commonitorium* itself.

The Greek originals or copies of *commonitoria* are introduced by κομμονιτώριον or ἴσον κομμονιτωρίου, followed by a brief description of the circumstances and the instructions to proceed. Although P.Wash. Univ. inv. 146 shares with the *commonitoria* *P.Cair.Masp.* 3.67282 and *P.Oxy.* 8.1106 the use of διδάσκω “to inform” and with *P.Mert.* 1.45 r° the use of μεθοδεύω, the fragmentary status of the text and the lack of further evidence prevent us from labeling it as a *commonitorium*. The letter could be part of an official correspondence concerning a particular case. The mention of χρυσικά τελέσματα in l. 4 and of χρυσίον in l. 6 and the use of the verb μεθοδεύω in l. 7, which recurs often in the meaning of “collecting taxes,”¹² may point to a fiscal matter as subject of the letter.

P.Wash.Univ. inv. 146 H × W = 12 × 12,8 cm Oxyrhynchus, V-early VI CE

- 1] . ους κομμονιτωρίου καὶ ταῦτα ἐνπεφάνιστε . [
- 2] . ενος ἐδίδαξεν καὶ διὰ ψῆφον τῆς ὑμετέρας [
- 3] ατων ἐνταῦθα ἐπίστατε καὶ τὰ πρόσωπ[.]α τὰ εἰ[
- 4] . κα[ι] τὰ χρυσικά τελέσματα . [±4] . δὲ τῇ δι[
- 5] ιτον λιπιζεν δια . . [±2] ἐλο[±2] . γ ὑπὸ τὴν [
- 6] χρυσίον τηδ . β . . . δ . κη . . . μεγαλ[
- 7 (2nd hand?)] . λος περιέχειν μ<ε>θοδευθῆναι . [

1 l. κομμονιτωρίου, ἐμπεφάνισται 3 l. ἐπίσταται

¹⁰ For the date cf. *BL* 13.57.

¹¹ For the date cf. *BL* 13.53.

¹² See the commentary to l. 7.

“... a *commonitorium* and these were exhibited ... (N.N.) notified and through a decision of your ... here knows and the persons, who ... and the taxes in money ... money ... to include (?) to be forced (or to be collected?) ...”

1] . ους κομονιτορίου (*l. κομμονιτωρίου*): the first letter could be *tau*, *gamma* or *chi*. The sequence could belong to an accusative plural or, alternatively, to an adjective depending on the following κομονιτορίου and with genitive ending in -ους.

In the originals and duplicates of *commonitoria* (cf. the table above) the term κομμονιτώριον stands at the beginning of the text indicating what kind of document it is. However, in the case of P.Wash.Univ. inv. 146 the term κομονιτορίου seems rather to be mentioned in the middle of a discourse, suggesting that the papyrus bears just a new mention of the term rather than being a *commonitorium* itself.

– ἐνπεφάνιστε]: at the end of the line is a faded trace of an *epsilon* or a *kappa*.

2] . ενος: possibly]μενος, a participle.

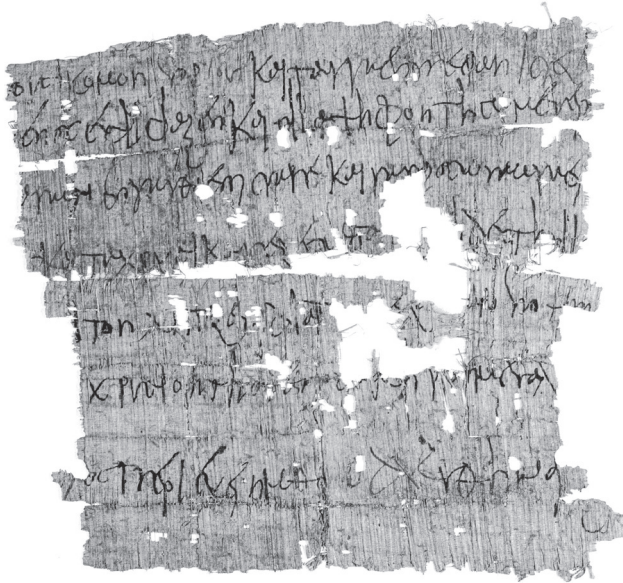
– διὰ ψῆφον: the term ψῆφος occurs in the papyrological sources in various contexts and with different meanings, such as “pebble” (cf. *P.Cair. Zen.* 4.59761.4, third century BCE), “number” (cf. *P.Bodl.* 1.7.10, fifth-seventh century CE), and “reckoning, account” (cf. *P.Lips.* 1.64 col. 1.7, ca. 368 CE). A further connotation, more fitting for the context of the Washington Papyrus, is “vote,” “decision,” or “decree,”¹³ cf. *P.Oxy.* 24.2407.8 (third century CE) καὶ ἀνη[νέχθ]η τῷ κυρίῳ μου διασημοτάτῳ ἡγ[ε]μόνι, ἐφ’ ὅσον ψῆφος ἐγένετο τῆς νομῆς “and the matter was referred to my lord the most eminent Prefect, while the voting on their apportionment was going on.”¹⁴ Cf. also Just., *Nov.* 123.21 εἰ εὔροι τὴν κρίσιν ὀρθῶς γενομένην, καὶ διὰ ψήφου ἰδίας ταύτην βεβαιούτω “If he finds the judgement to be correct, he shall confirm it by his own decision.”

– τῆς ὑμετέρας: the adjective was followed probably by an honorific abstract such as λαμπρότης or μεγαλοπρεπείας.

3 τὰ πρόσωπ[]α: between the *pi* and the *alpha* the scribe seems to correct some traces, maybe by deleting another *alpha* (πρόσωπ[]α)

¹³ Cf. F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, vol. 2 (Berlin 1927), s.v. ψῆφος: “Beschluss durch Abstimmen.”

¹⁴ Translation from the *editio princeps*.



or the first bowl of an *omega* (πρόσωπ[[ω]]α). The term πρόσωπον is used frequently in documents from the Byzantine period in the meaning of “physical person” and often in expressions such as ζητούμενα / ἐπιζητούμενα πρόσωπα “pursued persons.”¹⁵

4 τὰ χρυσικά τελέσματα: the expression is otherwise not attested but can be compared for example with *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67117.15–16 (524 CE) ἐτοίμως ἔχω τελέσαι τὰ ὑπὲρ τα[ύτης] παντοῖα τελέσμα<τα> ἔν τε σίτῳ καὶ χρυσῷ “I am prepared to pay all the taxes in wheat and money on it (= 1 *aroura* of land).” Cf. also the parallel expression ἀργυρικά τελέσματα used in earlier documents, for instance *SB* 22.15821.14 (180–192 CE) ἀπαιτήσιμ(ον) ἀργυρικῶν τελεσμ(άτων) “list of the taxes in money” or *P.Col.* 7.185.11–13 (319 CE) ἐμέτ[ρ]ησας ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ σίτου τε καὶ κριθῆς καὶ ἀργυρικῶ[ν] τελεσμάτων πλήρης “You have paid in full on my behalf the taxes in wheat, barley and money.”

5 λιπιζεγ: after the uncertain *lambda* a vertical can be seen, followed probably by a *pi*, a faded trace descending from the top of *pi* and a *zeta*. The term could be a verb (λιπίζειν?): its identification, however, remains for me still uncertain. A possible candidate could be the infinitive λοιπάζειν

¹⁵ Cf. A. Papathomas, *CPR* 25.8 (note to 1. 3).

“to leave.” The verb λοιπάζω, however, is used mainly in the passive form in the sense of “to be left over” or “to be owed, to be due.”¹⁶

An alternative reading to -πιζεν could be -ταξεν with a small *alpha* on top of *xi*. This reading is appealing, since it would fit a compound of τάσσω, but it is also problematic. The *alpha* would lack the bottom of its bowl (unless we assume a loss of ink here). The following letter could be a *xi*, but its tail appears too short if compared with the *xi* of ἐδίδαξεν in l. 2. Moreover, the reading -ταξεν would be problematic in respect to what precedes it, a clear *lambda* followed by vertical traces (*eta*?): a sequence such as ληταξεν can be hardly explained.

– δια . . [±2]ελϝ[±2] . γ: the letter after δια could be a *tau* or, alternatively, a *rho* with a narrow loop. In this case, the horizontal line traced above it could belong to a following letter. The sense remains obscure.

6 The letter following χρυσίον τη consists of a small circle and a tall vertical line, of which only the upper extremity is preserved: the traces are compatible with a *delta* (cf. l. 2 διά). After scanty remains of another letter, there is probably a *beta*. The following letter resembles at first glance a small *epsilon*, but its bottom stroke makes a peculiar curve, which is not found in other examples of *epsilon* in this text. The letter is followed probably by a *ny*. Right before the lacuna, another *delta* could be recognized, followed by the lower parts of other letters. Tentative readings for the traces preceding μεγαλ[could be κηρον, κηρου, κητρον or κηρου (maybe to be divided into -κη τόν and -κη τοῦ respectively).

7 περιέχειν μ<ε>θοδεύθηναι: the verb περιέχειν is used frequently in documents to indicate accordance with the terms of the agreement, cf. e.g. *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67167.9 (sixth century CE) or *P.Lond.* 5.1714.22 (570 CE). It can also refer to the content of a piece of writing, cf. e.g. *P.Heid.* 7.407.8–9 (fourth-fifth century CE) καθὼς περιέχει (l. περιέχει) ἢ ἐπιστολῇ “as the letter contains.”

The verb μεθοδεύω generally means “to go after (something or someone),” cf. *P.Col.* 8.242.4 and 6 (fifth century CE). It can also indicate the act of collecting taxes or exacting a debt, cf. the *commonitorium* *P.Mert.* 1.45 r° 2 (fifth-sixth century CE). Furthermore, the passive form can convey the meaning of “to be forced,” “to be held liable” (e.g. for the payment of something), cf. *P.Neph.* 20.3–5 (fourth century CE).

¹⁶ Cf. F. Mitthof, *P.Erl.Diosp.* (p. 13, n. 62).

The relationship between the two infinitives remains unclear. One possible interpretation could be that περιέχειν refers to the content of some piece of writing, which states that something (money? taxes?) has been collected or a person has been pressed to pay something (μεθοδευθῆναι). Alternatively, μεθοδευθῆναι could be dependent on a previous verb signifying “to command,” “to order” or it could also be a separate, one-word order “(Let it) be collected/pursued/pressed” (on imperatival infinitive cf. B.G. Mandilaras, *The Verb in the Greek Non-Literary Papyri* [Athens 1973] 316–319). The trace after μεθοδευθῆναι could be the lower swirl from a large chrisim.