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PSI 4.311: Early Evidence for “Arianism” at Oxyrhynchus?¹

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Abstract

Re-edition of *PSI* 4.311, a letter with instructions for the delivery of a “letter of peace” destined for Theodotus, the (Arian) bishop of Syrian Laodicea, to an intermediary who will take it to Theodotus. Theodotus will then forward the matters that the “letter of peace” speaks of to yet another person.

Although *PSI* 4.311, a fragmentary letter that dates to the first half of the fourth century, was published nearly a century ago and has been the subject of multiple re-editions, its significance for the study of ancient Christianity at Oxyrhynchus has not been fully realized.² While most treatments of this letter tend to agree that its only significance resides in the fact that it contains instructions for a letter (no longer extant) to be delivered to the well-known bishop Theodotus of Laodicea (Syrian), no attempt has been made to spell out the

¹ I would like to thank Richard E. Bennett for reading a draft of this paper as well as the anonymous reviewers whose insightful feedback has considerably improved the quality of this article. Lastly, I would like to thank the editorial board at *BASP* for accepting this article. For all dates appearing in this article an AD date is to be assumed unless otherwise noted.

² Following its publication as *PSI* 4.311 in 1917 by Giorgio Pasquali it was republished in G. Ghedini, *Lettere cristiane: dai papiri greci del III e IV secolo* (Milano 1923) 154-158 (no. 20); C. Wessely, *Les plus anciens monuments du christianisme écrits sur papyrus* 2 (Paris 1924) 389-391 (G); M. Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto: lettere private nei papiri dei secoli II-IV* (Firenze 1968) 184-187 (no. 39). This letter is also treated in *DACL* 8.2.2790-2791 (no. 34) and J. Winter, *Life and Letters in the Papyri* (Ann Arbor 1933) 170-171. The re-editions and emendations of Ghedini, Naldini, and Winter are reported in *BL* 1, 2.2, 3, and 6; *BL* 1 refers to readings proposed by Ghedini in *Aegyptus* 2 (1921) 107. An image of this papyrus may be viewed in M. Naldini, *Documenti dell'antichità cristiana* (Firenze 1965), pl. 46. The TM number for this papyrus is 33125, and an updated transcription of the papyrus, which accepts the readings of Naldini, is available at <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/psi;4;311>.

potential ecclesiastical implications of such contact.³ But given that this is the only letter in the papyri from Oxyrhynchus addressed to a prominent bishop, well known in patristic literature, and that it suggests some kind of early epistolary network between certain Christians at Oxyrhynchus (perhaps even some early bishop)⁴ and Theodotus of Laodicea, it surely deserves more attention.⁵

In what follows it will be argued that this letter serves as evidence for some kind of Arian alliance at Oxyrhynchus during the time it was sent.⁶ Though this

³ While this letter is sometimes cited because it mentions Theodotus of Laodicea, the implications of this reference are never pursued: Winter (n. 2) 170-171; L.G. Modena, "Il cristianesimo ad Ossirinco: papiri letterari e cultura religiosa," *BSAA* 10 (1938-1939) 299; E.J. Epp, "New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Letter Carrying in Greco-Roman Times," in B. Pearson et al. (eds.), *The Future of Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis 1991) 49-50; R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 306; M. Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout 2006) 127; M. DelCogliano, "The Eusebian Alliance: The Case of Theodotus of Laodicea," *ZAC* 12 (2008) 256, n. 27.

⁴ Given the nature of the letter and the fact that it is addressed to Theodotus, Bagnall suspects that it probably originated "from an Egyptian bishop." See Bagnall (n. 3) 306.

⁵ One other letter from Oxyrhynchus worth mentioning here, since it presupposes long distance correspondence between roughly the same areas, is *SB* 12.10772 (late III). This letter seems to have been sent from Syrian Antioch to Oxyrhynchus. For a lucid treatment of this letter see A. Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge, MA, 2008) 136-144. On issues related to travel and epistolary networks in the letters from Oxyrhynchus, see L. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden 2012) 89-154.

⁶ The term Arian is used here with some caution, as it has become increasingly evident in the past few decades that this designation is not an entirely accurate epithet for figures such as Theodotus and others who were caught up on the side opposite Athanasius of Alexandria in the ecclesiastical controversies of the first part of the fourth century. As Athanasius is largely responsible for coining this term and repeatedly uses it pejoratively and sweepingly to malign his opponents, whoever they were, some caution needs to be exercised before readily incorporating Athanasius' terminology. Though some scholars have recently preferred the epithet "Eusebian" instead of "Arian" to describe certain figures like Theodotus, since it is a more neutral term and an argument could be made that this epithet more accurately represents their theological commitments, this study will nevertheless retain the term Arian for the sake of convenience. On the use of the term see J. Lienhard, "The 'Arian' Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered" *TS* 48 (1987) 415-437; T. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 14-15; L. Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford 2004) 52-53; M. DelCogliano, "Eusebian Theologies of the Son as Image of God before 341," *JECS* 14 (2006) 482-483; D. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the "Arian Controversy"* (Oxford 2007); DelCogliano (n. 3) 250-252.

proposal may seem unwarranted, given the fragmentary and terse nature of the letter, a new reading in *PSI* 4.311 combined with a thorough examination of Theodotus’ episcopal career makes this suggestion likely. This article will proceed by first offering an updated transcription of the papyrus in which some new readings are proposed, and this will be followed by a detailed commentary. It will then attempt to highlight the theological significance of this papyrus by sketching out the episcopal career of Theodotus, the bishop of Oxyrhynchus in the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea, and conclude by elucidating one of the new readings in the letter that lends weight to the Arian proposal.⁷

PSI 4.311

H x W = 23.5 x 13 cm

Oxyrhynchus, ca. 330

α[]⁸
 [. . .]ομαι γρα[ca. 10]
 [. . .]αι εις αν . [ca. 10]
 [. .] δε θέλω ασ[ca. 8 α-]
 5 π[ο]δοθῆναι . [ca. 8 ἄν-]
 θρωπος εις τῆν ὑ[πάρχου-]
 σαν οικίαν ἀποδ[. . . . ἴνα]
 εις χεῖρας ἔλθῃ ᾧ [ἐγὼ θέ-]
 λω. τούτου χάριν τῷ ἐπισκό-
 10 πῳ τῆς Λαυδικίας τῆς πρὸ
 δύο μονῶν Ἀντιοχείας ἀ-
 π[ο]δοθῆναι αὐτὰ θέλω, κα-
 κείνος ἀσφαλ[ῶ]ς αὐτὰ πέμ-
 πει τῷ ἀνθρώπ[ω] ᾧ βούλο-
 15 μαι. τὸν Χρειστ[όν] σοι. <σὺ> οὔ[ν]

⁷ On the whole the evidence for Arianism in the papyri is slim and inconclusive. See Choat (n. 3) 127-131; cf. G. Ghedini “Paganesimo e cristianesimo nelle lettere papiracee greche dei primi secoli dopo Cristo,” *Pap. Congr. IV* (1935) 343-344. P. van Minnen, the editor of *P.Mich.* 18.767 (IV), entitled “An Original Document from the Arian Controversy?” has tentatively suggested that this papyrus, which appears to be the unfinished draft of a letter, could potentially have emanated from the Arian controversy. The letter appears to deal with ecclesiastical politics and a dispute over episcopal authority; it mentions “authorized bishop” (l. 2 αὐθέντην ἐπίσκοπον), “disorder” (l. 3 ἀταξίαν), “Didymus who cons over Homer and perverts (?) Holy Writings” (ll. 6-7 Δίδυμος ὁ τὸν Ὅμηρον μελετῶν καὶ παρα[---] θείας γραφάς).

⁸ The line numbering for this edition differs from all previous editions because they do not start their line count until l. 2 of the present edition.

σὺ ἄπελθε πρ[ὸς] τὸν ἄν-
 [θρωπ]ον κ[αὶ εἰ]ς χεῖρας
 δ[ὸς] αὐτῷ [τὸ] γράμμα
 [εἰρην]ικόν. δ[ιὰ τ]ούτου ἵνα
 20 [εἰ]ς χεῖρας Θε[ο]δότη τῷ
 ἐπισκόπῳ τῆ[ς] Λαυδικίας
 ἀποδῶ· οὕτως γὰρ ἔχει
 καὶ ἡ ἐπιγραφή. ἐπὶ δὲ δύο
 εἰσὶν Λαυδικίαι μία τῆς
 25 Φρυγίας καὶ μία ἡ κα-
 [τ]ὰ Συρίαν, . []
 — — — — —

Written downward along the left margin across the fibers:

27 [πρ]ὸς τὴν Λαυδικίαν τῆς κοίτης Συρία[ς τ]ῆς πρὸ δύο μονῶν

28 [Α]ντιοχείας· ἐκεῖ ἐστὶν Θεόδοτος ὁ ἐπίσκοπος[ς] αὐτὰ ὄν ἀπόδος σω . . .

29 *vacat* ἄδελφε ἀσύγκριτε.

13-14 l. πέμψει 15 l. Χριστόν. σὺ 19 ἵνα παρ. 23 l. ἐπεὶ 24 l. Λαυδικία

“(l. 6ff.) deliver to his house so that they (*neuter*) may go into the hands of him whom I want. For that reason I want them to be delivered to the (10) bishop of Laodicea, which is two stations before Antioch, and that man will send them safely to the one whom I wish. (15) By Christ I beg you! And so you go to the man and deliver the letter of peace into his hands. Through that man, so that he may deliver it (20) into the hands of Theodotus the bishop of Laodicea. For such is in fact the address. But since there are two Laodiceas, one (25) in Phrygia and one in Syria, (he should deliver it?) to Laodicea of Coelesyria, two stations before Antioch. Theodotus is the bishop there. Deliver them (safely?), incomparable brother.”

1 From the marginal note it would seem that there are probably 2-3 lines of text missing before the first line. From the marginal note (ll. 27-28) it would seem that there are probably 2-3 lines of text missing before the first line.

2]ομαι γρά[: Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156; *Aegyptus* 2 [1921] 107) and Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) believed that the most likely reconstruction for this line of text was [βούλ]ομαι γράμματα. While this reconstruction is certainly possible, it should be pointed out that there are also a number of other equally plausible readings for these lacunae: δέχο]μαι γράμματα (*BGU* 2.674.7 [VI]; *P.Apoll.* 63.18 [later VII]); δέ]ομαι γρά[ψαι

(*P.Oxy.* 14.1679.23 [III]); δύν[ομαι γρά[φειν (*P.Tebt.* 3.760.3 [215/4 BC]); etc. Without more context it is nearly impossible to determine which conjectural reading is to be preferred. Naldini left this line as [. . .] . ομαι γρά[and did not fill in the lacunae (*Il cristianesimo*, 185).

3 [. . .] αι εις άν . [: In the *ed.pr.* and in Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) the following reconstruction was given [. . .] αι εις Άν[τιόχειαν. To this Ghedini added [πέμψ]αι at the start of the line (*Lettere cristiane*, 156; *Aegyptus* 2 [1921] 107). Although all these reconstructions are possible, they are only conjectures, and in the case of Ghedini’s [πέμψ]αι it hinges on his reconstruction of the previous line. Given the number of possibilities with this letter combination, no reading can be established with much certainty. Between the *iota* and *sigma* of εις there is an unusually large space on the papyrus that could easily accommodate two letters. While this gap could signal some kind of word break or sense division, it seems more likely that the space is simply accommodating a long *iota* hanging down from the previous line. Alternative letter combinations could be either]αιει σαν[or]αι ει σαν[; however, no parallels could be found in the DDbDP for either of these possibilities.

4 [. .] δὲ θέλω ἀσ[: The *ed.pr.*, Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156), and Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 185) read [. .] δὲ θέλω ἀ . [. Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) expands the text and reads [ἐγὼ] δὲ θέλω ἀσ[φαλῶς.

6-7 τὴν ὑ[πάρχου]σαν οἰκίαν: Neither the *ed.pr.*, Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156), nor Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 185) attempted to fill this lacuna and both the *ed.pr.* and Ghedini read τὸν instead of τὴν. Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) reconstructs the lines as follows: τὸν [τόπον καὶ μὴ τὴν τυχοῦ]σαν οἰκίαν. But the major problem with this reconstruction is that it is far too long to fit the lacuna. The proposed reading ὑ[πάρχου]σαν fits remarkably well. It has a parallel in *BGU* 3.998.7 (101 BC): τὴν ὑπάρχουσας οἰκίας.

7 ἀποδ[. . . . ἴνα]: **The four letters that precede the lacuna are almost certainly the first part of the verb ἀποδίδωμι, which the writer employs frequently throughout the letter (ll. 4-5 and 10-11, ἀποδοθῆναι; l. 21, ἀποδῶ; l. 27, ἀπόδος).** However, since there is little context to go on at this point, it is difficult to determine its exact form. In the *ed.pr.* and in Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156) the lacuna is empty. Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) proposed ἀποδ[ότω ἴνα μή], J. Winter (*Life and Letters in the Papyri*, 171, n. 2) ἀπόδ[ος ἴνα], and Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) ἀποδ[ος οὖν ἴνα]. It seems likely that that lacuna contained ἴνα to introduce the subjunctive ἔλθῃ in l. 8, since the writer employs ἴνα in l. 19 to introduce the subjunctive ἀποδῶ in l. 22. Additionally, when ἴνα appears in l. 19, it is immediately followed by εἰς χεῖρας (l. 20), which also appears immediately after this lacuna in l. 8.

8-9 εἰς χεῖρας ἔλθῃ Ϝ̅ [ἐγὼ θέ]λλω: The *ed.pr.* and Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156) reconstructed the lacuna with [δη]λλῶ. Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 389) proposed ἔλθῃ Ϝ̅[τινιουν ἀπατη]λλῶ and Winter (*Life and Letters in the Papyri*, 171, n. 2) suggested [θέ]λλω. Seemingly building upon Winter's proposal, Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) filled the lacuna with [ἐγὼ θέ]λλω. Naldini's reading seems the most likely for a number of reasons: (1) it makes sense in light of the context of the papyrus; (2) it fills the lacuna nicely as it requires four or five letters; (3) the emphatic ἐγὼ θέλω is attested frequently in the papyri, and elsewhere in the letter the writer employs personal pronouns for emphasis (l. 16); (4) since the writer appears to have had a penchant for repeating certain verbs (ll. 4-5, 10-11, 27 ἀποδίδωμι), this makes it more likely that θέλω was used here since it also appears in ll. 4 and 12; (5) the dative relative pronoun Ϝ̅ that directly proceeds this lacuna also appears in l. 14 accompanied with the related verb for "wishing," βούλομαι.

10 τῆς Λαυδικίας: As is clear in ll. 24-27, the Laodicea being referred to is the one in Coelesyria (Laodicea ad Mare), not the Phrygian Laodicea (Laodicea ad Lycum). As a survey of the papyri reveals, Laodicea in Coelesyria is hardly ever mentioned in them. One other, nearly contemporaneous reference to this Laodicea is found in *P.Ryl.* 4.630.247 (ca. 317-323), which belongs to the archive of Theophanes of Hermopolis. This papyrus, along with *P.Ryl.* 4.627 (early IV), contains a dated list of the travel expenses Theophanes incurred on his round-trip from Hermopolis to Antioch. For a detailed treatment of these texts see J. Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman Near East* (New Haven 2006).

For the present purposes the Theophanes material is relevant because it may offer some indication of the route taken and the time required to deliver the letter spoken of in *PSI* 4.311. Theophanes left Hermopolis in the middle of March (Phamenoth) and sailed to Babylon (of Egypt = Old Cairo). After a few days rest he went on to Athribis, a city about 50 km north of Babylon on the eastern bank of the Sebennyitic Mouth of the Nile, then to Pelusium, and followed the coast of the Levantine Seaboard (*via maris*) until he reached Antioch. Based on a survey of his dated travel expenditures listed in *P.Ryl.* 4.627 he was able to make the trip from Athribis to Antioch in only twenty-four days and averaged about 50 km a day (see Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes*, 49-50). While one cannot assume that the person delivering the letter mentioned in *PSI* 4.311 took the same route as Theophanes, or made it in about the same amount of time, Theophanes' itinerary is still useful for comparison.

If the bearer of the letter was able to draw on the resources of the *cursus publicus* on his journey, then it is conceivable that he could have delivered the letter relatively quickly, at least by ancient standards (on the Christian use of

the *cursus publicus* see: Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.6; Gregory of Nyssa, *Ep.* 2.12; Ammianus Marcellinus 21.16.18). For letters conducted via the resources of the *cursus publicus* it is estimated that on average a letter would move about 50 Roman miles per day (A.M. Ramsay, “The Speed of the Imperial Post,” *JRS* 15 [1925] 65-69; cf. R. Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, trans. N.H. Field [London 1976] 194-195). While there are notable examples where letters travelled more than a 100 Roman miles in a single day, such speeds represent the rare exceptions required by special circumstances (E.G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An introduction* [Oxford 1980] 139-140; J. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* [Philadelphia 1986] 214-215; cf. Epp [n. 3] 98). Alternatively, if the letter was being conveyed outside of the resources of the *cursus publicus* by a private individual or by a subdeacon, deacon, or acolyte (such men often conveyed episcopal correspondence; see Ignatius, *Eph.* 2.1; *Phil.* 10.1, 11.1-2; Symm. 10.1, 12.1; Cyprian, *Ep.* 8.1.1; 9.1.1; 20.3.2; 36.1.1; 44.1.1; 47.1.2; 52.1.1; 55.2.1; 59.1.1, 9.4; 67.1.1; 75.1.1; 79.1.1), it could have taken considerably longer to deliver the letter. For letters delivered over long distances it was not uncommon for them to take up to a year or even more for delivery (M. McGuire, “Letters and Letter Carriers in Christian Antiquity,” *CW* 5 [1960] 200; cf. Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 17.1; Jerome, *Ep.* 28, this letter was sent from Augustine to Jerome and took nine years to be delivered because of a series of misfortunes).

10-11 τῆς πρὸ δύο μονῶν Ἀντιοχείας: The Greek μονή is the equivalent to the Latin *mansio* (*CGL* 2.127.5, 342.27, 327.59, 436.45, 3.411.4, 5). *Mansiones* (pl.) were roadway lodging houses or resting stops/staging points set up at various points along major roads or highways for the state post (*cursus publicus*) or for travelers on official state business (A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 831-834; *P.Köln* 5, pp. 255 and 264). At least in Egypt the evidence suggests that *mansiones* were run and funded by private individuals in their capacity as liturgists (C. Adams, “‘There and Back Again’: Getting around in Roman Egypt,” in C. Adams and R. Laurence [eds.] *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* [London and New York 2001] 138-166 at 143-144). It would seem that *mansiones* were typically spaced about a day’s journey apart for normal travel (while travelling about Palestine and Egypt [ca. 381-384] Egeria often uses the term *mansio* as a computation for the distance traveled on a particular day on her journey [i.e. a day’s journey]); although couriers on horseback could traverse multiple *mansiones* in a single day (Procopius, *Secret History* 301-305).

Both Theophanes (*P.Ryl.* 4.627v.330-333) and the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (ca. 333, *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 582) agree that the distance between Laodicea and Antioch was 64 Roman miles. While the present letter supposes that Laodicea was “two stations before Antioch” (ll. 27-28) the Pilgrim of Bordeaux

records that there were two *mansiones* between Antioch and Laodicea: *Platanus* (*mansio platanus*) 16 miles from Laodicea; *Catelae* (*mansio catelas*) 40 miles from Laodicea (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 582).

12-14 κα|κεῖνος ἀσφαλ[ῶ]ς αὐτὰ πέμ|πει: The *ed.pr.* reads κοσ|μειν ὄσα σφάλ[ματ]α πέμ|πει, and this reading is followed by Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 156). Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 390) prefers instead εἰκὸς | ἐκεῖνος ἀσφαλ[ῆ κ]ατασκο|πείτω and Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) reads κα|κεῖνος ἀσφαλ[ῶς] αὐτὰ [.] [.] πει.

The present reading for these lines suggests that while the letter of peace will be delivered to Theodotus (esp ll. 15-19), he (κα|κεῖνος) **will forward whatever** comes with them, the repeated αὐτὰ (goods, another letter?). As letters of peace served as effective travel documents for the bearer, they could be presented at multiple locations and were sometimes written as a kind of open letter. For example, *P.Oxy.* 56.3857 (IV), which represents a letter of peace, is addressed τοῖς κατὰ τόπον ἀγαπητοῖς ἀδελφοῖς καὶ συνλειτουργοῖς (“To the beloved brothers and fellow ministers in every locality”). Other “open” letters of peace include: *SB* 16.12304 (III/IV); *P.Oxy.* 8.1162 (IV); *SB* 3.7269 (IV/V). On the other hand, letters of peace could also be quite specific and address a single recipient, as here: *PSI* 3.208 (late III); *PSI* 9.1041 (late III); *P.Alex.* 29 (late III); *P.Oxy.* 36.2785 (late III); *SB* 10.10255 (III/IV).

15 τὸν Χρεῖστ[όν] σοι: **The exact meaning of this line has eluded previous editors.** The *ed.pr.* followed by Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 157) read τὸν χρεῖστ[όν ?] σοι ο[.] and were unable to make much sense out of this line. Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) proposed τὸν χρεῖστ[όν] σοι. [.] and suggested that τὸν χρεῖστ[όν] should perhaps be read as τὸν χρῆστ[όν?]. It is curious that after σοι Naldini does not read any other letters, given that the *omicron* is completely visible. Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 390) reads τὸν Χρ[ε]ῖστ[όν] σοιστ[ῆ]ναι with the note *l. σοιστ[ῆ]ναι*. While Wessely’s reading of σοιστ[ῆ]ναι is to be rejected because it is too long for the lacuna, his earlier reading in the line is correct as Χρεῖστ[όν] should be taken as Χριστ[όν]. I take τὸν Χρεῖστ[όν] as an asseverative accusative: “By Christ!” See E.A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 44; A.N. Jannaris, *An Historical Greek Grammar* (London 1897) §1746b. Cf. *SB* 18.13867.1: τὸν Σάραπιν (“By Sarapis”).

Χριστός is frequently spelled in the papyri as Χρηστός (W. Shandruk, “The Interchange of ι and η in Spelling χριστ- in Documentary Papyri,” *BASP* 47 [2010] 205-219). There are, however, a few examples of Χρεῖστός for Χριστός: *P.Oxy.* 3.407.5-6 (III/IV): Ἰησοῦ Χρεῖστοῦ; *SB* 26.16677.3-5 (V): κ(ύριος) Χρεῖστός; *SB* 20.15192.4 (V-VI): τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Χρεῖστοῦ (cf. *P.Lips.* 1.43.13 [IV]: βιβλίων Χρε[ῖστ]ιανικῶν; *P.Lond.* 1.77.71-2 [ca. 610, p. 231]: κατὰ τῆς

τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως). Finally, although it might be expected that χριστός should be rendered using a *nomen sacrum*, in documentary texts, unlike literary manuscripts, it is rarely contracted (Blumell [n. 5] 51; Luijendijk [n. 5] 64-65).

15-16 <σὺ> οὐ̄[ν] σὺ̄ ἄπελθε: In Naldini’s edition (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) he writes σὺ̄ν̄ἄπελθε; however, the supralinear stroke is only over the *sigma* and the *upsilon*. Naldini may have extended the supralinear line because he felt that it was functioning to divide the letter and therefore acting as a paragraphus to indicate where a new part of the instructions began. Despite my best efforts I was unable to see the *nu* identified by Naldini (σὺ̄ν̄ἄπελθε). The overstroke is not a paragraphus but indicates a deletion. The scribe confused σοι (l. 15) and σύ (sound the same), which explains the confusion about the postpositive οὐ̄ν, and so deleted the σύ in l. 16.

16-17 πρ[ὸς] τὸν ἄν|[θρωπ]ογ κ[αὶ ε]ἰς χεῖρας: The *ed.pr.*, Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 157), and Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 390) read πρ[ὸς] τ]ὸν ἄν[τι]|[οχείας ἐπίσ]κ[οπον ε]ἰς χεῖρας. However, the problem with this reading is that there are too many letters (10) forced into the lacunae in l. 17. This reading supposes that the line contained 24 letters; however, none of the fully intact lines exceeds 21 letters and most contain 18-20 letters. Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) transcribed this section as πρ[ὸς] τὸν ἄν[.] κ[. . . ε]ἰς χεῖρας. A high resolution digital image of this papyrus reveals that before the *kappa* in l. 17 there are traces of two and possibly three preceding letters after the lacuna. Immediately before the *kappa* the tops of two vertical strokes can be detected, which resemble the top half of a *nu*. Preceding these strokes is part of a slightly curved horizontal bar. These two letters are possibly an *omicron* followed by *nu*, which makes sense given the masc. acc. sing. article in the preceding line. Only a very small portion of the third letter is visible, not nearly enough to distinguish it from any other letters. While the reading ἄν|[θρωπ]ογ presents itself as a distinct possibility and may be reinforced since it occurs in ll. 5-6, it is still conjectural. Another possibility, albeit a less likely one, is ἄν[α]|[γνώστ]ηγ, since there is some space at the end of l. 16 and it is a masculine noun.

18-19 [τὸ] γράμμα | [εἰρην]ικόν: This reading has not been previously suggested. In the *ed.pr.* the lacunae surrounding γράμμα are left blank. Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 157) suggested [ταῦτα] γράμμα|[τα? . . .]κόν, Wessley (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 390) [καὶ τὰ] γράμμα|[ταῖο]κόνδ[ου, and Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 186) [τὰ] γράμμα|[τα? . . .]κόν. The problem with all of these readings is that they assume γράμμα must begin the plural γράμματα and are then at a loss as to how to incorporate the -κον that immediately follows. Wes-

sely's suggestion of Ἰοκόνδ[ου is pure speculation. Furthermore, this name is unattested in the DDbDP. In his notes Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 391) also raises the possibility that it could be Σεκόνδ[ου, noting that the name is frequent in Latin, but again this name is not attested in the DDbDP.

22-23 οὕτως γὰρ ἔχει καὶ ἡ ἐπιγραφή: ἐπιγραφή may be loosely translated here as “address.” Only a few letters preserved on papyrus contain a delivery address; this is typically signaled by the word σημασία (“address”): *P.Oxy.* 14.1678.27-30 (III) (= Ghedini, *Lettere cristiane*, 94-95 [no. 7]; = Naldini, *Il cristianesimo*, 93-96 [no. 9]); cf. *P.Laur.* 1. 20.14-15 (early III); *P.Oxy.* 14.1773.40-44 (III); *P.Oxy.* 34.2719.1-15 (III); *P.Hamb.* 4. 267.22 (ca. 336-348). See further N. Gonis, “Some More Elaborate Epistolary Addresses,” *ZPE* 136 (2001) 116-117; S.R. Llewelyn, “The εἰς (τὴν) οἰκίαν Formula and the Delivery of Letters to Third Persons or to Their Property,” *ZPE* 101 (1994) 71-78; R. Daniel, “Through Straying Streets: A Note on σημασία Texts,” *ZPE* 54 (1984) 85-86; *NewDocs* 7.29-43.

26 From the marginal note (ll. 27-28) it would seem that there are 0-2 lines of text missing after this line.

28 αὐτὰ οὖν ἀπόδος σω. . . : In the *ed.pr.* it was thought that σω . . . was probably the first part of σώζειν. This reading was subsequently followed by Ghedini (*Lettere cristiane*, 158). Wessely (*Les plus anciens monuments* 2, 390) read σωφῶ[ς] with a note *l. σοφῶς* and Naldini (*Il cristianesimo*, 187) read σωθ . . . [More recently J. Rea has suggested that the reading could be ἀπόδος Σώτῳ[(*P.Oxy.* 36.2785, p. 84, n. 2). While the reading proposed by Rea is a better possibility, since names regularly follow the verb ἀπόδος, especially when it concerns delivery instructions, it is nevertheless conjectural. On the conjectural reading of the name “Sotas” see also Luijendijk (n. 5) 81, n. 1. Another possibility is that it could be σῶα (from the adjective σῶος), referring to αὐτά, and have the meaning “safe and sound.” Earlier in the letter at l. 13 the author expressed concern that it be delivered “safely” (ἀσφαλῶς). While the αὐτά may seem somewhat unusual here and could be read τ]αῦτα, a parallel can be found in *P.Herm.* 13.9 (IV): οὖν ἀ[πό]δος αὐτά.

29 ἄδελφε ἀσύγκριτε: This phrase is attested once in *CPR* 25.3.7-8 (IV). Similar phrases are: *P.Oxy.* 10.1298.1-2 (ca. 330): τῷ δεσπότη καὶ ἀσυγκρίτῳ καὶ παραμυθίᾳ τῶν φίλων (= Ghedini, *Lettere cristiane*, no. 3; Naldini, *Il cristianesimo*, no. 4); *PSI* 7.783.A.10 (375[?]): πᾶτερ ἀσύγκριτε; *SB* 24.16204.14, 21 (IV/V): δέσποτα ἀσύγκριτε (= J. O'Callaghan, *Cartas*, no. 3; Naldini, *Il cristianesimo*, no. 92). This phrase is unattested in the TLG.

Bishop Theodotus of Laodicea ad Mare

In order to fully appreciate the significance of this letter it is necessary to consider Theodotus' episcopal career in some detail. Since no works by Theodotus have survived, his lengthy tenure as bishop of Laodicea has received little scholarly attention when compared with the other notable figures with whom he intermingled and who were at the epicenter of ecclesiastical politics in the first half of the fourth century.⁹ Nevertheless, there are enough scattered references to his episcopal career in various patristic sources to allow us to reconstruct its broad contours and identify his theological sympathies and leanings, which were clearly Arian throughout his career.

While the starting point of his episcopacy cannot be determined with precision, according to Eusebius of Caesarea it began sometime during the “Great Persecution” (ca. 303-310) after his predecessor, a certain Stephen, apostatized under duress.¹⁰ As a lifelong friend and theological ally of Theodotus, Eusebius of Caesarea dedicated his two major apologetic works to him, *Praeparatio evangelica* and *Demonstratio evangelica*, and Eusebius even praised Theodotus in his *Ecclesiastical History* by pointing out that he was a dedicated student of the scriptures and was renowned for his abilities to heal both the body and soul of those who visited him.¹¹

From the start of the Arian controversy ca. 317 Theodotus firmly aligned himself with Arius and sided with him against the Alexandrian patriarch Alexander.¹² Interestingly, the only other letter (besides PSI 4.311) from fourth-century Egypt that mentions Theodotus is a letter from Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia written ca. 318; in this letter Arius complains to the Nicomedian bishop that Alexander has unjustly driven him and his followers out of Alexandria and condemned certain eastern bishops, among them Theodotus of Laodicea, because they shared similar beliefs regarding Jesus.¹³ Sometime later, but before the Council of Nicaea in 325, in a passing remark Athanasius

⁹ In English the two most comprehensive summaries of Theodotus' life can be found in DelCogliano (n. 3) 256-261 and H. Wace and W. Piercy, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography* (Peabody, MA, 1999 [1911]) 980.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Hist.eccl.* 7.32.2. Eusebius does not mention the date of Theodotus' ordination in his *Chronicon*.

¹¹ Eusebius, *Praep.ev.* 1.1.1; *Dem.ev.* intro.; *Hist.eccl.* 7.32.23.

¹² There is no need to rehearse the Arian controversy here. The two best treatments of the subject in the fourth century are M. Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo* (Roma 1975), and R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh 1988).

¹³ The letter is preserved in Theodoret, *Hist.eccl.* 1.5.1-5. More specifically, Arius states that the eastern bishops were condemned, along with himself, because λέγουσιν ὅτι

alleges with disgust that certain eastern bishops, including Theodotus, had circulated writings in Egypt defending, and one might even say promoting, certain Arian tenets.¹⁴

A short time later Theodotus reappears at the Council of Antioch, held at either the end of 324 or the beginning of 325, that was convened to deal with internal problems plaguing the Antiochene church and to deal with the schism between Arius and Alexander.¹⁵ At this council, at which more than fifty bishops were in attendance, it was determined that they would side with Alexander against Arius. A creed was then drawn up supporting Alexander and condemning Arius and his theology. All the bishops in attendance signed with the exception of three recusants, one of whom was Theodotus.¹⁶ He and the two others were condemned for holding the same views as Arius and excommunicated until the Council of Nicaea (still six months away) when they would be given a chance to repent.¹⁷

προϋπάρχει ὁ θεὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ (“they say that God had an existence prior to that of His son”). For the date of this letter see Hanson (n. 12) 6-7.

¹⁴ Athanasius, *Syn.* 17.1-7, describes how certain bishops defended themselves before Alexander and mentions that other bishops (Narcissus, Patrophilus, Maris, Paulinus, Theodotus, and Athanasius of Anazarba) circulated similar writings. He then relates specifically how Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Anazarba, and George of Laodicea (the successor of Theodotus) sent letters to various persons, some in Egypt, defending Arian tenets.

¹⁵ The primary reason for convening the council at Antioch was to deal with the disorder that had arisen as a result of the untimely death of the city’s bishop (Philogonius) in December 324 and the rioting that had ensued with the appointment of his successor (Eustathius). On the context of this council see J. Nyman, “The Synod of Antioch (324-325) and the Council of Nicaea,” *TU* 79 (1961) 483-489; Hanson (n. 12) 146-151.

¹⁶ The two others were Eusebius of Caesarea and Narcissus of Neronius.

¹⁷ The synodal letter of the council that contains its creed and the condemnation of Theodotus and the two other bishops exists only in a Syriac translation. For a Greek reconstruction of the Syriac see E. Schwartz, “Zur Geschichte des Athanasius,” in *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse* (Göttingen 1905) 271-280. Regarding Theodotus and the two others the letter states: “In fact, from what they were asked and what they asked in turn, they clearly were proven to agree completely with Arius’ party, and to hold opinions contrary to what was established by our synod. For this reason, that their hearts are so hardened, and that they have no regard for the holy synod which rejected and disapproved of their ideas in these matters, we all fellow-ministers in the synod have ruled not to practice fellowship with these men, not to consider them worthy of fellowship, since their faith is something other than that of the Catholic Church.” Translation, slightly adapted, from J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, rev.ed. W.H.C. Frend (London 1987) 336.

At the Council of Nicaea Theodotus, at least ostensibly, repented of his former convictions by signing the creed, though it would become clear that he was less than wholehearted in doing so.¹⁸ Some months after the conclusion of the council, Constantine directed a pointed letter to Theodotus ordering him not to mimic the actions of Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea, who had been removed from their bishoprics and exiled for drawing up and circulating a document that undercut the Nicene Creed and provoked controversy, as it offered an interpretation contrary to the one agreed at the council.¹⁹ While the extent of Theodotus’ involvement with Eusebius and Theognis in this post-Nicene affair is not perfectly clear from the letter, and it may be argued that he played a less significant role since Constantine did not exile him, it is evident that he still harbored genuine Arian sympathies.²⁰

For the next few years we know nothing about Theodotus’ episcopal career; there is no mention of him in any source until the year 327. Here he reappears as a prominent attendee at another Antiochene council that was convened as a result of a bitter dispute between Eustathius, bishop of Antioch, and Eusebius of Caesarea over the meaning of the term *homoousios*.²¹ The outcome of this council was that Eustathius was deposed and sent into exile.²² What is most interesting is that Theodoret, who is one of the primary sources for this council, specifically points out that in the proceedings Theodotus’ Arian sympathies were again made manifest in his denunciation of Eustathius.²³ The

¹⁸ Both Eusebius of Caesarea and Narcissus of Neronius also signed, though in the case of Eusebius it was not wholehearted. Later Eusebius wrote a letter to his church in Caesarea (Socrates, *Hist.eccl.* 1.8.35-54; cf. Theodoret, *Hist.eccl.* 1.12.1-18) intimating that he felt pressured to sign the creed. For an interpretation of this letter see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London 1972) 220-226.

¹⁹ This letter is preserved in Athanasius, *De decr.* 42 and Gelasius, *Hist.eccl.* 3 app. 2; cf. H.-G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke* 3.1, no. 28 (p. 63). See also Sozomen, *Hist.eccl.* 1.21.3-5.

²⁰ Theodotus’ apparent misgivings are clear near the end of the letter (Athanasius, *Syn.* 42.3) where Constantine admonishes him to manifest ἄχραντον πίστιν τῷ σωτῆρι θεῷ (“undefiled faith to the Savior God”).

²¹ In the pamphleteering war that preceded the council Eusebius charged Eustathius with Sabellianism and Eustathius charged Eusebius with polytheism. See Eusebius, *Vit.Const.* 3.59-62; Athanasius, *H.Ar.* 4.1; Socrates, *Hist.eccl.* 1.24.1-9; Sozomen, *Hist.eccl.* 2.19.1-7.

²² Eusebius, *Vit.Const.* 3.59.4; Athanasius, *H.Ar.* 4.1; Theodoret, *Hist.eccl.* 1.21.9; cf. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1996) 227-228.

²³ Theodoret, *Hist.eccl.* 1.21.4. Theodoret specifically reports that Theodotus (and a few others) had still “imbibed the Arian sentiments” (τὴν λώβην εἰσεδέξαντο τὴν Ἀρείου).

following year Theodotus attended, and possibly presided over,²⁴ yet another council at Antioch as the episcopal successors of the deposed Eustathius had died in rapid succession resulting in severe unrest in the city.²⁵

After this third council at Antioch we hear of Theodotus one last time in his capacity as bishop. Sometime ca. 335 it is reported that he reprimanded the young Apollinarius, who would later become bishop of Laodicea, because he attended lectures of the sophist Epiphanius and failed to leave when Epiphanius recited a hymn to Dionysus.²⁶ After this episode Theodotus effectively disappears from the sources and all we know of him is that he was succeeded by George, a native of Alexandria and enemy of Athanasius. Exactly when Theodotus was replaced by George (presumably because he had died) cannot be determined precisely. Nevertheless, George's presence as bishop of Laodicea at the Dedication Council in Antioch in 341 provides a *terminus ante quem* for the end of Theodotus' episcopacy.²⁷ In light of a later comment by Theodoret, where he identifies Theodotus among the leading Arians in the East and laments that he and the other Arians were aided in their heresy by the "indifference of Constantius,"²⁸ it should not only be supposed that he outlived Constantine but that he retained his Arian sympathies throughout the entirety of his episcopal career.

Arianism at Oxyrhynchus during the Episcopate of Theodotus

In light of the foregoing sketch of Theodotus' ecclesiastical career the implications of PSI 4.311 begin to become clearer. If we now turn and look at the bishopric of Oxyrhynchus in the wake of the Arian controversy to consider the

²⁴ In a letter written by Constantine to the congregants of this council Theodotus is the first bishop addressed (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.62.1), which has been taken as evidence that he may have been the presiding bishop. See A. Cameron and S.G. Hall, *Life of Constantine* (Oxford 1999) 306.

²⁵ It is reported that Paulinus died within six months of his ordination and Eulalius within a year (Eusebius, *Marc.* 1.4.2; Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.15; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 1.22.1). Part of the unrest in Antioch was caused by the supporters of the exiled Eustathius who were clamoring for his reinstatement. Eusebius of Caesarea was initially elected as bishop but promptly declined the appointment citing that it was contrary to canon law, at which point a priest from Caesarea named Euphronius who had been put forward by Constantine was confirmed by the council (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.60.3).

²⁶ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25; cf. Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.46.1-12.

²⁷ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.10.

²⁸ Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.7.1: Κωνσταντίνου ἡ εὐκολία. On the Arian leanings of Constantius II see R. Klein, *Constantius II. und die christliche Kirche* (Darmstadt 1977) 16-67.

possible context of this letter it becomes evident that for the first 30 or 40 years after Nicaea Oxyrhynchus was also troubled by this controversy.²⁹ From ca. 325 until 347 the bishop of Oxyrhynchus was a man by the name of Pelagius.³⁰ In Athanasius’ *Festal Letter* of 347 (no. 19), written shortly after the return of his second exile in 346, he deposed Pelagius and appointed another bishop by the name of Theodorus.³¹ While the specific reasons for the removal of Pelagius are not altogether clear, the question that naturally arises is whether it had something to do with Pelagius’ ecclesiastical sympathies. Elsewhere Athanasius reveals that he had Melitian and quite possibly Arian ties,³² and so it seems probable that this may have been a decisive factor for his removal in 347.³³ Pelagius’ episcopal career largely overlapped with that of Theodotus. If the sender

²⁹ At this time Oxyrhynchus was anything but the bastion of “orthodoxy” it was purported to have become by the end of the century, when the anonymous author of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* reports that the bishop of the city was orthodox and not a single “heretic” could be found within the city’s walls (*Hist.mon.* 5.4): ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἦν οἰκίητωρ αἰρετικὸς οὐδὲ ἐθνικὸς ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὁμοῦ οἱ πολῖται πιστοὶ καὶ κατηχοῦμενοι, ὡς δύνασθαι δοῦναι τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἐν τῇ πλατείᾳ εἰρήνην τῷ λαῷ (“Moreover, not one of the city’s inhabitants is a heretic or pagan. But all citizens together are believers and catechumens so that the bishop is able to bless the people publicly in the street”). Greek text taken from A. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Bruxelles 1971 [1964]) 42. This account is clearly tendentious and idealized; see R.S. Bagnall, “Combat ou vide: christianisme et paganisme dans l’Égypte romaine tardive,” *Ktèma* 13 (1988) 293.

³⁰ A. Papaconstantinou, “Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchus,” *ZPE* 111 (1996) 172-173; K.A. Worp, “A Checklist of Byzantine Bishops,” *ZPE* 100 (1994) 303.

³¹ Athanasius, *Ep.fest.* 19.10. On Athanasius’ return from exile see Socrates, *Hist.eccl.* 2.22.1-4. On the chronology of his festal letters see Barnes (n. 6) 183-191 (Appendix 1: Festal Letters).

³² Athanasius, *Apol.sec.* 71.6; 78.7. As Melitians and Arians were virtually synonymous for Athanasius, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the members of the two groups in his writings (Athanasius, *Ep.Aeg.Lib.* 22; *H.Ar.* 31, 78; cf. Sozomen, *Hist.eccl.* 2.21; Theodoret, *Hist.eccl.* 1.9.14). See also Choat (n. 3) 128-129.

³³ This interpretation may be further supported by the fact that when Athanasius returned to Egypt in 346 he immediately commenced with some “house cleaning” and removed bishops whose orthodoxy and theological connections were suspect (Athanasius, *Ep.fest.* 19.10). Furthermore, some of those who were selected as bishops by Athanasius had formerly had such connections but had recently, as the letter states, been “reconciled to the church.” This letter only survives in a Syriac translation. See W. Cureton, *The Festal Letters of Athanasius, Discovered in an Ancient Syriac Version* (Piscataway, NJ, 2003 [1848]) liv-lv; H.-G. Opitz, “Das syrische Corpus Athanasianum,” *ZNW* 33 (1934) 18-31.

of PSI 4.311 were the bishop of Oxyrhynchus,³⁴ it may be no coincidence that a bishop whose ecclesiastical commitments were suspect according to Athanasius was corresponding with a prominent Arian supporter. Furthermore, Pelagius' successor Theodorus, though appointed by Athanasius, eventually sided with the Arians during his episcopacy; it is even reported that he led a group of Arian clergy to sack a catholic church in Oxyrhynchus because its church had consecrated a rival bishop by the name of Heraclides.³⁵

³⁴ See n. 4.

³⁵ Theodorus was ordained bishop in 347 by Athanasius, presumably because he was deemed "orthodox," but when Athanasius was removed from office and began his third exile in 356, being replaced by George of Cappadocia (a noted Arian), it seems that Theodorus switched allegiance and apparently became an Arian himself. He was re-ordained by George of Cappadocia ca. 360. At this time a rival "orthodox" bishop named Heraclides was installed by an orthodox faction in Oxyrhynchus. As a result, Theodorus led a band of Arian clergy to destroy the church of Heraclides. See *Libellus Marcell. et Faustini*, xxvi in PL 13.101A-B (CSEL 35/1, p. 33, 35-36): *Tunc egregius iste bis episcopus, iam propriis viribus nititur, et mittit turbam clericorum ad ecclesiam beati Heraclidae catholici episcopi, eamque evertit destruens undique parietes: ita ut ipsum altare Dei securibus dissiparet, cum horrore totius civitatis et gemitu, quod illa ecclesia everteretur, ...* ("Then that infamous twice ordained bishop [Theodorus], relying now on his own men sent a multitude of clerics to the church of the blessed catholic bishop Heraclides, and overthrowing it, destroying the walls on all sides so that he destroyed the altar of God with axes, with horror all of the city [Oxyrhynchus] groaned, because that church was destroyed, ...").

The *fasti* of the bishops of Oxyrhynchus are further complicated at this time, since there is evidence for at least two other (rival?) bishops during the episcopate of Theodorus. In *P.Oxy.* 22.2344, a petition dated to ca. 351/2 and sent to the *strategus* of Oxyrhynchus, the sender was a person who identifies himself as "Dionysius, bishop of the Catholic Church of this city [Oxyrhynchus]" (ll. 1-2, παρὰ Διον[υσίου] ἐπισκόπου καθολικῆ[ς ἐκκλη]σίης τῆς αὐ[τῆ]ς πόλε[ως]). The question that arises is whether Theodorus was briefly replaced by Dionysius or whether there were two rival bishops in the city. See N. Gonis, "Dionysius, Bishop of Oxyrhynchus," *JJP* 36 (2006) 63-65. Lastly, there is also evidence for another bishop in Oxyrhynchus named Apollonius sometime around ca. 359. Epiphanius (*Pan.* 73.26.4) reports that a Melitian bishop by the name of Apollonius sided with the Arians at the council of Seleucia in 359 and signed as "bishop of Oxyrhynchus" (Ἀπολλώνιος ἐπίσκοπος Ὀξυρύγχου). According to Papaconstantinou ([n. 30] 173) there is reason to believe that Theodorus remained bishop of Oxyrhynchus until 383/4.

PSI 4.311 and “Letters of Peace”

Turning now to the letter itself, there is one significant new reading that lends considerable weight to the present hypothesis. This letter concerns instructions for the delivery of some other letter, no longer extant, to be transported to Theodotus in Laodicea. In ll. 18-19, where the letter to be delivered to Theodotus is mentioned, it reads as follows: δ[. . .] αὐτῷ [. . .] γράμμα | [.] κων δ[ιὰ τ]οῦτου ἴνα. In previous editions of the letter it was always supposed that the correct reading was the plural τὰ γράμματα; however, the problem with this reading is that **-κων (l. 19) immediately following the lacuna cannot be accounted for**. A better reading that fits the lacunae and enables the whole line to be reconstructed is to take [. . .] γράμμα in l. 18 not as a plural [τὰ] γράμμα | [τα] but as a singular [τὸ] γράμμα and then take -κων following the lacuna beginning in l. 19 ([.] κων) as a singular ending for an adjective modifying τὸ γράμμα. The most probable reading is then τὸ γράμμα εἰρηνικόν for these two lines; thus the sender of *PSI 4.311* was sending a so-called “letter of peace” to Theodotus. This reading seems even more secure when one enlarges a digital image of the papyrus: one detects what appears to be faint traces of an *iota* just to the right of the lacuna so that the transcription would be [εἰρην]ικόν.

While this emendation is a relatively minor one, it has significant implications for elucidating the latent church historical context behind *PSI 4.311*. A little over a century after this letter was written, the Council of Chalcedon (451) would officially mandate that a “letter of peace” (ἐπιστολή εἰρηνική/*epistola pacifica*), a technical designation for a specific kind of travel letter used within ecclesiastical channels, was to be understood as a letter provided to a member of the laity by an ecclesiastical authority so that they might be able to attain support, hospitality, or even communion on their travels as it vouched for their upstanding character in the church.³⁶ While such letters, even one hundred years earlier when *PSI 4.311* was written, were primarily

³⁶ Canon Eleven of Chalcedon reads: πάντας τοὺς πένητας καὶ δεομένους ἐπικουρίας μετὰ δοκιμασίας ἐπιστολίοις, ἧγουν εἰρηνικοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς μόνοις ὀδεύειν ὠρίσασμεν καὶ μὴ συστατικοῖς, διὰ τὸ τὰς συστατικὰς ἐπιστολάς προσήκειν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ὑπολήψει μόνοις παρέχεσθαι προσώποις (“We have decided that all the poor and those in need of assistance, after examination, are to travel only with ordinary letters, or ecclesiastical certificates of peace, and not with systatic letters, since systatic letters should only be given to persons who are of standing”). Translation taken from R. Price and M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon: Translated with Notes* (Liverpool 2005) 3.98. Greek text taken from P. Joannou, *Les canons des conciles œcuméniques, I^e - IX^e s.* (Grottaferrata [Rome] 1962) 78-79; cf. *ACO 2.1.2*, p. 160. On the differentiation between the two kinds of letters in the time of Chalcedon see T. Teeter, “Letters of Recommendation or Letters of Peace?” *APF Beiheft 3* (1997) 958.

used as travel documents,³⁷ they implied that the sender and addressee, both of whom were typically bishops,³⁸ shared a common bond and as such implicitly functioned to create, maintain, and reinforce theological and ecclesiastical ties between likeminded church leaders. Both Basil of Caesarea and Epiphanius of Salamis periodically use the phrase τὸ γράμμα εἰρηνικόν within the context of strengthening theological bonds with a fellow bishop.³⁹ Likewise, the so-called *Apostolic Canons* make it clear that such letters were sent between bishops who regarded each other as orthodox.⁴⁰ On this front the later evidence of Leo I of

³⁷ References to “letters of peace” first appear in the canons of the Council of Elvira (306); Canon Eighty-One states: *ne feminae suo potius absque maritorum nominibus laicis scribere audeant, quae fideles sunt, vel litteras alicuius pacificas ad suum solum nomen scriptas accipiant* (“Let no women who are among the faithful dare to write to laity on their own without their husband’s signatures nor accept anyone’s letters of peace addressed only to themselves”). Latin text taken from K. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d’après les documents originaux*, trans. H. Leclercq (Paris 1907) 1.263. Canon Seven of the Council of Antioch (341) stipulates: μηδένα ἄνευ εἰρηνικῶν δέχεσθαι τῶν ξένων (“receive no stranger without [letters of] peace”). Greek text taken from P. Joannou, *Les canons des synodes particuliers, IV^e - IX^e s.* (Grottaferrata [Rome] 1962) 110.

³⁸ Canon Eight of the Council of Antioch (341) makes it clear that letters of peace should not be issued by someone less than a country-bishop: μηδὲ πρεσβυτέρους τοὺς ἐν ταῖς χώραις κανονικὰς ἐπιστολάς διδόναι, ἢ πρὸς μόνους τοὺς γείτονας ἐπισκόπους ἐπιστολάς ἐκπέμπειν. τοὺς δὲ ἀνεπιλήπτους χωρεπισκόπους διδόναι εἰρηνικὰς (“Country-presbyters cannot give canonical letters [letters of peace], for only bishops send out such letters to neighboring regions. Country-bishops above reproach can give [letters of] peace”). Greek text taken from Joannou (n. 37) 110. Cf. *P.Oxy.* 8.1162 (IV) where “Leon the presbyter” issues such a letter (l. 1, Λέων πρεσβύτερος ...).

³⁹ In *Ep.* 258.1 Basil thanks Epiphanius of Salamis for sending a “letter of peace” when some were doubting his orthodoxy, since it cheered him up and reinforced Epiphanius’ theological confidence in him at a time of difficulty (cf. Basil, *Ep.* 203.4). All the same, while letters of peace necessarily presupposed that some kind of common bond was shared between corresponding bishops, episcopal alliances in the fourth century could be a complex combination of theology, loyalty, common enemies, previous affronts, and the like. Returning to Basil *Ep.* 258, Basil notes that while many bishops are united on important matters (i.e. trinitarian doctrine) they are at odds on lesser points (i.e. episcopal succession in Antioch). Therefore, the sending of a letter of peace need not imply total unity between bishops in all matters.

⁴⁰ The *Apostolic Canons* form the final Chapter of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and were probably composed sometime in the middle of the fourth century. Canon Thirty-Three states that all clergy carrying such letters were to be tested for their orthodoxy. The implication here is that one would not provide someone with a letter of peace so that they could draw upon the hospitality of another congregation unless they were certain that they were regarded as orthodox by the receiving bishop.

Rome (bp. 440-461) is pertinent: he specifically employed “letters of peace” (*epistolae pacificae*) as a way of approving of the orthodoxy of another bishop.⁴¹

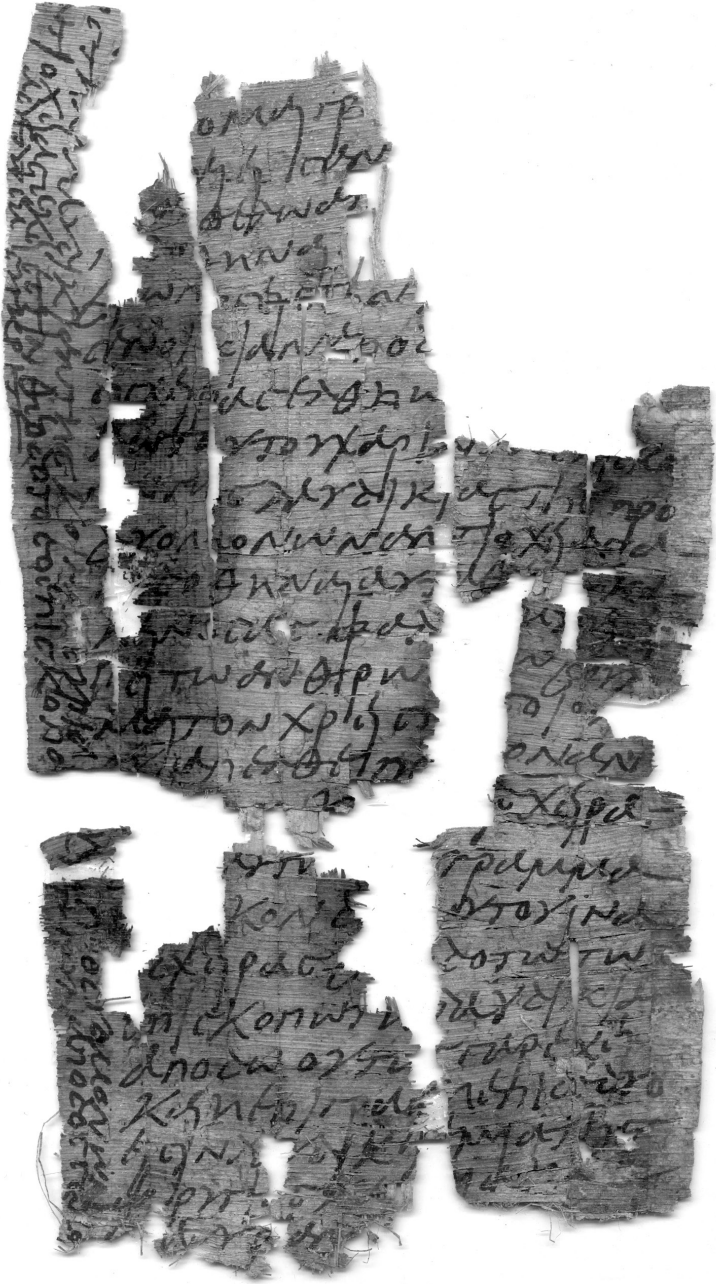
There is one additional reference that bears heavily on *PSI* 4.311, since it is contemporaneous and emanates from Egypt. In a letter written to Athanasius shortly before the Council of Tyre (ca. 334-335),⁴² Arsenius of Hypselis, who had been used as a pawn by the Melitians in their struggle against Athanasius,⁴³ wrote to Athanasius to ask for pardon and request communion with the Catholic Church: “Being earnestly desirous of peace and union with the Catholic Church, over which by the grace of God you [Athanasius] preside, and wishing to submit ourselves to the Canon of the Church, according to the ancient rule, we write unto you, beloved Papa, . . .”⁴⁴ As a sign of his sincerity, Arsenius promised Athanasius that he would now adhere to the Nicene faith, pledged that he would disassociate himself from both the Melitians and Arians, would no longer hold communion with them, and at the request of Athanasius would not “send to them or receive from them letters of peace” (μήτε γράμματα εἰρηνικὰ ἀποστέλλειν μήτε δέξασθαι παρ’ αὐτῶν). From this reference it is clear that at the same time and in roughly the same region where *PSI* 4.311 was written, the act of sending and receiving a “letter of peace” signified loyalty and unity between two bishops and often presupposed some kind of theological bond. The new reading in *PSI* 4.311 is thus supported by external evidence and suggests that someone at Oxyrhynchus, perhaps a bishop or at the very least a prominent ecclesiastical figure, shared a close bond with Theodotus, a noted Arian supporter throughout the entirety of his episcopal career. Therefore, it seems likely that there is an Arian subtext to the letter.

⁴¹ Leo I, *Ep.* 111.1 (PL 54, 1021). In this letter Leo wrote to the Emperor Marcian (ca. 450-457) and reports that he abstained from sending any “letters of peace” (... *ad eum pacis epistolis abstinere* ...) to a newly consecrated bishop since he had grave doubts about his orthodoxy in the Catholic Faith.

⁴² Cited in full in Athanasius, *Apol. sec.* 69. Hypselis was a city located in Upper Egypt on the western side of the Nile Valley about 10 km south of Lycopolis. In the fourth century it was a part of the administrative division of the Thebaid. See H. Verreth, *A Survey of the Toponyms of Egypt in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Cologne/Leuven 2008) 207; Timm 5.2416-2424.

⁴³ In ca. 330 when Arsenius fled from the confinement imposed on him by Plusianus, the Catholic Bishop of Lycopolis, the Melitians accused Athanasius of having murdered him. Athanasius was eventually able to locate Arsenius and defend himself against the charge of murder, first before Dalmatius, the half-brother of Constantine, and then before the council of Tyre in 335 (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 1.27-29; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23-25).

⁴⁴ Athanasius, *Apol. sec.* 69.2: καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀσπαζόμενοι τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ ἔνωσιν πρὸς τὴν καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἧς σὺ κατὰ χάριν θεοῦ προίστασαι, προηρημένοι τε τῷ ἐκκλησιαστικῷ κανόνι κατὰ τὸν παλαιὸν τύπον ὑποτάσσεσθαι, γράφομέν σοι, ἀγαπητὲ πάπα, ...



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