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WOMEN IN P.WÜRZB. 3?


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PWürzb. 3\(^1\) transmits two intercessory prayers, each consisting of a string of requests and topics prayed for. The question of who is prayed for at r.14–17 of the papyrus has generated scholarly controversy. In a contribution in the Festschrift for Ramon Roca-Puig the liturgist Klaus Gamber advanced the view that this prayer concerns females consecrated to God, virgins or widows.\(^3\) This view was met with the criticism of Pieter Sijpesteijn and Kurt Treu\(^4\) who rightly pointed out that this interpretation of the passage did not square with Wilcken’s text of ll. r.14–15 followed by Gamber:

\[
\textit{kατάρτιϲον} \textit{δὲ} \textit{ϲεαυτῷ} \textit{καὶ} \textit{τὰϲ} \textit{ψυχὰϲ} \textit{τῶ} \textit{ν} \textit{ἐ} \textit{ν} \textit{ἁγνίϲα} \textit{καὶ} \textit{παρθενίᾳ} \textit{τοῦ} \textit{λαοῦ} \textit{ϲου}, \textit{θεέ} \textit{διαμενουϲ}.
\]

As the text stands, \textit{τὰϲ} \textit{ψυχὰϲ} must be taken as the subject of the participle. “No mention whatsoever of women is made in the Würzburg papyrus”, asserted Sijpesteijn and Treu.

An inspection of the photo of the papyrus\(^6\) shows that, as already noted by Wilcken,\(^7\) there is no \textit{nomen sacrum} stroke over the invocation of God at l. r.15. While Wilcken assumed that the omission of the stroke was a scribal error, an alternative would be to assume that no abbreviation was intended and that the vocative was written out in full. Rather than the \textit{i} read by Wilcken and Hammerstaedt, what remains of the letter between \textit{e} and \textit{δ} could be a partly expunged or deformed \textit{ε}, comparable to the lower right part of the first \textit{ε} of \textit{θεράπευϲον} at the end of l. v.13. More importantly, the traces of the last letter of l. r.15, visible after the lacuna, do not appear to me to be compatible with a \textit{c}, which the scribe tends to draw out well into the left margin as the line immediately below shows (as well as l. r.20), but rather with the upper peaks of a \textit{v}.

I would then propose to restore PWürzb. 3 r.14–17 as:

\[
\textit{kατάρτιϲον} \textit{δὲ} \textit{ϲεαυτῷ} \textit{καὶ} \textit{τὰϲ} \textit{ψυχὰϲ} \textit{τῶ} \textit{ν} \textit{ἐ} \textit{ν} \textit{ἁγνίϲα} \textit{καὶ} \textit{παρθενίᾳ} \textit{τοῦ} \textit{λαοῦ} \textit{ϲου}, \textit{θεέ} \textit{διαμενουϲ}.
\]

14–15 l. \textit{ἀγνείϲ}, \textit{ἐ} [\textit{v}] \textit{ibaba[ia]} Wilcken: \textit{ε} [\textit{v}] \textit{ibaba[ia]}\([\textit{a}]\)\textit{Hammerstaedt}

16 [\textit{δ}⟨ε⟩ικ\textit{υ}ϲ\textit{πιϲτὰϲ} \textit{ἐγκρατεῖϲ} \textit{ἀμετακεινήτο};\textit{υ}ϲ\textit{βεβαί✞[α]}\textit{ἐν}\textit{τάϲ}\textit{τῇ}\textit{πίϲτε};\textit{ἐν}\textit{τάϲ}\textit{τῇ}\textit{ἀγ[α]>}

\(^1\) Thanks to the participants of the Oslo seminar in papyrology Ágnes Mihálykó, Joanne Stolk, Jens Mangerud and Carlos Hernández Garcés for their critical observations on an earlier draft of this paper.


\(^5\) Hammerstaedt’s version does not differ substantially from that of Wilcken. Transl. Hammerstaedt: “Richte für dich her auch die Seelen derjenigen aus deinem Volk, die <in> Reinheit und Jungfräulichkeit sind, Gott, welche – scil. die Seelen – für sich bleiben …”

\(^6\) See http://papyri-wuerzburg.dl.uni-leipzig.de/index.xml and Hammerstaedt, \textit{Anaphorenfragmente}, Taf. VIII–IX.

\(^7\) Wilcken, \textit{Mitteilungen}, 35 ad l. 15.
“Perfect/Confirm8 in you(rself), God, also the souls of those (females) of your people who persevere in chastity and virginity, proving(?) them faithful, self-controlled, unmoved, steady in this faith, in this love(?) . . .”

This restoration has the advantage of enabling us to dispense with the construction of μένῳ with the bare adverb ἤδη, which is unattested in Greek.9 The noun τῆς ψυχῆς would in this reading govern the adjectival participle in genitive plural feminine (τῶν διαμενοντῶν) which is in turn complemented by the prepositional phrase with ἐν + dative, a usual syntax for this verb. Despite Gambier’s “many problematic assumptions”10 about this papyrus, the text may be aligned with the interpretation that the persons prayed for in these lines are female dedicatees to God.11

What distinguishes the prayer inPWürzb. 3 r.14–17 is that the female identity of the chaste individuals prayed for is dramatically explicit. The intercessory prayer for the bishop and the church (no. 25) in the euchologium of Sarapion of Thmuis does not expressly name the group of Christian believers whose cause is being presented,12 while in the thanksgiving prayers in the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom13 it is possible to discern the particular group of practising sexual abstinence, constituting a parallel of sorts to the proposed perpetual almsgiving of the proposed διαμενοντῶν inPWürzb. 3r.15.

The latter construction occurs also with the genitive plural feminine (τῶν διαγόντων) which is in turn complemented by the prepositional phrase with ἐν + dative (e.g. τῶν μοναζόντων καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν παρθένους);14 however, the gender of individuals practising sexual abstinence is masculine or grammatically non-transparent is also the intercession in the Liturgy of St. Gregory 89–90 and in the White Monastery euchologium in fol. 42.4–14, esp. 8–9.

The status of this group of Christian believers developed towards greater institutionalisation starting from the third/fourth century; see Roger Gryson, Le ministère des femmes dans l’égise ancienne (Gembloux, 1972) 101–4; Susanna Elm, The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis. A Literary, Liturgical, and Theological Analysis, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 249 (Rome, 1995) 76.


9 μένῳ is combined either with adverbial dative (e.g. ἐκοινωνίας καὶ σόφιας μένῳ Bas. Reg. Br., answer to question no. 303 = PG XXXI 1297A) or with prepositional ἐν + dative (e.g. μείναντες ἐν τῇ παρθενίᾳ, said of the Apostles in Epiph. Pan. haer. 58, 3, 6 = GCS 31, 361.11 Holl/Dummer). The latter construction occurs also with ἀριθμός as adjectival modifier (e.g. ἀλλὰ ἐξενεχθαὶ ἐν τῇ ἅγια πρεσβυτρία φίλοις, said of Jesus in Epiph. Pan. haer. 77, 26, 1 = GCS 37, 438.29 Holl).


15 In this prayer a verb with διά as its first compound serves to express the perseverance anticipated of those pledged to abstinence, constituting a parallel of sorts to the proposed διαμενοντῶν inPWürzb. 3r.15.

16 Apost.Const. VIII, 12, 44 (292) and VIII, 15, 19–20 = SC 336, 202 and 212 Metzger.


19 Ernst Hammerschmidt, Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora. Syrische und griechische Einflüsse auf eine ägyptische Liturgie (Berlin, 1957) 42 and 46.
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20 Εμμανουήλ Λαν, Λάτι ἑυχολογός τοῦ μοναστηρίου Μεγάλου, Πατρολογία Οραντικίας 28.2 (Παρίσι, 1958) 298–9, 300–1
and 322–3.