

ZEITSCHRIFT
FÜR
PAPYROLOGIE UND EPIGRAPHIK

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P.VINDOB. G 42417 (= P¹¹⁶)

Codex Fragment of the Epistle to the Hebrews 2:9–11 and 3:3–6 Reconsidered

Nearly a decade ago P.Vindob. G 42417 (= P¹¹⁶), a small rectangular papyrus fragment containing portions of Hebrews 2:9–11 on the recto and 3:3–6 on the verso, was published.¹ Since it first appeared in an online journal and was initially accorded a date of the sixth or seventh century this fragment has not received much attention.² However, there are compelling reasons to believe that the paleographic assessments rendered in the *ed. pr.* and in a subsequent reedition of the fragment, both of which were done by Amphilochos Papatomas, are inaccurate and that the actual date of the fragment is somewhat earlier than the dates given in these editions.

In the *ed. pr.*³ Papatomas stated, “The fragment can be safely dated by applying paleographical criteria. In fact, even though several characteristics of the elegant script point to an early dating, the drawing of specific letters such as ε and μ allows us to date the papyrus to the sixth or seventh century.”⁴ Papatomas’ comments here are curious for a couple of reasons. First, given the small size of the fragment it may be wondered just how “safely” it can be dated as the text represents a very limited sample of letterforms; and second, as there is only one μ (l. 14) that appears in the entire fragment, how much weight should be placed on it for securely establishing a date given that it displays no distinct characteristics indicative of any one particular period.

In the footnote accompanying this paleographic claim Papatomas cites two principal texts that ostensibly share a similar script and establish a sixth or seventh century date for the fragment, P.Berol. 3605 and Pap. Heid. 1.1.⁵ However, a close look at these two exemplars reveals that their script has little in common with the script of P.Vindob. G 42417 outside of some superficial similarities that are attested in multiple periods. The hand of P.Berol. 3605, a parchment codex fragment containing 1 Tim 1:4–5, 6–7 (AD VI/VII), is quite different.⁶ While Papatomas describes the hand in P.Vindob. G 42417 as “elegant”, the hand of P.Berol. 3605 has been described by Raffaella Cribiore as “‘evolving’, uneven with varying letter size”.⁷ Surprisingly, in light of Papatomas’ explicit remark that the drawing of the μ in P.Vindob. G 42417 is characteristic of the sixth or seventh century, in P.Berol. 3605 the form of the μ is written very differently. Whereas in P.Vindob. G 42417 it is written with four straight strokes in P.Berol. 3605 it is written cursively without any straight bars.⁸ As for the forms of the epsilon found in both documents, while epsilon ligature

¹ Amphilochos Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews, *JGRChJ* (= *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*) 1 (2000) 18–24.

² Notwithstanding, of course, the interest this fragment briefly garnered as a result of an article by Karl Jaroš, Ein neues Fragment des Hebräerbriefes, *Antike Welt* 32 (2001) 271–73. On this article see n. 13 below. There is nothing especially noteworthy about this fragment except perhaps that it contains an unusual rendering, potentially even a textual variant, at Heb 3:4. See Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews, 19–20.

³ Nothing is known about the provenance of this fragment or even when it was acquired by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. Consequently, the date of this fragment is solely based on paleographic considerations.

⁴ Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews, 20. Unfortunately Papatomas does not elaborate on what specific aspects of the letters ε and μ display traits that are characteristic of the six or seventh centuries.

⁵ Though he also cites a third text, CPR VII 27 (Beeinträchtigung der Rechte eines Klosters) (VI–VII), he merely states at the end of the footnote that it contains scripts that are characteristic of the period and that share some similarities to the present fragment.

⁶ P.Berol. 3605 first published in Kurt Treu, Neue neutestamentliche Fragmente der Berliner Papyrussammlung, *APF* 18 (1966) 36. A picture of this fragment can be seen in Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, 1996), pl. 80.

⁷ Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews, 20; Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 283.

⁸ In P.Berol. 3605 μ appears in ll. 1, 2, 13 and 14. Its form is rather indicative of the paleographic example given for the year A.D. 585 (perhaps even c. A.D. 346) in P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer*² (Leiden, 1994), 61.

is present in P.Berol. 3605 (ll. 11, 13) but not in P.Vindob. G 42417, the forms are similar enough as both employ lunate or oval shaped epsilon with rather long protruding crossbars. However, this letterform is not distinct to the sixth or seventh century and may be found in earlier periods.⁹

Turning to Pap. Heid. 1.1, a codex containing sections from the Minor Prophets, for paleographic comparison, it may be observed that the scripts contained in these two documents may be noted more for their dissimilarities than similarities.¹⁰ The hand of Pap. Heid. 1.1 is of a more professional character than what is found in P.Vindob. G 42417 as it is more regular and the letters are consistently written with more detail. In Pap. Heid. 1.1 the writer of this codex regularly employs distinct roundels on the cross bar of the T, and sometimes on the Y, which is a characteristic feature of texts from the fifth and subsequent centuries.¹¹ However, turning to P.Vindob. G 42417 none of the completely visible taus (ll. 4, 6, 9–12), nor any of the upsila (ll. 5, 12, 13), bear such decorative features. Looking at the forms of the epsilon and mu that appear in Pap. Heid. 1.1, while the epsilon share the same general features already noted, the mu are written in a completely different fashion, similar to the style found in P.Berol. 3605. Therefore, a date of the sixth or seventh century for P.Vindob. G 42417 based solely on alleged paleographic similarities to P.Berol. 3605 and Pap. Heid. 1.1 is rather tenuous.¹²

More recently,¹³ Papatomas has produced a reedition of this papyrus.¹⁴ While little has changed in the reedition, the introduction is remarkably similar to the one that appeared in the *ed. pr.* and the transcription is left untouched, about the only noticeable difference is that the paleographic date has been revised. Instead of dating the text “safely” to the sixth or seventh centuries it is now dated earlier: “This fragment can be dated by applying paleographical criteria. In fact, even though several characteristics of the elegant script point to an early dating, the paleographical parallels allow us to date the papyrus to the fifth or possibly even to the sixth century.”¹⁵ Examining the footnote for this claim it is interesting to note that Pap-

⁹ P. Yale I p. 4, where a cursory description of the different characteristics of handwriting in the Augustan period is given.

¹⁰ Pap. Heid. 1.1 (= *Die Septuaginta-Papyri*, ed. A. Deissmann. Heidelberg 1905). Digital images of this codex may be viewed at http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gv0/Papyri/VHP_I/001/VHP_I_1.html.

¹¹ G. Cavallo and H. Maehler, *Greek Bookhands of the Early Byzantine Period* (London 1987), 44, who specifically note that “decorative roundels” are indicative of this period of writing.

¹² Papatomas (p. 19) also reconstructs the size of the codex to which this fragment belonged and estimated that it was about 18 x 25 cm (W. x H.). In the accompanying footnote (n. 6) he points out that the reconstructed format roughly corresponded to the codices belonging to Group 5 (18 x 30 cm) of Turner’s codicological typologies (*The Typology of the Early Codex*, pp. 16–17). He then goes on to state that this size “is a perfectly normal size for the papyrus codices of the time”. Based on the paleographic date assigned the fragment the implication here seems to be that the date of the fragment (i.e. AD VI/VII) is reinforced by the size of the codex. However, in Turner’s Group 5 there are also a number of codices that date much earlier (AD III/IV). Therefore, the size of the codex to which this fragment belonged cannot be used to establish, or necessarily even support, a late date.

¹³ Shortly after the publication of the *ed. pr.* a popular article with sensational claims was published the same year by Karl Jaroš, in which he argued that the fragment (P.Vindob. G 42417) belonged to the late second or early third century. However, his argument was not based on paleographic grounds but primarily on two features of the papyrus that he believed pointed to a very early date. First, he argued that the present fragment was early since the form of the *nomen sacrum* that appeared in l. 1 (ⲓⲛⲧ) was peculiar and is generally attested in earlier manuscripts. Second, he argued that since the writer of the fragment spelled ⲩⲓⲟⲥ (i.e. Jesus) in l. 13 without employing a *nomen sacrum* he must have believed that Jesus was different from the divine *Logos*, a belief which (according to Jaroš) was apparently a part of the “dogmatische Kontroversen” that occurred in Alexandria at the end of the second century or beginning of the third century (p. 273). Given the tenuous nature of these arguments it is not surprising that there has been widespread rejection of Jaroš’ claims about the papyrus. The following year Hans Förster wrote a telling critique of Jaroš’ article largely refuting it (*Heilige Namen in Heiligen Texten, Antike Welt* 33 (2002) 321–24). Förster was especially critical of Jaroš’ lack of a paleographic assessment since such an assessment (according to Förster) would have to be integral to any attempt to redate the fragment to an earlier period (pp. 322, 324). For his part, Förster never offered any detailed paleographic assessment of the fragment but simply referred to the date given in the *ed. pr.* Somewhat ironically Jaroš even admitted in his article that he did not deal much with the paleography of the fragment since it would have prolonged the article (p. 273 n. 13).

¹⁴ Amphilochios Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews (2.9–11 and 3.3–6), *Tyche* 16 (2001) 107–110 (plate 6). Most recently it has been republished in *MPER N.S.* 29 (2008) 21 (transcription and image only).

¹⁵ Papatomas, A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews, 109.

athomas no longer cites P.Berol. 3605 as a potential “paleographical parallel” and effectively discards the parallel to Pap. Heid. 1.1.¹⁶

To establish a fifth or sixth century date for the fragment he now invokes P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 (= P¹¹²) a fragment that contains Acts 26:31–32 and 27:6–7 and is dated to the fifth century.¹⁷ However, once again there are some distinct differences between the scripts that are used in these two fragments. It may be noted that the lone T (l. 10) as well as the lone Γ (l. 12) in P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 contain distinct roundels on their crossbars, a distinct feature of fifth century bookhands but one that does not appear in the script of P.Vindob. G 42417.¹⁸ Likewise, in P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 the letters M, N, and H, are generally written with broad vertical strokes and conspicuously thinner horizontal and diagonal strokes, another feature of fifth century hands that is not evident in P.Vindob. G 42417.¹⁹ Furthermore, the alphas (ll. 4, 7, 9–11, 14) are written with two distinct strokes in P.Oxy. LXVI 4496, whereas in P.Vindob. G 42417 the alphas (ll. 4, 9, 10) are all written with a single stroke, and in the former the epsila (ll. 3–5, 9, 12) generally have finials on their crossbars while in the latter none have finials on their crossbars. Once again, the paleographic parallel adduced for P.Vindob. G 42417 by Papathomas is somewhat curious given the notable differences in the scripts.

Interestingly, in both editions of P.Vindob. G 42417 Papathomas acknowledges that the script displays paleographic characteristics that would suggest an early date and even cites P. Bodmer II (P⁶⁶) and P.Beatty 7 as potential exemplars even though he effectively dismisses these comparisons based on the dates he assigns the fragment.²⁰ While the hand of P.Beatty 7, a second or early third century codex that contains portions of LXX Ezekiel, Daniel, Bel and the Dragon, Susanna and Esther,²¹ is generally more elegant and regular than the hand that appears in P.Vindob. G 42417, there also exist some similarities between the two. The stroke thickness of the letters is roughly commensurate and both texts lack decorative roundels and finials.²² Furthermore, the epsila, upsila, and deltas are written in roughly the same fashion.²³ On the other hand, certain letters such as alpha, mu, and pi, are written differently in the two documents.²⁴ Therefore, while P.Vindob. G 42417 does share some distinct paleographic resemblances with P.Beatty 7 it is difficult to state with a strong degree of certainty that the hand of P.Vindob. G 42417 is so close to the hand of P.Beatty 7 that they should be regarded as temporally proximate to one another.

P. Bodmer II (P⁶⁶), the famous codex containing large sections from the Gospel of John,²⁵ was dated by Turner to the first half of the third century (c. AD 200–250).²⁶ His paleographic reasons for this dating rested on the following criteria: the use of the broad delta; the broad theta; the narrow alpha written with a single stroke; and the finial end on the crossbar of the epsila. Interestingly, some of these distinct character-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109 n. 12, where he notes, “Although a dating of our text to the seventh cent. could be considered on the basis of A. Deissmann, *Die Septuaginta-Papyri und andere altchristliche Texte* (Pap. Heid. 1), . . . , it seems to be less likely.”

¹⁷ P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 may be viewed at <http://www.csad.ox.ac.uk/POxy/papyri/vol66/pages/4496.htm>. More recently, this text has been dated to the later part of the fifth century (c. AD 450–499). See P. Orsini, *Manoscritti in maiuscola biblica. Materiali per un aggiornamento* (Cassino, 2005), 113–14.

¹⁸ Cavallo and Maehler, *Greek Bookhands*, 44.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁰ Unfortunately, in the footnote citing these texts Papathomas never specifies what particular paleographic characteristics these texts shared with P.Vindob. G 42417.

²¹ On this date see the *LDAB*. Digital images of sections of this codex may be accessed and viewed online at <http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/NRWakademie/papyrologie/PTheol1.html>.

²² However, it may be noted that the bottoms of the vertical bar on the rhos in P.Beatty 7 tend to have an upward curl. In P.Vindob. G 42417 one rho (l. 6) has this distinct bottom curl while the other (l. 12) does not.

²³ The deltas are generally broad, so too are the upsila which are written with a single stroke, and the epsilons are lunate with a protruding crossbar.

²⁴ In P.Beatty 7 alphas are written with two distinct strokes and pis with a single stroke (rounder at the top) whereas in P.Vindob. G 42417 pis are written with three distinct strokes (ll. 4, 11, 13) and alphas with a single stroke.

²⁵ John 1:1–6:11; 6:35–14:26, 29–30; 15:2–26; 16:2–4, 6–7; 16:10–20:20, 22–23; 20:25–21:9, 12, 17. This codex does not contain the pericope of the adulteress (7:53–8:11).

²⁶ Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*² (London, 1987), 108 no. 63.

istics can be seen in the present fragment. Though there are no thetas in the extant portions of text there are three broad deltas (ll. 1, 4, 5).²⁷ Similarly, all the visible alphas in the text are written with a single stroke (ll. 4, 9, 10) and the epsila of both texts are remarkably similar as they are lunate with a long protruding crossbar.²⁸ Additionally, the upsila (ll. 12, 14) are written with a single stroke and are rather broad, similar to how they are written in P. Bodmer II. Therefore, even if there are some differences between the way certain letters such as M or K are written in the respective texts,²⁹ there are some compelling paleographic similarities – certainly more than exist between P.Oxy. LXVI 4496 and P.Vindob. G 42417 – that would otherwise suggest that potentially P.Vindob. G 42417 is temporally near to P. Bodmer II.

When the publication of P.Vindob. G 42417 was briefly noted in the annual catalogue of published Christian documents in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*, the compiler of the list, Cornelia Römer, briefly remarked that notwithstanding the date given by the editor it seemed to her that the fragment was considerably earlier.³⁰ She then pointed out, without rendering any paleographic details, that it shared certain characteristics with P.Oxy. IV 656 that is dated to the third century.³¹ The hand of P.Oxy. IV 656, a codex that contains sections of Genesis ((a)14:21–23; 15:5–9; (b) 19:32–20:2; 20:2–11; (c) 24:28–37; 24:38–47; (d) 27:32–33; 27:40–41), does share a number of parallels with P.Vindob. G 42417: broad deltas; single stroke upsila; three stroke pis; broad kappas written (periodically) with two strokes (single vertical stroke and intersecting lunate stroke); and lunate epsila with protruding crossbar. However, there are also some distinct differences as the alphas are usually written with two strokes, although occasionally with a single stroke, mus are more cursive, and ligature is common. Nevertheless, on the whole the comparison is an appropriate one.

In light of the foregoing evidence it would appear that P.Vindob. G 42417 is somewhat earlier than the dates accorded the fragment in its various editions by Papatomas and propagated in contemporary scholarship.³² Even though it is a small fragment and there are always additional dangers in any attempt to establish dates for such fragments since they offer little text to compare with other documents, there are enough points of convergence with the script found in P.Vindob. G 42417 and other texts dated to the third century to make a case that it dates to this century. In fact, in light of the evidence currently marshaled in support of the present date for this fragment it seems that a third century date should be preferred until such time that more compelling parallels may be cited from the fifth, sixth, or even seventh century.

If a third century date appears too extreme, a difference of some three or four hundred years from the one appearing in the *ed. pr.*, it may be pointed out that such drastic redatings are not without precedent. When PSI I 1 (= \mathfrak{P}^{35}) was first published, a fragment containing Matt 25:12–15 and 20–23, the editor

²⁷ In l. 4 the delta is not entirely visible but only its lower horizontal bar can be seen.

²⁸ While Turner noted that the epsila of P. Bodmer II were written with finials at the end of the cross-bar, this only occurs very rarely and in fact it appears that these were not deliberate as they were the result of a stop that created a blob of ink. See Comfort and David P. Barrett (eds.), *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: A Corrected, Enlarged Edition of the Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Wheaton, Ill.), 377. It may also be noted that in P. Bodmer II the cross bar of the epsila often form a ligature with preceding letters whereas this is not the case in P.Vindob. G 42417.

²⁹ In P. Bodmer II. the mus are written more cursorily with flowing strokes whereas in P.Vindob. G 42417 the sole Mu is written with 4 distinct strokes. Likewise, the kappas in P. Bodmer II are generally written with three strokes whereas in P.Vindob. G 42417 they are written with two.

³⁰ Cornelia Römer, *Christliche Texte V: 2000–2001*, *APF* 47 (2001) 369, who states, “. . . die vom Herausgeber vorgeschlagene Datierung (6.–7. Jh.) ist sicher zu spät, die angeführten Parallelen überzeugen nicht.”

³¹ While Römer also mentions P.Ryl. 5 (= \mathfrak{P}^{32}) (Titus 1:11–15; 2:3–8) she is clearly dependent on A. S. Hunt for this observation since he was the first to point out that P.Ryl. 5 was from the third century because it contained similarities to P.Oxy. IV 656. See A. S. Hunt, *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library* (Manchester, 1911–) 1.10–11. Commenting on P.Oxy. IV 656 Hunt noted (P.Oxy. IV p. 28–29): “The MS was carefully written in round upright uncials of good size and decidedly early appearance, having in some respects more affinity with types of the second century than of the third. To the latter, however, the hand is in all probability to be assigned, though we should be inclined to place it in the earlier rather than the later part of the century . . .”

³² Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, 2009), 39–40, still cites the date given in the *ed. pr.* and seemingly defends it. A sixth century date for this fragment is currently given in the LDAB and in the electronic catalogue of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek the date given is the fifth or sixth century.

assigned it on paleographic grounds to the seventh century. However Colin Roberts and T. C. Skeat judged it to be of the third century.³³ Similarly, when P.Baden IV 57 (= P⁴⁰) (Rom 1:24–17; 1:31–2:3; 3:21–4:8; 6:2–5, 15–16; 9:17, 27) was published it was initially dated to the fifth or sixth century.³⁴ More recently, it too has been redated to the third century.³⁵ Furthermore, there is nothing about the date proposed here that is particularly extreme or unwarranted as there are currently a significant number of Christian literary papyri that securely date to the third century.

The Diplomatic Transcription given in the *ed. pr.* has simply been reproduced:

Recto		Verso	
Heb 2:9	-----	Heb 3:3	-----
	1]ιην δια[8]υ οικο[
	2]η εστε[3:4	9]ος κατ[
	3]ντος γε[10]ς κατ[
2:10	4]ω δι ον τα π[3:5	11]πιστος εγ[
	5]ους εις δο[12]αρτυριον τ[
	6]σωτηριας[3:6	13]ς υιος επι τ[
2:11	7]ε γαρ[14]ν ημει[
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³³ The opinion of Roberts and Skeat is cited in Kurt Aland, *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (Berlin, 1967), 105 n. 5; cf. Comfort and Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, 138. However, Eric Turner judged it to be of the third or fourth century (*Typology of the Early Codex*, 147) and Cavallo and Maehler (*Greek Bookhands*, 22 no. 8d) have suggested a date of the fifth or sixth century.

³⁴ Friedrich Bilabel, *Römerbrieffragmente*, *BVP* 4 (1924) 28–31, 124–27 (P.Baden IV 57). Image of the text may be viewed online at http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gv0/Papyri/VBP_IV/057/VBP_IV_57.html.

³⁵ Orsini, *Manoscritti in maiuscola biblica*, 44.