

BGU 1208, A Letter from Tryphon to Asclepiades:
Translation and Explanation
Gary Manning, Ph.D.,
Professor of New Testament Language and Literature
Talbot School of Theology at Biola University

BGU 1208, A Letter from Tryphon to Asclepiades, is a family business letter written about 27-26 BC. It has drawn attention primarily because it includes the word ἀθηντέω, and thus is used in debates over the use of ἀθηντέω in 1 Tim 2:12. However, no translation of the whole letter has been available, leading to a number of speculative reconstructions of the situation behind the letter. This article provides a detailed translation and explanation of the letter, brief translations of the other letters in this group (BGU 1203-1209), and an explanation of the use of ἀθηντέω in this letter.

Methods and Limitations

There are several obstacles that make some aspects of this translation and explanation tentative. First, significant sections of the papyrus are damaged. The first column (lines 1-16) has a lacuna that makes nearly 140 letters unreadable, and the next two columns have five smaller lacunae. Some other letters are smudged or difficult to read. The first editor, W. Schubart, said that BGU 1208 was “fragmentary and hard to understand,” and later readers have had similar comments.

Second, the papyrus makes use of business and legal language that is often quite different from the literary Greek found in contemporary authors or in the Greek New Testament. However, most of the language is similar to that used in other business and legal papyri. Using three databases (papyri.info, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and Loeb Classical Library), I was able to find parallel uses of nearly every business term or phrase in the text. I also used standard lexica such as BrillDAG and LSJ,¹ favoring especially the known financial or legal uses of each term. Notes by the editors of the papyrus, W. Schubart and B. Olsson, were also helpful.

Third, the author of this papyrus is not a skilled writer, which is not surprising. There are some possible grammatical errors. Some run-on sentences (especially an abundance of relative clauses and genitive absolutes) make it difficult at times to tell whether clauses should be attached to preceding or successive clauses. I think it very likely that the author is a bit sarcastic; overlooking this feature is likely to cause a misreading of some of his letter. Finally, the author refers to a number of people and events that are familiar to both himself and to the recipient of the letter, and so he is able to omit many details, leaving us guessing about some of them.

Characters in the Letter:

- Tryphon: writer. Close associate of Asclepiades, family business owner. Calls him “brother,” but this is apparently honorary (based on comments in BGU 1203 and 1209).
- Asclepiades: recipient. Owner of the family business; other letters often discuss shipping, textiles, and grains.
- Soterichos: his people brought the letter from Asclepiades to Tryphon.
- Calatyitis: a boatman who is at the center of the dispute.
- The *strategos* (sort of a police captain or magistrate): received the complaint from Tryphon and took some legal action.

¹ H. Liddell, R. Scott, H. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940). F. Montanari, M. Goh & C. Schroeder (Eds.), *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

- Apollonius: Fragmentary section, but seems to be an assistant to the *strategos* or other government official.
- Poilis: agent who was supposed to be part of the negotiations for transport.
- Peteesis: someone asking payment from Tryphon.
- Antilochos: connected with contracting pilots, setting fares and renting dock space. He is probably working together with Poilis.

Basic Flow of the Letter:

The letter describes a dispute over various issues related to the cost of passage for livestock on or across the Nile. Tryphon is trying to resolve a problem that his boss, Asclepiades, has informed him about. There has been an error or fraud involving the boatman Calatyti, although other agents seem to be more at fault. The problem has been reported to the local *strategos*, and part of the letter recounts the legal moves so far. Tryphon and Asclepiades are concerned, because of the severity of the Nile flood this year, that they have to avoid being cheated or spending unnecessarily. Poilis is an agent somehow involved in the transport negotiations; Tryphon speaks about him, apparently with some sarcasm, and says Poilis will not change his mind. Tryphon had an unpleasant visit with him to make sure that Poilis would not delay in his role in the transaction. Tryphon is sending Calatyti's wage-contract to Asclepiades, so there was some resolution, although the terms may not be exactly what they want. Other complexities in the transport of the livestock have arisen: The cost of passage (separate from hiring the boatman) has been increased by Antilochos. Rent for the upper landing docks is supposed to be included in the ferry contract, but has been contested. However, there has been some success: the stopping of payment (to Peteesis and perhaps also to Antilochos) has resulted in the other parties agreeing to the terms of passage and renting the landing. Tryphon forced the issue of hiring Calatyti the boatman at the same rate, using the legal actions mentioned earlier. Finally, there was some insult or harm from an encounter between Calatyti and an unstated person after the agreement was made; but Tryphon accepts Calatyti's explanation, and the situation has been smoothed over.

Translation of BGU 1208²

In	Text	Translation
1	[Τρύφω]ν ³ τῶι ἀδελφῶ[ι] χαίρεν καὶ διὰ παντὸς	Tryphon to the brother, greetings and
2	[ύγιαίν]ειν. καταντή[σα]ς ἐκ τῶν ἄνωθεν	good health always. After arriving from the inland/upper
3	[τόπων ε] ἔκομισά[μην] διὰ Σωτηρίχου	[regions], I acquired through Soterichos
4	[.] ὃ ἐπιτέθ[ε]ισαί ⁴ τοῖς παρ' αὐτοῦ	[6 lett.] ⁵ the note which you had sent by his people,
5	[πιττάκ]ιον, ⁶ δι' οὗ [μοι] ἱστορεῖς ⁷ τὴν	in which you informed [me] about the
6	[Καλατύ]τεως πλ[άν]ην, ⁸ ὃ ἀναγνοῦς	fraud of Calatyti, which, after reading,

² I am grateful to Michael McOsler, who gave invaluable suggestions and corrections on this translation. Any errors, however, are mine.

³ The name of the author is deduced from two other letters from this family business, BGU 1203 and 1209.

⁴ ἐπιτίθημι = ἐπιστέλλω. Olsson, 35.

⁵ The bracketed sections indicate lacunae, or holes, in the papyrus. Words in the brackets indicate hypothesized text based on context and size of the lacuna. If no hypothesis is possible, the number indicates the approximate amount of letters that are unreadable because of the holes.

⁶ πιττάκιον: note, document, receipt, tablet.

⁷ ἱστορέω: to inform, tell; or perhaps ask.

⁸ πλάνη and πλανάω sometimes mean "fraud" or similar in the papyri (BGU 6.1303.7,14, P. Oxy. 6.898.8).

7	[.]ξάμην ⁹ [τὸν] στρατηγὸν ἐφ' ἧι ¹⁰	I [informed?] the <i>strategos</i> , because of
8	[ἐστὶν μ]εισοπ[ονη]ρία, ¹¹ ἐξ ὧν Ἀπολλώ(νιος)	the hatred of evil that he [has]; as a result of which, Apollonius
9	[.] ἔγραψε [. . . .] τωι. θέλω οὖν σε	[6 lett.] wrote to [4 lett.]. Therefore I want you
10	[- ca.16 -]των σημήναι καὶ	[16 lett.]... to declare and
11	[- ca.16 -]ν ἀγαγγέλλοντα	[16 lett.] reporting
12	[- ca.12 - περὶ] ὧν ἔ[γρα]ψας ἐντεύξεων ¹²	[12 lett.] concerning the petitions that you wrote
13	[- ca.20 -]λει. . . ρηναί ¹³	[20 lett.]??... ??
14	[- ca.16 -]αὶν τῶν ἐγκα- ¹⁴	[16 lett.]?? of the accused [?]
15	[- ca.16 -]αν περὶ φων[. . .]	[16 lett.]?? concerning a declaration?
16	[- ca.15 - τ]ῆν ¹⁶ ἀποτομίαν	[15 lett.] the severity
17	τῆς ἀναβάσεως ¹⁷ [οὐ μόν]ον χρεοκοπηθῆναι	of the flooding (of the Nile), not only to be cheated,
18	ἀλλὰ καὶ χορήγησιν ¹⁸ ποιῆσθαι, εἰκός σε μετελιφέναι ¹⁹	but also to make an expenditure. Likely you have heard
19	παρὰ τοῦ πολυτιμήτου ²⁰ Ποίλιος τοῦ μὴ μετα-	from the “much-honored” Poilis who does not
20	μελομένου. περὶ οὗ γράψαντός σου εἰς τὸ ²¹ μὴ	change his mind. Concerning whom, after you wrote, so that he would not
21	διατρεψαι αὐ[τὸν παρ]αγενηθεῖς εἰς Δικωμίαν	delay, after arriving at Dicomia ²²

⁹ [.]ξάμην = [ἀνεδίδα]ξάμην? I informed / proved, used also in later complaint papyri (P. Oxy. 8.1103, 8.1163, 55.3794).

¹⁰ The relative pronoun is expected to be masculine, not feminine, but ἧι is probably an example of odd attraction to μεισοπονηρία later in the clause. The overall sense of the clause is nonetheless clear.

¹¹ μεισοπονηρία (= μισοπονηρία): hatred of evil or crime. Normally found in the singular, it is used in the papyri to describe those who render justice fairly. (BGU 8.1855).

¹² ἐντεύξις: petition. Legal term, from the claimant/petitioner. P.Tebt. 3.1.743 uses both ἐντεύξις and σημαίνω in a petition about stolen property.

¹³ -λει could be almost any third singular verb; -ρηναί could be almost any infinitive.

¹⁴ ἐγκα[. . .]: probably ἐγκα[λουμένων], “of the accused.” Common in other complaint papyri (P.Mich. 5.226.39, 5.229.30).

¹⁵ φων[. . .]: the lacuna only allows for a few letters, so the word is likely φωνῆς. In legal contexts, φωνή can refer to a declaration or verbal testimony. P.Ryl. 2.77.48, SB.16.12692.74.

¹⁶ Schubart (in Olsson, 36) proposed ὅτι χρή διὰ τ (“for it is necessary because of the”) in the lacuna; but it is then difficult to account for οὐ μόνον χρεοκοπηθῆναι (“not *only* to be cheated. . .”). The missing phrase may instead be some wording expressing difficulty: “[It is difficult, because of] the severe flood, not only to be cheated but to have to make an expenditure.” In any case, these lines are about the current business difficulties and the necessity for resolving this problem.

¹⁷ ἀναβάσις: in Egyptian papyri, usually the annual Nile flood (SB 22.15622) or a voyage upstream (P.Oxy. 4.742.6). The flood is most likely in this context. Olsson, 35.

¹⁸ χορήγησις: expenditure (BGU 1208 cited in BrillDAG). Perhaps provisions for the livestock that are not arriving at their destination on time?

¹⁹ μεταλαμβάνειν: to hear, learn. Olsson, 36.

²⁰ πολυτίμητος: honorific, “much honored.” But nearly every other honorific use of πολυτίμητος is with the names of gods, not people (Plut. Mul. Virt. 258b8). This suggests that the author is being sarcastic, as perhaps in the only other place where it is used with a person, Plato Euth. 296d. Πολυτίμητος is however used of people in a non-honorific way (that is, not as a title).

²¹ εἰς τὸ + infinitive: Probably connected with the following clauses. “So that he might not delay. . . I visited him. . .”

²² There is some ambiguity here because of the lacuna. Another possible translation: “Concerning whom, since you wrote not to delay, after I myself arrived in Dikomia, I met with him.”

22	ἠσπασάμη[ν ²³ ἐπιθ]έντος ²⁴ αὐτοῦ πιττάκιον καὶ	I visited him. When he delivered a document and
23	ἀποτριβομένου ²⁵ μου καὶ ἵνα μὴ ἐκπέση ²⁶ ἀπο-	I got rid (of him?), and, so that he might not fail
24	τετρεῖφθαί με αὐτὸ ἐδεξάμην. ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆς	to get rid of me, I accepted it. ²⁷ But so that you may know
25	τὸ ὄρθριον ²⁸ τοῦ ἀνθρώ(που), πέπομφά σοι ἦν τέθειται ²⁹	in the morning, I have sent to you the wage contract of the man ³⁰ that has been set,
26	μίσθωσιν, περὶ ὧ[ν ἐ]μνήσθην ἀλιευτ ³¹ [. . .]. σιολας ³²	concerning which matters I reminded the fishermen [?][... letters?]
27	δὲ ὑπὸ τούτου πρὸς Π]ετεῆ(σιν) μὴ προσεχ[. . .]	and by this [letter?] not to provide (payment) to Peteesis
28	παρ' ἡμῶν. Τὸ δὲ [πά]ντων χεῖρω τ[ὸ] του	from us. And worst of all the [5 lett.] ?
29	π[ο]ρθημεῖον ³³ τῆς [τῶν] προβάτων ὠ[νῆς . . .] ης	cost of passage for the livestock [...]
30	τῶν ³⁴ ἕως τοῦ συνκεχωρισμένου ³⁵ τ. . . τασνωε ³⁶ . [. . .]	of the fees up to the agreed upon ??
31	ὧν ἑπιβαλομένου Ἀντιλόχου καθάπερ ἐπὶ	that (?) Antilochos imposed, just as in
32	τῶν ἄλλων διαμισθῶν, ³⁷ καὶ σοῦ μνησθέντος δαν ³⁸	the other cases to lease, and after you at length reminded
33	τοῦτον συγχρησάμενον τῷ ἄνωθεν ἐπιν ³⁹ . . . αὶ τῆ	him (about?) making use of the upper dock

²³ ἀσπάζομαι: to visit. Olsson, 36.

²⁴ ἐπιθέντος = ἐπιστέλλω, to send.

²⁵ ἀποτρίβω: middle, to receive as loss? to refuse? to rid oneself, brush aside, abolish?

²⁶ ἐκπέση = προσπέση, to fail, fall short. Olsson, 36.

²⁷ This section is very difficult. Likely it is sarcastic – “I wanted to get rid of him, and he wanted to get rid of me, so I helped him out by taking the letter.” Or if the financial sense of ἀποτρίβω is preferred, the author wants to make sure that Poilis incurs a loss just as the author is incurring a loss.

²⁸ Olsson (36): “so that you know it, early in the morning...” τὸ ὄρθριον elsewhere always means “early” or “in the morning.” Another suggestion by the Schubart, the first editor: “but so that you may know the first thing this man does each morning” i.e. “the kind of man he is.” But this is an unattested idiomatic meaning of τὸ ὄρθριον, so the translation “early” is preferred.

²⁹ Olsson (36): “I sent you the contract which the man finalized.” Τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (of the man) would then be out of place, but it seems to be the best way to make sense of a difficult phrase. τέθειται could be middle, “he set,” or passive, “has been set.”

³⁰ Either the original contract for Calatytis, or an updated contract.

³¹ ἀλιευτ: probably ἀλιευτάς or ἀλιευτικούς, fishermen. Their role is not clear, although perhaps not surprising in a letter about shipping on the Nile.

³² [...]σιολας is very smudged; possibly ἐπίστολας, but that leaves little room for the ending of ἀλιευτ. Maybe Ἰόλας, a male name (O.Bodl.1.285), but the case ending would then be wrong for the context.

³³ πορθημεῖον: Schubart suggests that this refers to the rental of the ferry itself. Olsson, 36.

³⁴ The τῶν of line 30 may be completed with ὧν of line 31: “of the fees up to the agreed upon...”

³⁵ συγχωρίζω – “to agree upon,” often found in papyri contracts (BGU 2.584.5, P.Kron. 48.11). This papyrus is cited for the meaning “separated” in BrillDAG; but that meaning is difficult to make sense of in this context.

³⁶ τασνωε is not a normal Greek combination of letters. However, the Egyptian names Τασνώς, Σεντασνώς and Ψεντασνώς show up in several other papyri (P. Princ. 2.52, SB 1.5378). It’s not clear if the ending ω or ωε is an acceptable case ending for those names, however.

³⁷ διαμισθῶω: to sublease, contract out; usually land (P.Ryl. 2.77.36). Here it refers to the lease for the docks.

³⁸ δαν: probably an alternate spelling of δήν, “at length.” BrillDAG, s.v. δήν.

³⁹ ἐπιν...αι: probably ἐπίνεια, port or landing.

34	χρεία σου διαμισθοῦν δόξας συγκαταριθμεῖσθαι, ⁴⁰ τῆς	to lease out for your use, expecting it to be included in the number,
35	ληγομένης ὠνῆς σοῦ μνησθέντος εἰς τὸ νῦν(ν)	when you reminded (him) of the fee that is stopped for the present,
36	ἐν μηδενὶ ἀντ[ι]λογία	I was surprised that there was no argument. ⁴¹
37	γενηθῆ(ναι) ἐξέστην. Κάμοῦ	And since I
8	ἀθθεντηκότος πρὸς αὐτὸν	had exercised / asserted authority toward him, ⁴²
39	περιποιῆσαι ⁴³ Καλατύτει	he agreed within the hour to secure (for?)
40	τῶι ναυτικῶι ἐπὶ τῷ	Calatyti the boatman at the same fare. As for
41	αὐτῶι φόρῳ ἐν τῇ ὥρῳ	the
42	ἐπεχώρησεν. ⁴⁴ τὴν δὲ	
43	μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξηκολου-	insult/harm that followed after this,
44	θηκυῖαν ὕβριν μετα-	
45	πε[μ]φθεις ὑπὸ σοῦ ὁ	Calatyti, after being summoned by you,
46	[Καλατ]ύτις ἐξηγή-	explained it to me completely.
47	[σατό μ]οι ἀκεραίως. ⁴⁵	
48	[τὰ δὲ] ἄλλα χαριεῖ τοῦ σώμα(τος) ⁴⁶	As for the rest, take care of yourself
49	[ἐπι]με(λόμενος) ἵν' ὑγιένῃς, ὃ δὴ	being careful that you may be well,
50	μέγιστον ἡγοῦμ[αι].	which indeed I consider most important.
51	ἔρρω(σο). (ἔτους) δ [-ca.?-]	Farewell. Year 4 [...] ⁴⁷

Translation of Κάμοῦ ἀθθεντηκότος (line 38)

The precise meaning of ἀθθεντέω is of course debated, and is the primary reason for interest in BGU 1208. ἀθθεντηκότος is a perfect participle in a genitive absolute construction. A common way that a perfect tense functions is to describe a condition or state that exists because of a prior event. That seems to fit the context here. Tryphon did not inherently have authority over Antiochos, but in the recent past he brought to bear two means of authority: he made a complaint to the *strategos*, and he and Asclepiades withheld payment on this contract. These two actions result in him now having some ability to push Antiochos to agree to terms that Tryphon thinks are fair. The translation “Since I had exercised authority” or “since I had asserted authority” thus seem to be consistent with this sense of the passage.

⁴⁰ συγκαταριθμέω: BrillDAG cites this papyrus as an example of the meaning “to be included.” Its use here suggests that in the past, the dock fees had been included as part of the total passage fees, but now Antiochos was charging for it separately.

⁴¹ Lit., “argument in nothing.” Probably sarcastic: “when we decided not to pay him, I was amazed that he suddenly agreed to the terms!”

⁴² See detailed comments below on the translation of the phrase Κάμοῦ ἀθθεντηκότος πρὸς αὐτὸν, “since I had exercised / asserted authority toward him.”

⁴³ περιποιέω: “to secure,” but an accusative object is expected, “to secure [the contract? fee?] for Calatyti...” Or the author may be using the wrong ending (as in line 7) in which case the translation would be “to secure Calatyti...”

⁴⁴ ἐπιχωρέω: often used in the papyri in the sense of conceding to a legal obligation or to the terms of a contract (P.Cair.Zen. 1.59093.4, P.Oxy.12.1434.12-15, P.Enteux. 15.5).

⁴⁵ ἀκεραίως – Could also mean “sincerely” or “honestly.” The meaning “completely” seems to fit better and is attested in Cic. *Ep. Att.* 398.2, Dio Chrys. *Disc.* 34.2.37.

⁴⁶ All of the phrases in lines 48-51 are fairly standard parts of letter endings. μέγιστον ἡγοῦμαι is primarily in 1st century BC letters.

⁴⁷ “Year 4” refers to Augustus’ reign, so the letter was written in 27-26 BC. The month and date were lost in this papyrus, but are included in the other family letters, BGU 1203-1209.

Al Wolters suggests the translation “since I had authority.”⁴⁸ This is grammatically possible with a perfect tense (see for example ἐξουσίαν ἐσχηκότες, “having authority” in 3 Macc 7:21). However, it does not seem to fit the situation of the letter as well, since Tryphon did not have inherent authority over Antiochos.

Philip Payne says that ἀθηντέω has the meaning “to assume authority” here and in all other occurrences.⁴⁹ While that is beyond the scope of this translation of BGU 1208, it is worthwhile to note that other verbs related to authority, such as ἐξουσιάζω, βασιλεύω and κυριεύω, do not specify within their meaning whether the authority is assumed or exercised, or whether the authority was legitimate or not. That sort of nuance is provided by the context, not by the word itself. For example, βασιλεύω in the aorist means both “to become king” and “to rule as king” in 2 Kgdms 2:10. Κυριεύω can mean “to gain the lordship over” (LXX Josh 15:16, Diod. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 15.90.3.10) or “to rule over” (LXX Josh 24:33b) depending on the tense and the context. Payne says that “the grammatical construction and content of BGU 1208 imply that the bystander took authority into his own hands.”⁵⁰ However, in the context of this letter, Tryphon’s legal actions have given him grounds to compel the negotiations in his favor. Tryphon believes those grounds are legitimate, and Antiochos apparently had to agree.

Belleville suggests the translation “since I took a firm stand with him.”⁵¹ Although “firm stand” gives the general idea of what Tryphon did, it does not adequately account for the legal steps that Tryphon has taken. It is not merely that Tryphon spoke firmly on this occasion; he had previously taken legal actions that gave him the advantage.

Translation of προς αὐτόν (line 38)

I have chosen the simple translation “toward him,” although more specific translations might be chosen. The general sense is that Tryphon had exercised or asserted authority with respect to Antiochos, or directed at Antiochos. Verbs related to authority often use a genitive for those who are under that authority (Matt 2:22, Mark 10:42, 1 Cor 7:4, 1 Tim 2:22), but it is not out of the ordinary to use prepositional phrases instead.⁵² Wolters reasonably suggests that the author used πρὸς here instead of a genitive since another genitive after κάμοῦ ἀθηντηκότος would create some ambiguity about who was exercising authority over whom.⁵³ Using πρὸς with verbs of authority can describe the application of authority that is against the person ruled (Plut. *Sulla* 5.2.7), but it can also describe authority that is neutral or positive (Jos. *Ant.* 2.52.4, perhaps Eur. *Iph.* 337). My translation “toward him” is neutral, although clearly Tryphon believes that the application of authority is to his own advantage, not to Antiochos’ advantage.

Response to Two Other Explanations of BGU 1208

Philip Payne’s analysis of this papyrus⁵⁴ has a number of unlikely claims repeated from other scholars; this is somewhat understandable considering the fragmented papyrus; but it does not appear that they have interacted enough with other portions of this letter or with the other family letters.

- Payne relies on an analysis by John Werner saying that “a slave of Asclepiades refused to pay Calatytis his boat fare.” However, no slave is mentioned in the papyrus; and the dispute is about

⁴⁸ A. Wolters, “The Meaning of Αἰθεντέω” in Köstenberger and Schreiner (eds.) *Women in the Church* (Crossway 2016), 74-76. See below for a response to Wolters’ reconstruction of the letter’s situation.

⁴⁹ P. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters*. (Zondervan, 2009) 369-370.

⁵⁰ Payne, 370.

⁵¹ L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15” in Pierce and Westfall (eds), *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 3rd edn. (IVP 2021), 218

⁵² Verbs of authority can also use prepositions such as ἐπί to refer to the objects of authority (Luke 1:42, Rom 5:14).

⁵³ Wolters, 76

⁵⁴ Payne, 365-70.

overall costs, not just a pilot's fare. Since the papyri normally introduce slaves in the format X δοῦλος τοῦ Y ("X slave of Y"; BGU 4.1139.12, 16.2604.5, O.Wilck 1400.1 and many others), the lack of "slave" with any of the names in this letter means it is unlikely that any slaves are mentioned.

- Payne says that "Tryphon writes an apology to the slave's owner..." However, Tryphon is not writing to a slave's owner, but to his own boss, a man he is close enough to call "brother." Further, this is not an apology letter at all. It would be more accurate to say that Tryphon is reporting some limited success in resolving several business difficulties.
- Payne claims that "when he intervened, acting with self-assumed authority (αὐθεντηκότος) over the slave, he consented within the hour." The person who consented is Antilochos. He apparently set prices over docking and negotiated other aspects of the contract, and is not a slave.
- Payne claims that "Calatytiis returned to him with a report of the insolent failure of the debtor to execute that agreement." But the letter is actually unclear who committed the insult or harm, or what the insult was. It is even possible that Calatytiis committed the insult or is accused of it. The letter is clear that the insult happened later (μετὰ ταῦτα), after the agreement was concluded, and that Tryphon accepted Calatytiis' explanation.
- Payne suggests that Tryphon did not have any authority over the (mislabeled) slave, and so he must have assumed that authority improperly. Without assuming much about the meaning of αὐθεντέω, it is clear that Tryphon's previous legal actions explain Tryphon's authority. Tryphon's overall tone suggests that he believes his actions were correct, and he believes the other side is guilty of fraud.
- Payne quotes Baldwin, "αὐθεντέω in Ancient Greek," WCFA 74: "the boatman gets his 'full fare.'" The letter actually says that the boatman received "the same rate." In the context of Tryphon's concern for the budget, and Antilochos' attempt to raise rates, it is just as likely that Tryphon is reporting that he kept the charge down to a previously negotiated rate.

Many of Wolters' comments on BGU 1208 are quite reasonable.⁵⁵ However, his "hypothetical background" does not seem to fit information found in the rest of this letter or in the other family letters. Wolters acknowledges that his reconstruction is tentative.

- Wolters suggests that "Tryphon, the writer of the letter, was a senior official of the Roman taxation bureaucracy..." But this letter, as well as the two other letters that include Tryphon, make it clear that he was not a government official, but part of Asclepiades' business. If he were a tax official, he would use his title, as is often found in the papyri (BGU 6.1259.17, O.Bodl. 2.653.1, 2.1014.1). There is no room in the lacuna with Tryphon's name to include any title. In BGU 1203, Tryphon is called "the brother" and in BGU 1209, Tryphon does not use a title.
- Wolters proposes that Antilochos was "the tax-farmer (τελώνης) who dealt directly with Kalatytiis." But Antilochos is not described as a τελώνης in the letter, so this seems unlikely. Antilochos seems to have had some local control over dock rentals as well as charges for the ferry and the boatman wages; these are not normal responsibilities of a tax-farmer. If he is managing the docks, he is likely a government official, but not a tax official.
- In support of the idea that Antilochos was a tax-farmer, Wolters quotes Wallace: "in BGU. IV. 1188 the rent (φόρος) for the concession of a ferry is paid to tax-farmers (τελώναι)." But this seems to be an incorrect understanding of BGU 1188.⁵⁶ BGU 1188 is an appeal from a tax-district to a *strategos* for help on a tax-related matter. The district paid a special assessment tax for dike repairs; this was collected by a cargo surcharge on the local ferry. The ferry pilot then paid that tax, a portion

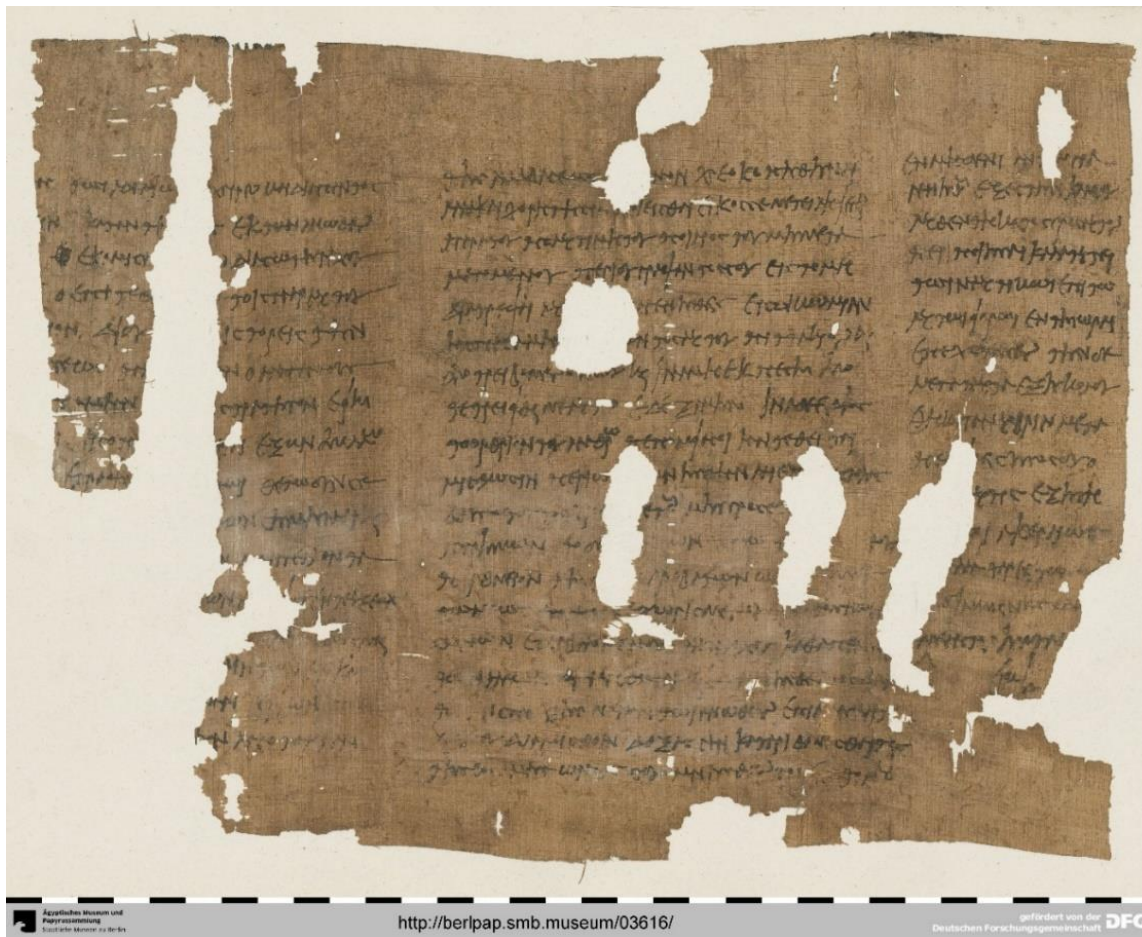
⁵⁵ A. Wolters, "The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω," 74-76.

⁵⁶ I have provided a translation of BGU 1188 in Appendix 2.

of the total ferry fees, to the tax-farmers. It does not appear that any rent was paid to tax-farmers in this letter. Further, the word φόρος does not appear in BGU 1188.

- Wolters says that Tryphon is concerned to protect Calatyti from losing money. But the letter suggests that Tryphon's primary concern is that Asclepiades and company not lose any money during a difficult season. It is possible that Tryphon is concerned about Calatyti, but the letter does not make that clear. Tryphon wants to make sure that they don't pay more than is necessary, and that the docking fees are included in the contract.
- Wolters says that "the noun αὐθέντης was sometimes used as the designation of a senior revenue official..." Wolters mentions a papyri occurrence with this meaning of αὐθέντης, but no examples of αὐθεντέω with the meaning "to function as an αὐθέντης." In any case, in this context αὐθεντέω cannot mean "to function as a revenue official," since we know that Tryphon was a family business associate, not a tax official.

Appendix 1: Photo of Papyrus BGU 1208



Appendix 2: Other Relevant Papyri

The following are my cursory translations of other relevant papyri. BGU 1188 is a document that mentions ferry taxes, quoted in Wolters (see discussion above). BGU 1203-1209 are other letters of the Asclepiades family business; these are helpful for understanding the family relations and business, and also show something about Tryphon's writing style.

BGU 1188 To Herakleides the *strategos* and ἐπὶ τῶν προσόδων;⁵⁷ from Castor the gymnasiarch of Koma and from the others who live in the district and the other farmers and the royal farmers who live in the district. Still from the 16th year of Caesar, since in the district there are ongoing public repairs... because of breaches in the dike, there is in our district a fare for ferrying, through which both the summer works and all the other sowing in this we made [the payments] while ferrying. Although the ferryman Patouontis paid to the public 300 pure drachmas on this money⁵⁸ for the recruitment tax⁵⁹... Apollos, making use of ... after arriving in the district with a soldier, occupied his house, and took the two new garments that he found there and led him away although he owed nothing; he, being debilitated by the tax collectors, has appealed to us...

BGU 1203 Asclepiades to Tryphon the brother, greetings and health, just as I pray. The letters that... and after receiving the wine... then the upper (floor) that is called... Since then also the rest... has declined and you around the... it is moved[?], you will do well to write... to your sister⁶⁰ and to Aryote the child... so that he may deliver to us, [...] ? [...] we have sent [a letter?] as you take possession [?]. Take care of yourself, that you may be well. Farewell. Year 2, Phaophi 17.

BGU 1204 Isidora to Asclepiades my brother. Greetings and be well always. I have enclosed the letters to Paniskos⁶¹ to you. Send quickly an official reply about everything departing [?] by the ship. And also be honest, until it arrives, and take care of yourself that you may be well, which is most important. Farewell. Year 3, Phaophi 5. Send the bedspread for the child.

BGU 1205 Received in year 4, Athur 8. Isidora to Asklas my brother. Greetings and be well always, just as I pray. I have received the letters that you have written through [...] on the 27th. You properly want to write the request to me about the lentils and peas. For not fitting to yourselves [?], you have written to Paniskos, for we have sold, when [...] we have not sold, nevertheless, do as you wish. Only be honest in the count and in the entry, so that if Paniskos does not arrive at Memphis you may be present [?]. I have sent to you the price of the bedspread, 120 drachmas, and you will decide, if you come, who will receive it. It is not worth [?] more. Give Alexion the dyer in my name one bedspread for the child Artemas for 100 drachmas, filled [?], not empty. Do not detain Acheilles, but give him the two boats because he is going to Hermopolis, and take care of yourself so that you may be well. Farewell. Year 3, Phaophi 28.

BGU 1206 Isidora to Asklas my brother. Greetings and always be well, just as I pray. I have received the [letters] you have written. Paniskos the brother⁶² has written Noumenis to send Philoinas the steward to him quickly. Since the province has not yet indicated what has transpired concerning Areos and Patr... write to him... with respect to the account [?] list for wheat. Both you and Aramoites be honest in the entry of the price of the lentils and spelt. If any other thing occurs in addition to this, I will let you know. And take care of yourself so that you may be well. Farewell. Year 3, Athur 6.

⁵⁷ ἐπὶ τῶν προσόδων is a tax administration term of uncertain meaning; possibly “superintendent of revenues.” See BGU 4.1187, 8.1773, P.Oxy.2.260

⁵⁸ That is, 300 drachmas was the tax on the larger amount collected from ferry passage fees.

⁵⁹ This is probably the labor fee for the dike repairs.

⁶⁰ Tryphon calls Isidora “your (Asclepiades’) sister,” evidence that Tryphon is not a biological brother to Asclepiades or Isidora.

⁶¹ Paniskos is another brother of Asclepiades, along with Petechon (BGU 1209).

⁶² Isidora appears to use the wrong case ending for ἀδελφός (ὁ ἀδελφὸς Πανίσκος), perhaps as Tryphon uses the wrong endings in BGU 1208.7, 39.

BGU 1207 Received in Year 3, Athur 9, through Ptolion. Isidora to Asclepiades my brother, greetings and health always. [...] [what] you have written I have received: the red bedcovers [amount linens]10 gray 4 bedcovers [word referring to color or material] 2. Concerning Paniskos our brother, Noumenios has sent Philon his brother to him quickly/ diligently at the provincial [offices]. Therefore you and Aramos be honest and enter the price of the lentils and spelt. As for the rest, take care of yourself so that you may be well. Farewell. Year 3, Athur 3. If anything occurs in addition I will let you know. If it seems good continue [?] until [...] I write. I have received through the agent 2800 silver drachmas and Ptolion receives an account with you [?] [...] if then you send the money in part... one twentieth payment. To Asclepiades.

BGU 1209 Received [...] year 7, Phamenoth 24. Tryphon to Asclepiades the brother, greetings and health. After receiving the letter from you regarding those who are displaying (in court) the possessions of Petechon, your fortunate (deceased) brother, and our friend,⁶³ I neglected no effort or difficulty, until I identified each thing of Nearchos the child who follows [in the inheritance]. Since then with the gods nothing has advanced, and from his own things [?] the beginning of the matter has happened, three copper pieces being spent, the matter will be [?], whenever you receive the letter, bring in the orphan and his mother, so that with the amazement of those who dare (challenge?) we may have them ready for the accusation / charges at the refutation, they may again follow those appointed [over the estate] by us.

Appendix 3: Translation of Bror Olsson's comments on BGU 1208

Bror Olsson's comments on BGU 1208 include the notes from the original papyrus editor, W. Schubart.⁶⁴ Many of the discussions of BGU 1208 seem unaware of these notes, so it may be useful to have them available and translated from German.⁶⁵

BGU IV 1203–9 consists of seven letters which all belong to the correspondence of a single family and were found glued together. Apparently they were preserved in the archive of the house. The main person seems to have been the wealthy freighter/charterer (*Reeder*) Asklepiades (aka Asklas), to whom apparently all the letters with the exception of 1203 were addressed; cf. 1205 and 1206. (FN: that the freighter/charterer was not always the owner of the ship that was loaded by him is demonstrated by San Nicolo, *Äg. Vereinswesen etc. I*, 135 f.). However, the most clearly appearing personality is Asklepiades' sister Isidora. One gets a fairly clear picture of her in the letters that come from her hand. She seems to have been an energetic and active woman, who eagerly participated in the management of the family property. Now she gives orders about the vehicles (1205), now about the collection of outstanding claims (1207). From time to time, her orders have a somewhat threatening tone (1205) and sometimes she uses strongly critical expressions (1205). From all this it ought to emerge that Isidora cannot well have been wife and sister of Asklepiades at the same time.

Another brother seems to have been Paniskos, to whom Isidora also sends letters (1204) and finally the siblings had another brother, Petechon, who was dead at this point (1209). Tryphon, on the other hand, from whom the last-mentioned letter came, ought not to have been a brother of the above-mentioned siblings; cf. 1209.5–6: “ἀδελφοῦ σοῦ, ἡμῶν δὲ φίλου.”

1209 has a special quality. It treats not the management of affairs but rather a lawsuit about an inheritance against the widow and child of Asklepiades' and Isidora's brother Petechon. Their inheritance is in danger of being confiscated, perhaps on the instigation of greedy relatives. On the side of the widow

⁶³ This comment, that Paniskos is “your (Asclepiades’) brother, our (Tryphon’s) friend” is further evidence that Tryphon is an honorary brother, not a biological brother to Asclepiades. Olsson, 24.

⁶⁴ Bror Olsson, *Papyrusbriefe aus der Frühesten Römerzeit* (Weidman, 1926), 24-25, 35-37.

⁶⁵ I am thankful to Michael McOsker for translating Bror Olsson's work from German.

and child Tryphon and Asklepiades appear. Through the sudden appearance of the widow and child before the court, Asklepiades and Tryphon hope to shock their opponents. One cannot however fully fight off the suspicion that all this well-wishing does not spring from the involved parties' exclusively selfless motives, but instead that it has its origin in the prospect that they might get something from the inheritance.

Unfortunately, several letters, especially 1203 and 1208, are fragmentary and hard to understand. As a letter collection which originates from a single family, it possess great value, although it cannot compete with P. Fay. 110–23 in this connection. For individual details, see the notes.

Notes:

(I've omitted the paleographical notes. -McO)

As a consequence of the very fragmentary condition and the difficult-to-understand content of the papyrus, translation of the whole is not possible, so I limit myself to the following notes:

Col. 1

2 καταντή[σα]: in Polybius, Diodorus, LXX, NT and the papyri, καταντᾶν often means “come, arrive.” P. Teb. I 59.2 (99 BC): καταντήσαντος...εἰς τὴν πόλιν Σοκονώφεως. Cf. ἀπαντᾶν.

4. ἐπιτέθ[εισα]: ἐπιτίθημι here = ἐπιστέλλω

5. πιττάκιον: “Here this means writing-tablet,” Schubart. Cf., however, P. Oxy. II 297.4 “account-book.” ἱστορεῖς or perhaps ἱστόρεις?

10. σημήναι: the Attic form; BGU IV 1097.17 has the Hellenistic form ἐσήμανα.

16/17: τὴν ἀποτομίαν τῆς ἀναβάσεως: ἀποτομία is typically said only of the strictness of laws. Diodorus XII 16,3: ἅ. τῶν νόμων, P. Oxy. II.237, VII 40 (AD 186) ἢ τῶν νόμων ἅ. Here, apparently, the word refers to the violence of the flood. Cf. Corp. Gloss. Lat. II 196,16: *temeritas*, ἀθθαδία, ἀποτομία.

col. 2

17: Schubart suggests e.g. “ὄτι χρὴ διὰ τὴν... “that it is necessary on account of the rising of the Nile not to be cheated.”

18: χορήγησιν ποεῖσθαι: probably “procure food,” cf. χορηγία. The violent flood provoked a bad harvest. μεταλαμβάνειν = hear, learn, *accipere*. LXX, Aristeas (Wendland, index), pap.; Witkowski 57,6 records examples.

19/20: τοῦ μὴ μεταμελομένου “who doesn't change his mind.” Polybius IV 50,6, BGU 1040,19 (2nd century AD): χαίρω, ὅτι μοι ταῦτα ἐποίησας ἐμου μεταμελομένου περὶ μηδενός.

20: περὶ οὗ γράψαντος σου κτλ. A genitive absolute inside a relative clause is not foreign to the Classical language; Kühner-Gerth II 101. In Polybius I found the following example: V 49.1: ἐν ᾧ καιρῷ πάλιν ἀθροισθέντος τοῦ συνεδρίου (and several more genitives absolute) πάλιν Ἑρμείας ἤρξατο λοιδορεῖν. P. Tor. 1, II 2f. (Mitteis Chr. 31; 116 BC) should probably be understood similarly: ὑπὲρ ὧν μεταλαβόντος μου παρεγενήθην εἰς τὴν Διόσπολιν.

21: διατρέψαι = διατρίψαι? Δικωμία a village, apparently in the Heracleopolite Nome. Hibeh I 47, 29. Schubart.

22: ἠσπασάμην “visited” Cf. Acts 25.13 Ἀγρίππας ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ Βερνίκη (sic) κατήνησαν εἰς Καισαρίαν ἀσπασάμενοι τὸν Φῆστον. BGU I 248,12.

ἐπιθέντος αὐτοῦ πιττάκιον cf. ll. 4-5.

23 ἀποτριβεσθαι in the sense of “try to get rid of something.”

ἐκπέσει = προσπέσει

25: τὸ ὄρθριον: Schubart translates “his morning greeting” (= his first action?. Another idea seems possible, perhaps, preferable, to that of Schubart: τὸ ὄρθριον is adverbial and τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is to be taken with μίσθωσιν. Thus I translate: “so that you know it, early this morning I sent you the contract which the man

finalized.” The word order is then the only thing which is a little unusual. ὄρθριον is the Attic form; cf. Phrynichus XXXIV: ὀρθρινός οὐ, ἀλλ’ ὄρθριος χωρὶς τοῦ ν.

29f. “This can only be about the rent of the ferry,” Schubart. Cf. πορθμεῖον (l. 29) and l. 40f.

col. 3

38 ἀθρονηκός: cf. Hesychius: ἀθρονεῖν· ἐξουσιάζειν, “have power, be able,” and Deissman L. v. O. 69f.

41: ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ: Swedish “på stunden,” “immediately”

47: ἀκεραίως “evenhandedly, unbiasedly, uprightly”

48: Cf P. Long I 42,31 (S. 30; Witkowski 35; 168 BC): χαριεῖ δὲ καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἐπιμελόμενος. Regarding this circumlocution for the regular ἐπιμέλου, cf. Ziemann 314f. Cf. P. Oxy. VII 1061,20, P. Oxy. II 292,9.