Traces of a notarial signature in BGU III 997 – a deliberate removal?

Marja Vierros*

Abstract: This article provides a new reading of a notarial signature in papyrus BGU III 997, a copy of an agronomic sale from the Ptolemaic period. The signature was not transcribed in the original edition since only traces of it survive and the papyrus seems blank and intact at that place. A closer examination reveals that only the upper layer of the papyrus has been peeled off. How, when, and why the alteration took place, remains unsolved.

Keywords: notarial signature, Ptolemaic period, Pathyris, sale

DOI 10.1515/apf-2017-0004

The papyrus BGU III 997 is a copy of a notarial provisory sale document written in Pathyris in 103 BCE. The papyrus is housed in the Berlin papyrus collection with the inventory number P.9001.1 When I studied the handwriting of the original papyrus, I discovered some ink traces in the place where the notarial signature would normally be, but which were not mentioned in the original edition, nor have they been mentioned later as far as I know. At a quick glance, the papyrus seems intact and empty at that place, but a closer examination reveals that a strip of the upper layer of the papyrus has been torn away precisely where the notarial signature had been, leaving only a few ink traces below and above the torn piece,

* Kontakt: Marja Vierros, University of Helsinki, Department of World Cultures, P.O. Box 24 (Unioninkatu 40A), FIN-00014 Helsinki, Finland <marja.vierros@helsinki.fi>

1 A good quality image has recently been made available online at <http://www2.smb.museum/beripapi/index.php/02579/>. I warmly thank Dr. Marius Gerhardt for his help during my visit to the papyrus collection at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.
and at the end we see traces of the word κεκρημ(ματικα) around the kollesis (the kollesis runs approximately where the epsilon of κεκρημ was).²

The handwriting of the document presents features belonging to the so-called “Hermias-hand”, which is the hand that wrote the majority of the documents in the name of the notary Hermias at Pathyris (agoranomos in 109–98 BCE).³ This sale was written in the name of Hermias, as is stated in the contract proper (col. 2, l. 4): δι’ Ἐρμίου τοῦ παρὰ Πανίσκου ἀγορανόμου, “before Hermias, the representative of Paniskos, agoranomos”. Therefore, the signature we expect to see in the lacuna is of the form: Ἐρμίας δὲ παρὰ Πανίσκου κεκρημ(ματικα).

The traces to be added to the edition for column 2, as line 12, are:

[Ἐ]ρμίας δὲ παρὰ Πανίσκου κεκρημ(ματικα)

I. Hermias, the representative of Paniskos, has dealt with the matter.

The traces of the rho and mu at the beginning are small, and could be other letters as well, but they do seem to be letters that come below the line. The trace of rho in παις[ά]μι[τ] is most likely the tail of a rho (but phi or an exceptionally long iota cannot be ruled out). The kappa of κεκρημ(ματικα) is the upper stroke above the tear, but the kollesis runs vertically where the epsilon was, and the rupture becomes more narrow after the kollesis, so the rest of the traces are more clear. A lacuna follows κεκρημ(ματικα), but it is not expected that the text would have continued there.

**

The current document adds to the discussion on copies vs. originals in the notarial contracts in Upper Egypt from the Ptolemaic period.⁴ The document clearly states that it is a “copy of a sale”: the words ὁνήματα(ποιον) ὁνήματα(ποιον) are written on a separate line before the body of the text begins (col. 2, l. 1). I considered it strange that the copy did not have a signature: “It is not clear why the signature was missing in 90 [= BGU III 997].”⁵ Now we know that it was not missing, but there was a strange removal of the signature.

The interesting question is whether the alteration was happenstance or deliberate. If the first, it is strange that only this part of the papyrus has suffered such damage, and exactly where the signature was, especially since the papyrus is otherwise in good condition. It is true that the edge of the kollesis shows some peeling of the upper layer a bit downwards in the papyrus as well. But the current tear so clearly only affects the place where the signature had been that it seems unlikely to be explained as happenstance.

If the signature was removed on purpose, we must ponder upon why. It is possible that the document was first written with the intention that it was the original (which state of affairs would explain the existence of the scriptura interior in the margin [col. 1], an element not present in other copies from the Pathyrite area) and only later it was decided to consider it as a copy by adding the words “copy of a sale” above the first line of the contract proper. In fact, those words may be written by a different hand.⁶ In that case, however, the signature would not make the document less a copy; the agoranomic copies did usually contain a signature. Since this sale of a house was provisory, it merely functioned as a pledge of a loan. The sale was not executed, as the same house was used again as a pledge in another sale by the same person for a higher price two years later (BGU III 998).⁷ Paying back the loan in question could have provided a reason for invalidating the copy of the provisory sale.⁸ The need to annul a copy would depend on who possessed it and whether a copy could have been used as evidence. Still, the careful removal of only the signature seems like a too discreet way to invalidate a document, when the text could have

---

² On the agoranomic signature in the Ptolemaic period, see Marja Vierros, Bilingual Notaries in Hellenistic Egypt. A Study of Greek as a Second Language (Brüssel 2012) 78–9. The ID number used in Vierros for this document was 90.
⁴ Cf. Vierros, 98–100.
⁵ Vierros, 99; I had not seen the original nor a photo at that time, see List of photographs in Appendix A, p. 243.
⁶ The agoranomic hands are difficult to tell apart, and the letters that characterize the “Hermias-hand” are not present in these two words (e.g. kappa). But we may note that the eta is generally of more angular shape in the document proper.
⁸ I thank Prof. Dr. Fabian Reiter for introducing this idea.
been crossed out more clearly (e.g., with criss-crossing lines, cf. P.Corn. 6) or the copy destroyed altogether when the loan was paid back.

Another, perhaps overly imaginative, scenario also comes to mind: the signature was removed on purpose in order to attach it to some other document, to make it look like an agoronomic one. To prove such a forgery, we would, however, need to find the missing piece added to another papyrus.

«They beat him with bronze files» (UPZ I 7)
Le mot ξυστῆρ and les différents types de «racloirs»

Valérie Schram

Abstract: This article examines the meaning of the word ξυστῆρ and points out the different types of «scrapers» it may refer to according to the context. In view of the analogy of form and function between all the tools considered, this study discusses the lexical identification and actual use of specific implements such as the woodworking drawknife.

Keywords: scraper, draw hoe, stigil, drawknife, woodworking tools

DOI 10.1515/apf-2017-0005

Lorsque Ptolemaïos, Gréco-macédonien en réclusion depuis dix ans dans le Sarapieion de Memphis¹, se plaint au stratège de subir les violences


Les termes techniques sont traduits en anglais dans le tableau final de l’annexe 2; les figures renvoient à l’annexe 3.

¹ Au sujet de la pratique de la «réclusion» ou katoché au Sarapieion de Memphis, voir B. Legras, Les reclus grecs du Sarapieion de Memphis, Louvain, 2011.

* Kontakt: Valérie Schram, 89 rue Belliard, F-75018 Paris, France <valerie.schram@yahoo.fr>