

A LETTER FROM TERENTIANUS TO TASOCHARION¹

Craig A. Harvey *University of Michigan*

Abstract. — Fragment of a private letter from Karanis (P.Mich. inv. 5417a) with a possible connection to the Archive of Tiberianus.

Keywords: Karanis, Archive of Tiberianus, Terentianus, Tasoucharion

The papyrus presented here was found at the ancient village of Karanis, during the University of Michigan excavations in 1928. The fragment, P.Mich. inv. 5417a, comes from House C/B167 (figs. 1 and 2), the same house that produced the Archive of Tiberianus. This archive consists of a collection of Greek and Latin letters, mostly between Claudius Terentianus and his father, Claudius Tiberianus, that were found together in a storage niche under a staircase (locus D²) and date to the first quarter of the second century CE.² Most of the private letters that form this archive deal with the business and family affairs of Claudius Tiberianus, who is either the sender or addressee of all but one of the published letters. The exception (P.Mich. 8.481) is a letter between Terentianus and Tasoucharion. As a result of the prosopographical and archaeological connections between P.Mich. inv. 5417a and the Archive of Tiberianus, this fragment has previously been mentioned in several publications.³

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² TM Arch 54. See R.P. Stephan and A. Verhoogt, "Text and Context in the Archive of Tiberianus (Karanis, Egypt; 2nd century AD)," *BASP* 42 (2005) 189–201; S. Strassi, *L'archivio di Claudius Tiberianus da Karanis* (Berlin and New York 2008); P. Reinard, *Kommunikation und Ökonomie. Untersuchungen zu den privaten Papyrusbriefen aus dem kaiserzeitlichen Ägypten* (Rahden, Westfalen, 2016) 2.693–768.

³ Stephan and Verhoogt (n. 2) 197–199; Reinard (n. 2) n. 2682; Strassi (n. 2) 10 with n. 21, 63, n. 109, 95, n. 54, 101, n. 8, 135, n. 90; Strassi seems to conflate P.Mich. inv. 5417a with another fragment mentioned in P.Mich. 8, p. 71. The introduction to P.Mich. 8.481 contains the following remarks: "With this letter was found a small piece of another letter, written perhaps by the same hand. It contains nothing intelligible apart from fragments of



Fig. 1. Karanis site plan showing location of C167, Third Layer
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salutations and is therefore not transcribed here.” No photograph is known of *P.Mich.* 8.481, and thus the hand of the two letters cannot be compared. It seems unlikely, however, that the two papyri are the same. Not only does the description of the fragment mentioned in *P.Mich.* 8, p. 71 not match *P.Mich.* inv. 5417a, but the excavation records state that *P.Mich.* inv. 5417a was found in a separate locus from *P.Mich.* 8.481 and therefore could not have been described as being found with it.



Fig. 2. Plan of C167, Karanis, Third Layer

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P.Mich. inv. 5417a is recorded as coming from “high in the fill” of C/B167 L,⁴ where C/B is the occupational level, 167 is the house, and L is the locus.⁵ According to the architectural drawings, locus L was situated in the southwest corner of the courtyard, located east of the living quarters of the house (fig. 2). This fragment is the only papyrus recorded from this context; however, other finds from this same locus include a fragment of a cylindrical wooden box, a lamp (with a potter’s mark), a large bronze ring, a ceramic double bust of African men (with heads back-to-back), and a small glass bead.⁶

⁴ Both the Archive of Tiberianus and P.Mich. inv. 5417a had originally been recorded as coming from level B; however, a reexamination of the Karanis records revealed that the finds from the B and C levels were conflated, and it concluded that both the archive and P.Mich. inv. 5417a should instead be associated with occupation level C, see Stephan and Verhoogt (n. 2) 196–199.

⁵ For an explanation of the Karanis excavation labels see: W.G. Claytor and A. Verhoogt, *Papyri from Karanis: The Granary C123 (P. Mich. XXI)* (Ann Arbor 2018) xix–xx.

⁶ The small glass bead is held in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (KM 77397). The ceramic bust is in the Cairo Museum (J 65596) and has previously been published (without an image) by M.L. Allen, *The Terracotta Figurines from Karanis: A Study of Technique, Style and Chronology in Fayoumic Coroplastics 2* (unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan, 1985) cat. 108, 468–469. The other objects likely remain in Cairo.

There is a strong case to be made that P.Mich. inv. 5417a was once part of the Archive of Tiberianus. This letter, like a majority of the letters in the archive, was sent by Terentianus. It is also addressed to Tasoucharion, who is the recipient of another letter with an identical greeting (*P.Mich.* 8.481) found with the archive. This prosopographical connection, combined with the discovery of P.Mich. inv. 5417a in the same house as the Archive of Tiberianus, indicate that this letter was once part of the same collection of letters. P.Mich. inv. 5417a was most likely separated from the archive in antiquity and became part of the fill during the transition between occupation levels.⁷

P.Mich. inv. 5417a is 13.9 cm high and 22.8 cm wide. The full width of this papyrus is preserved, which includes a curiously wide right margin, measuring 10.2 cm. The left margin is 1.4 cm, and the top margin is 2.1 cm. All margins are irregular and contain stripped fibers. The papyrus, which is medium brown in color, is broken at the lower edge, where it becomes more fragmented and the ink more abraded. The papyrus preserves eleven lines in black ink, seven of which are partially legible. The *verso* is blank, except for a few traces of black ink that may form one or two illegible letters. The papyrus contains at least seven vertical fold lines at 2.5–3.5 cm intervals. Four small fragments are associated with this papyrus. Each are smaller than 1 cm² and contain no traces of ink.

Regarding the abnormally wide right margin of the papyrus, it is possible that this letter was originally intended to be double-columned, or that the extra papyrus was used as an outside cover to protect the letter while being transported. Another possibility is that Terentianus intended for this excess papyrus to be cut off and used by Tasoucharion for her response. In another letter to Tasoucharion (*P.Mich.* 8.481.35–36), Terentianus speaks of sending her papyrus so that she might write him back.

The hand of P.Mich. inv. 5417a is sloping and varied, with contrasting wide and narrow characters. The strokes are thick, and some letters contain serifs. There are few ligatures, though some exist with *alphas*, *epsilons*, *iotas*, and *sigmas*. *Alphas* have round bowls and, in some instances, have stems that are nearly horizontal. *Epsilons* are curved and narrow, *mus* are made with three strokes, *nus* are rendered as “flying,” *omicrons* are sometimes narrow and often float above the line, *sigmas* are upright,

⁷ Stephan and Verhoogt (n. 2) 198–199.

and the *upsilon* is “v”-shaped. The prosopographical and archaeological connections with the Archive of Tiberianus date P.Mich. inv. 5417a to the first quarter of the second century CE, which is also supported by its paleography. Similar handwriting is found in *P.Sarap.* 28 (dated 125 CE) and *P.Oxy.* 36.2754 (dated 111 CE). The handwriting also bears a strong resemblance to that of another letter from the Archive of Tiberianus (*P.Mich.* 8.479).

Turning to the text of P.Mich. inv. 5417a, there is a close parallel with that from *P.Mich.* 8.481 (also from the Archive of Tiberianus), in that the first two lines of both these letters are exactly the same. Unfortunately, no photograph of *P.Mich.* 8.481, which is held in Cairo, exists. Thus, it is impossible, at this time, to determine if these two letters were written by the same hand.

P.Mich. inv. 5417a begins with a formulaic greeting from Terentianus to Tasoucharion, whom he addresses as his sister.⁸ Terentianus seems to imply that he has already written, but it is not entirely clear to whom. What follows is mostly fragmented and lost, but there is mention of carrying and double bags.

P.Mich. inv. 5417a

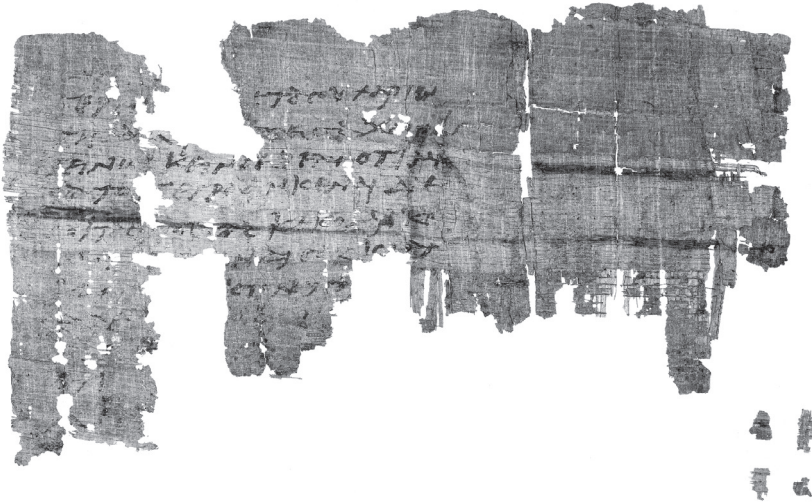
H × W = 13.9 × 22.8 cm

Karanis, Egypt,
first quarter of II CE

Τερεν[τιανὸς] Τασουχαρίω
 τῆ ἀδελφ[ῆ] πλεῖστα χαίρε\|v.
 γεινώσκειν σε θέλω ὅτι με-
 τὰ τὸ γεγραφεκέναι δ . ε
 5 σοι τὰς . . ο . . ας κεκομικέ-
 ναι [ca. 6] γ διακκίαγ
 . . . [ca. 4–5] κτογ . σα [ca. 4–5]
 . . α . [ca. 4–5] . . γ [ca. 5–6]
 [ca. 2] . [ca. 8] . [ca. 9]
 10 . τι [ca. 18]
 α . . [ca. 18]

3 l. γινώσκειν

⁸ Although the terms ἀδελφός/ἀδελφή were commonly used between spouses at this time and did not necessarily imply blood relation, Terentianus and Tasoucharion are considered to be siblings, Strassi (n. 2) 135; Reinard (n. 2) 704, 744–746.



“Terentianus to Tasoucharion, his sister, many greetings. I wish you to know that after having written to you ... has brought ... double bags ...”

1–2 As mentioned in the introduction, these first two lines are identical to the first two lines of *P.Mich.* 8.481.

1 Τασουχαρίω: The line through the *omega* could either be a correction or an attempt to fix the letter.

2 There seems to have been a small *vacat* between ἀδελφῆ and πλεῖστα.

3–4 ὅτι μετὰ τὸ γεγραφοκέναι: This is the only known example of this phrase in published papyri. A parallel for the use of the articular perfect infinitive can be found in *P.Tebt.* 1.34.108.

4 Only the *delta* of the last word in this line is discernible, although the last letter may be an *epsilon*. A possible reading could be δ’ αἰεῖ; however, this reading seems peculiar and an *iota* is not clearly visible.⁹

5 The accusative word going with τὰς is unclear. It is also uncertain whether this word is the direct object of γεγραφοκέναι or κεκόμικεν.

6 δισακκίαν: For discussion see, G. Husson, “Τὸ δισάκκιον/ῆ δισακκία: formes concurrentes du genre féminin parallèles aux neutres en -ιον,” *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*, vol. 3 (1984) 1297–1301.

⁹ I am grateful to Peter van Minnen for suggesting this possibility.