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**Reconsidering the Dates of Three Christian Letters:
P.Oxy. XVIII 2193, 2194, P.Köln IV 200 and a Reference in the
*Historia monachorum in Aegypto***

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P.Oxy. XVIII 2193, 2194 and P.Köln IV 200 represent three rather extraordinary Christian letters of the Byzantine period.¹ Not only are they all written by the same person, a certain individual bearing the name Theon, these letters are also particularly noteworthy since they represent bilingual letters.² While the body of each letter is written in Greek the valediction is written in Latin, and in the case of P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 they also contain a Latin preface. When P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 were published, it was argued by the editor, based on a paleographical assessment of the Latin text, that they likely dated to either the late fifth or early sixth century.³ Consequently, when P.Köln 200 was later published and it was discovered that it was also written by the author of the previous two letters it was accordingly dated to the same period.⁴ However, there are a couple of reasons for reconsidering the current dating of these three letters in favour of an earlier date of the late fourth or early fifth century.

¹ These letters have been republished as follows. P.Oxy. XVIII 2193 = J. O'Callaghan, *Cartas cristianas griegas del siglo V* no. 53; ChLA XLVIII 1410; CEL I 243; CPL 270. P.Oxy. XVIII 2194 = O'Callaghan, *Cartas cristianas* no. 54; R. Seider, *Paläographie der lateinischen Papyri* II.1 (Stuttgart 1972), no. 59; ChLA XLVIII 1411; CEL I 244; CPL 271. P.Köln IV 200 = ChLA XLVII 1455; CEL 244bis. Photographic plate of P.Oxy. XVIII 2193 may be seen in ChLA XLVII, p. 23. Plate for P.Oxy. XVIII 2194 can be seen in R. Seider, *Paläographie der lateinischen Papyri*. II.1 59a and b; ChLA XLVII, p. 25; CLA Suppl., No. 1738. Plate for P.Köln IV 200 may be seen in P.Köln IV plate XXVII a; ChLA XLVII, p. 23. Digital images of all the texts may also be viewed by accessing them through the *Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*: <www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gv0/gvz.html>.

² Only P.Köln 200 does not contain the name of the sender since only the latter part of this letter is extant. Nevertheless, the hand that wrote this letter is identical to P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 and it contains the same unusual Latin valediction that is otherwise unattested outside of these three letters. On the various interpretations of the somewhat enigmatic Latin closing in these letters see P.J. Sijpesteijn, "Apphus and Pascentius: *servi dei tempore*," *APF* 40 (1994) 69–70.

³ The editor noted (P.Oxy. XVIII p. 153), "The Latin text is written in a square and heavy cursive, probably of the late fifth or early sixth century."

⁴ P.Köln IV p. 212.

Since the publication of P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 the latter text has been the subject of two independent paleographical studies, both of which have favoured an earlier date than was suggested in the *ed. pr.* In A.E. Lowe's examination he observed that while the writing of this letter did not fit into any definite category it was written with an early half-uncial script that was common in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵ R. Seider's later paleographical evaluation of the Latin section of the same letter reached similar conclusions as he argued that the Latin had certain features that were most common in the fourth century.⁶ In addition to these two paleographic reassessments there appears to be a prosopographical reason for re-dating these letters to an earlier period. As noted earlier the writer of all three letters was an individual by the name of Theon.⁷ While Theon was a rather common name, a theophoric one derived from the abstract noun for "God" (θεός), based on two particular features that the letters reveal about their author it may be possible to identify him with another person bearing the name Theon who is featured in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*. Thus, if such identification can be made, it would thereby provide a more precise date for the composition of the letters to the late fourth or early fifth century.

First, since the letters reveal that the Theon who sent them was especially well versed in the scriptures it may safely be assumed that he was an ecclesiastical figure of some sort, either a member of the clergy or perhaps a monk.⁸ Not only does he preface P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 with what appears to be a Latin remi-

⁵ E.A. Lowe, *CLA Suppl.* (Oxford 1971), no. 1738. Lowe also noted that the closest parallel to the Latin of P.Oxy. 2194 could be found in no. 1782 (Barcelona, Fundació Sant LLuc Evangelista Pap. Barc.) that was dated to the later half of the fourth century. Lowe consequently dated the letter to the fifth century.

⁶ R. Seider, *Paläographie der lateinischen Papyri*, II.1, no. 59. Seider dated the letter to the fourth or fifth century.

⁷ Besides the name of the sender only three other names appear in these letters. Both P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 are addressed to an individual bearing the name Pascentius (Πασκέντιος). The name is clearly of Latin origin and interestingly it is not attested in any other papyrus outside of these two letters. In P.Oxy. 2194 a veteran named Paul (I. 7 διὸ Παῦλος ὁ οὐδρανὸς) is mentioned in the body of the letter. With the rapid Christianization of Egypt at the beginning of the fourth century Paul became a very common name (Dionysius *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.14; R.S. Bagnall, "Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change in Early Byzantine Egypt", *BASP* 19 (1982) 110–11). In P.Köln 200 the recipient is named Aphous, on the possible identification of this individual see note 15.

⁸ Theon's extended knowledge and proficient use of the scriptures has led numerous commentators to the same conclusion: P.Oxy. XVIII p. 153; P.Köln IV p. 213–14; ChLA XVIII 1410. Besides the three letters of Theon only two other letters provenanced to Oxyrhynchus contain such explicit citations of scriptural passages, P.Lond. VI 1927 (IV) (Eph 5:23) and P.Oxy. XVI 1874 (VI) (LXX Job 1:21). In both of these cases arguments have also been made that the respective writers were ecclesiastical figures. See A. Papaconstantinou, "Sur les évêques Byzantins d'Oxyrhynchus," *ZPE* 111 (1996) 172; J. Chapa, *Letters of Condolence in Greek Papyri* (Pap. Flor. XXIX, Firenze 1998), 150; St. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, Teil I (Wiesbaden 1984), 285.

niscence of Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24,⁹ in the body of each letter he aptly works in a scriptural citation from three different passages. In P.Oxy. 2193 he cites the first part of LXX Job 26:19 to buttress a request that the recipient hear a petition of a certain old woman and similarly in P.Oxy. 2194 he cites LXX Sirach 12:2 to reinforce a request that the recipient take care to ensure that no one trouble a certain veteran. Also, in P.Köln 200 he cites the first half of LXX Genesis 46:16, to lend comfort to the recipient and assure him of divine protection in his present troubles.¹⁰ Second, it must be noted that Theon's use of Greek and Latin in these letters is very unusual and suggests that at the very least he was bilingual. A survey of the letters provenanced to Oxyrhynchus reveals that bilingual letters (Greek/Latin) are on the whole very rare; besides the present three letters they number less than ten.¹¹ Interestingly, a survey of these letters reveals that all of them are official letters, which makes the letters of Theon all the more unique since they represent personal correspondence and are otherwise unattested. Consequently, based on Theon's use of Latin as well as his intimate knowledge of the scriptures it would appear that Theon was a noted bilingual ecclesiastic.

Turning to the *Historia monachorum*, which dates to c. A.D. 400,¹² in the Sixth Chapter it contains an interesting reference to a "holy man" (ἅγιος ἄνθρωπος) by the

⁹ Concerning the Latin preface the editor of P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 noted (p. 153), "This passage seems reminiscent of Wisdom ii. 22–23 ... If the writer had this passage in mind it is clear that the version known (however imperfectly) to him was not the Vulgate, ..." Owing to some of the differences between the preface and the text of Wisdom 2:23–24, as well as certain emendations made by the editor in order to make the Wisdom text the probable locus of the preface, P. van Minnen has recently argued that perhaps the Latin preface is not reminiscent of Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24 but simply a reference to some common expression concerning mortality. See P. van Minnen, "Notes on Texts from Graeco-Roman Egypt," *ZPE* 96 (1993) 120.

¹⁰ On the use of scripture in private letters see M. Choat, "Echo and Quotation of the New Testament in Papyrus Letters to the End of the Fourth Century," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, ed. Th.J. Kraus and N. Tobias (Leiden 2006), 267–92; M. Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth Century Papyri. Studia Antiqua Australiensia I* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 74–83; *NewDocs* 2.154–59; B.F. Harris, "Biblical Echoes and Reminiscences in Christian Papyri," in *Proceedings of the XIV Intern. Congress of Papyrologists*, ed. P.J. Parsons, J.R. Rea, and E.G. Turner (London 1975), 155–60; G. Tibiletti, *Le lettere private nei papiri greci del III e IV secolo d.C.: Tra paganesimo e cristianesimo* (Milano 1979), 115–16; M. Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto: lettere private nei papiri dei secoli II–IV*, Firenze 1968 (repr. Firenze 1998), 54–55.

¹¹ P.Oxy. XLIII 3129 (= *ChLA* XLVII 1419; *CEL* 224bis1) (A.D. 335); P.Oxy. LV 3793 (= *ChLA* XLVII 1426; *CEL* I 225bis) (A.D. 340); P.Oxy. LV 3794 (= *ChLA* XLVII 1427; *CEL* I 225ter) (A.D. 340); P.Oxy. L 3579 (= *ChLA* XLVII 1422; *CEL* 225quinquies) (A.D. 341–43); P.Oxy. L 3577 (= *ChLA* XLVII 1421; *CEL* 225quater) (A.D. 342); P.Oxy. LXIII 4369 (= *ChLA* IV 255; *CPL Ann.* 9) (A.D. 345); P.Oxy. VIII 1106 (*ChLA* IV 237) (A.D. VI); *ChLA* V 291 (= *SB XVI* 12990) (A.D. VI). On the general increase of bilingual texts (Greek/Latin) after Diocletian see R. Criboire, "Higher Education in Early Byzantine Egypt: Rhetoric, Latin, and the Law," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. R.S. Bagnall (Cambridge 2007), 58. On the presence of Latin documentary texts at Oxyrhynchus see D. Thomas, "Latin Texts and Roman Citizens," in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, ed. A.K. Bowman, et al. (London 2007), 239–43.

¹² On the date of this text see N. Russel, ed. and trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (London 1981), 6–10.

name of Theon who lived just outside the city of Oxyrhynchus.¹³ Following a brief description that includes some details concerning his ascetic lifestyle the writer relates the following:

πεπαίδευτο δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ τριπλῆ τῶν διαλέξεων χάριτι ἔν τε Ἑλληνικοῖς καὶ Ῥωμαϊκοῖς καὶ Αἰγυπτιακοῖς ἀναγνώσμασιν, καθὼς καὶ παρὰ πολλῶν καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου ἐμάθομεν. ἐπιγνούς γὰρ ἡμᾶς ξένους ὄντας γράψας ἐν πινακιδίῳ τῷ θεῷ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἠὲ χαρίστησεν.

By grace the man [Theon] had been educated in three languages, being able to read Greek, Latin and Coptic, as many told us and as we discovered from the father himself. For knowing that we were strangers, he wrote on a slate, giving thanks to God for us.

Bearing in mind the observations derived from P.Oxy. 2193–2194 and P.Köln 200, it may be wondered whether the reference in the *Historia monachorum* to another ecclesiastic bearing the same name in the same geographic region at roughly the same time and with the same unusual language skills is merely a coincidence.¹⁴ Though such a coincidence cannot be completely ruled out, in light of the foregoing similarities as well as the fact that this is the only time the writer of the *Historia monachorum* specifically points out such a linguistic attainment it is extremely unlikely. Therefore, even though this evidence is circumstantial, there are enough points of convergence to make a plausible argument that the Theon who sent P.Oxy. 2193, 2194 and P.Köln 200 may probably be identified with the Theon who is described in the Sixth Chapter of the *Historia*

¹³ That Theon lived just outside of the city is made clear in *Hist. mon.* 6.1: “And we saw another [holy man] not far from the city [Oxyrhynchus] in the desert” (εἶδομεν δὲ καὶ ἄλλον οὐ μακρὰν τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ τὴν ἔρημον). In the previous chapter (Chp. 5) the focus was on the City of Oxyrhynchus. Greek Text taken from A.-J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto: Édition critique du texte grec et traduction annotée par André-Jean Festugière* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1971). Outside of this account nothing else is known about this Theon. See Russel, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 130.

¹⁴ While P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194 were both found at Oxyrhynchus and it is also very likely that P.Köln 200 is also provenanced to the city the location from which they were sent is unknown. Nevertheless, R. Alston’s work on evidence of lines of communication between the city and other locations shows that most correspondence found at Oxyrhynchus originated within the nome. See R. Alston, “Trade and the City in Roman Egypt,” in *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City*, ed. H. Parkins and C.J. Smith (London and New York 1999), 183–92. Likewise, the second chapter of my forthcoming dissertation (*Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus*, University of Toronto, 2009) has shown that in the case of letters provenanced to Oxyrhynchus and sent by Christians the far greater majority, well over 80%, originated within the nome. While this does not prove that P.Oxy. 2193–2194 and P.Köln 200 originated just outside of Oxyrhynchus where the Theon mentioned in the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* resided, in the absence of any specific places mentioned in these letters it certainly increases the probability that these letters originated somewhere within the general vicinity of the city or the nome.

monachorum.¹⁵ Accordingly, this group of letters surely dates to the end of fourth/beginning of the fifth century when he was known to have lived.

¹⁵ Provided the foregoing analysis is correct there is a remote possibility that the recipient of P.Köln 200, a certain Aphous, could be identified with the famous monk bishop of Oxyrhynchus at the end of the fourth/beginning of fifth century who also bore this name. On the dates of his episcopate see A. Papaconstantinou, "Sur les évêques Byzantins d'Oxyrhynchus," 173; K.A. Worp, "A Checklist of Byzantine Bishops," *ZPE* 100 (1994) 304. According to a single Coptic manuscript that preserves a hagiographical account of his life it reports that he was a monk and was reluctantly ordained bishop of Oxyrhynchus by the patriarch Theophilus. On the weekends he would go to Oxyrhynchus to hold services and administer to his congregations but during the week he would return to a monastery outside of the city to dwell. On his life see F. Rossi, *I papiri copti del Museo Egizio di Torino, Trascritti e Tradotti, vol I* (Torino 1887), 5–22, 83–88; *Apophthegmata patrum*, PG 65 col. 133.