

Excavations at the Seila Pyramid and Fag el-Gamous Cemetery

Editor-in-Chief

Kerry Muhlestein

Editors

Krystal V. L. Pierce and Bethany Jensen



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

The Fag el-Gamous Papyrus Fragment

Lincoln H. Blumell

The BYU excavation of the Fag el-Gamous cemetery has yielded to date only one small papyrus fragment¹ with writing.² The fragment was excavated during the 1992 season in the northern part of the cemetery. In the field book, the papyrus bears the number KA, FeG09 and was reportedly found in the sandal of burial no. 39 who was buried at a depth of 127 cm. As papyrus (*papyrus*/πάπυρος) was used for a variety of purposes in antiquity, and did not just serve as the “paper” (*charta*/χάρτης) of the ancient world, it was not uncommon for inscribed papyrus to be repurposed after it was no longer needed and to be used for sandals,³ or even for other items like ropes, cordage, baskets, and especially cartonnage and in the stuffing of mummified animals.⁴ The present papyrus is made up of two small pieces that, when fitted together, measure 5.3x7.7 cm (HxW). The text consists of seven very partial lines of Greek text written with a dark brown ink along the fibers (recto) of the papyrus; the right margin is intact but the top, bottom, and left margins are missing. There is no way to determine how much text is missing before the start of each line and there is no writing on the back of the papyrus. The hand can be described as a cursive script where the writer tends to rapidly write letters without the lift of the pen. Most letters are written with a single stroke and overall there is a slight slant to the right. At the end of the line the last letter is often extended to the right margin with an exaggerated stroke extension. Some letters are ligatured

-
- 1 For editions of papyri, I have followed the abbreviations given in J.F. Oates et al. (eds.), *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (5th ed.; BASP Suppl. 9, 2001). The online version is available at <http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>. I first autopsied this papyrus in February 2013 at the Kom Aushim storage magazine.
 - 2 There is potentially a second papyrus, although its present whereabouts are unknown. The registry records that during the 1988 season another small papyrus fragment was discovered in the southern area of the cemetery, but it does not mention whether the papyrus preserved text.
 - 3 W.M. van Haarlem, “A Pair of Papyrus Sandals,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1991): 294–295. P.Ford.inv.00002 is a Ptolemaic letter that was later repurposed as a sandal as the papyrus has been cut to the outline of a sole of sandal and is entirely preserved.
 - 4 When B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt were excavating in Tebtunis on January 16, 1900 they discovered that a number of the mummified crocodiles had been stuffed with papyrus that had been previously inscribed.

to the next letter, most notably the alpha (ll. 4, 6), and the rho is written with a long vertical descender that can descend two lines (l. 4). There are no detectable phonetic or orthographic irregularities in the text and there is a sole abbreviation in line 7 marked by a supralinear stroke.

Given the small text sample, any paleographic analysis is tentative. But the text displays graphic trends that are indicative of documents written in the 4th century AD, with notable parallels to texts written at the beginning of the century: viz. P.Oxy. XLIII 3143 (May/June, AD 305; Oxyrhynchus); P.Oxy. LXV 4491 (May 9, AD 307; Oxyrhynchus); P.Oxy. XLVI 3270 (Sept. 14/15, AD 309). The fragment should therefore be tentatively dated to the first half of the 4th century. In terms of provenance, while the text was found in the Fag el-Gamous cemetery, there is no indication from the text itself where it originated. There is a reference to a “village” (κώμη) in line 7, but the toponym that follows is lost where the papyrus is broken off. In terms of the kind of document that the fragment preserves, it is difficult to determine as there is very little text and the extant portion contains only general vocabulary; there is no single phrase that appears in the extant portion of the text that definitively establishes its content or purpose. The phrase τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν that appears in line 3 does occur in documents dealing with sales and leases, but this phrase on its own is not conclusive regarding the type of text. All that can be said therefore about the piece is that it preserved a documentary, and not literary, text.

→].[
 ο]ῦκ ἀναπαύη
]ος τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν
]ον ἕκαστος γὰρ α-
 5].ετούμενον τῇ ν-
] γὰρ ἐν πάσῃ φυ-
]. ἐν κώ(μῃ)

7. pap. κῶ.

1 Translation

... [if] he/she/it does not cease ... the [blank] from them ... for each ... [verb] to the ... for in every ... in the village of ...

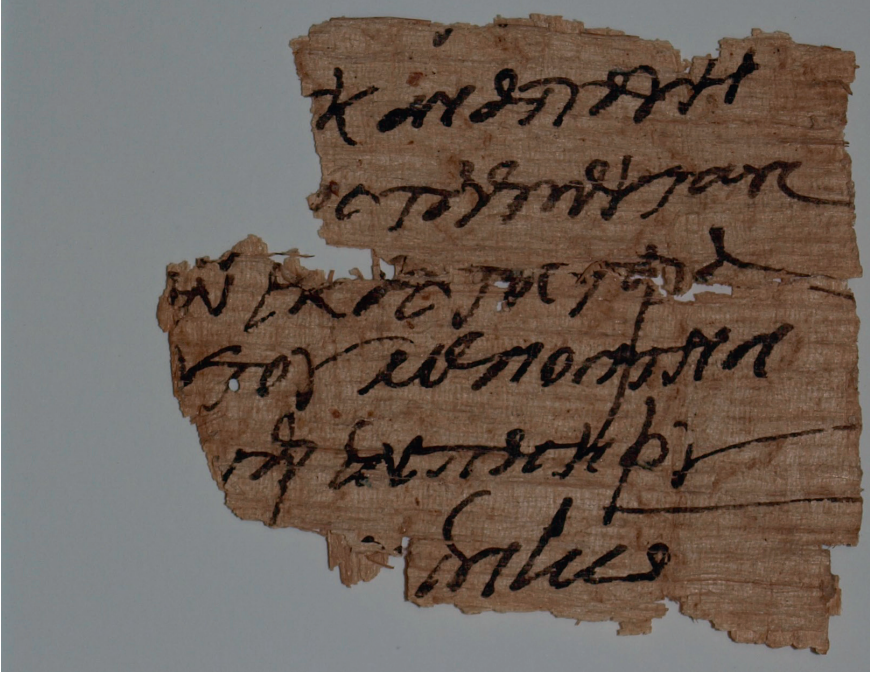


FIGURE 13.1 The papyrus fragment from Fag el-Gamous
PHOTOGRAPH BY LINCOLN BLUMMELL

Notes

■ Please set little indentation.

- 2 ο]ὐκ ἀναπαύη. This phrase is not at present attested in the papyri, although the verb ἀναπαύω (“to cease”) does appear. There are only a handful of literary parallels: *Apoph. Pat.* 16.2, λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· εἰ οὐκ ἀναπαύη, ἰδοὺ δέχομαι αὐτό (see also 7.9); *Vita Nicolai Sionitae* 44.3, Σὺ τί θλίβῃ ὦδε καὶ μοχθεῖς, καὶ οὐκ ἀναπαύη ἐν τῷ κελλαρίῳ ἔσω μετὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου,;
- 3]ος τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν. Cf. P.Lond. III 1164.H.15 (p.164; AD 212; Antinoopolis) and P.Sijp. 46.7 (Sept. 4, AD 332; Hermopolis?): τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν δίκαια; P.Mich. xv 719.12 (III AD; Oxyrhynchus?), P.Oxy. XIV 1698.16 (Sept. 10 AD 269; Oxyrhynchus), and P.Oxy. XIV 1704.14 (AD 298; Oxyrhynchus): πάντα τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν περιεσόμενα; PSI XII 1310.40 (135/34 BC; Arsinoite): καὶ τὰ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν πεσούμενα.
- 4]ον ἕκαστος γὰρ α-. The pronoun ἕκαστος (-η, -ον) is so common there is little that can be said of substance about this line of text. Since the phrase ἕκαστος γὰρ appears a few other times in the papyri and in every instance

it begins a new sentence, the same may be the case here: cf. BGU I 15.4 (AD 197; Arsinoite); BGU XVI 2644.9 (4 BC; Herakleopolite); P.Cair.Masp. II 67151.209 (AD 570; Antinoopolis).

- 5]ετούμενον τῆ ν-. The termination of the verb establishes that it is either a masculine accusative singular middle/passive present participle or a neuter nominative/accusative singular middle/passive present participle. In the papyri the two verbs that most often end with this participial termination are ὑπηρετέω (“to render service,” sometimes in the context of “military service”) and ἐξυπηρετέω (“to assist to the utmost”). As both verbs tend to take the dative case, what follows should probably be read τῆ ν-: e.g. BGU XIII 2252.8–9 (AD 330; Arsinoite): ὑπηρετούμενον τῆ δημο[σίᾳ] χρεία; SB XVIII 13953.11 (AD 492; Herakleopolis): ἐξυπηρετούμενον τᾶίς δ[ημ]οσίαις χρείαις. While these two verbs appear as the most likely candidates for the verb in this line, there are other possibilities.
- 6 γὰρ ἐν πάσῃ φυ-. The phrase ἐν πάσῃ appears about a dozen times in the papyri but is never followed by a word beginning with φυ-. An interesting chronological note about this phrase in the papyri is that outside of a single reference (Stud. Pal. XX 1.30 [AD 83/84; Arsinoite] it otherwise only appears in texts dated to the 3rd century AD and later. See P.Ross.Georg. v 6.5 (AD IV; Oxyrhynchus [?]).
- 7]. ἐν κῶ(μῆ). The abbreviation κῶ̄ for κῶμῆ is attested in the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine periods, although it is especially well-attested in the last period. On this and other abbreviations by suspension see N. Gonis, “Abbreviations and Symbols,” in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171–174. When it is governed by the preposition ἐν, the phrase typically has a definite article: ἐν τῇ κῶ(μῆ); however, it is also attested, as it is here, without the definite article: ἐν κῶ(μῆ). In the papyri this phrase is almost always followed by the name of the village, which presumably appeared at the start of the next line that is lost where the papyrus breaks off.

While ἐν κῶ(μῆ) is almost certainly the correct reconstruction, it is also possible that the phrase could be rendered ἐν κ(υρί)ω “in the Lord” and then what we have here is a *nomen sacrum* – a “sacred name” abbreviated in a Christian text. Though the supralinear stroke is written over the omega, suggesting that the abbreviation is based on the suspension κω(), and not the contraction κ()ω, because it is not written over both letters, it is not uncommon for the supralinear stroke in *nomina sacra* to be only written over the second letter: e.g. P.Bas 16.21 (mid III AD; Egypt, provenance unknown) where it is written ἐν κῶ̄ but because it is part of a larger valediction (ll. 19–21) it has to be a *nomen sacrum*, ἐρρώσθαι σε εὐχομαι

ὄλοκλή[ρω]ς ἐν κ(υρί)ῳ (“I pray for your health in the Lord”). Beginning in the 3rd and 4th centuries, Christians began employing *nomina sacra* in papyrus letters as part of the initial greeting or valediction, although the practice is earlier in literary manuscripts of Christian origin. See L.H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Brill: Boston, 2012), 49–52.