

THE DATE OF, AND NOTES

UPON PAPYRUS  $\wp^{123}$

copyright © 2010

Mr. Gary S. Dykes

first published in PDF format at:

[www.Biblical-data.org](http://www.Biblical-data.org)

As a matter of course, whenever I consider using a manuscript for my work, I usually make sure the manuscript is available to me in an accurate format or image. If it is a collation, it needs to be tested for accuracy. If it is an image, it must be sharp and one which clearly presents the text. If it is a transcription, it must be accurate. A short time ago, a papyrus (P<sup>123</sup>) became available to the world of scholarship. It was published in volume LXXII of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 2008. Color images of medium resolution were made available on-line. In the published volume, the fragments were presented in gray scale images, with a diplomatic transcription. The editing of the fragments was done by J. David Thomas the eminent Emeritus Professor of Papyrology, University of Durham. The date was indicated as IV (A.D. 300 – 400). His actual transcription of the visible letters seems accurate.

I have not read or even as yet seen the published volume. Consequently, my views are independent of Thomas, and should be seen as supplemental to his effort. [However, s.v. the end note which alters this.]

Since accuracy is a hopeful trademark of my work, I began my usual examination of these three small fragments which comprised a single leaf from a codex. The recto side has I Corinthians 14:31-34, and the verso has I Corinthians 15:3-6. A fortuitous text indeed! I decided to do a brief paper on the papyrus, and this present essay is the result.

The fragments were unearthed in the Oxyrhynchus digs, thus we suspect it was created in that once populous city. It was certainly written before the Arab invasions, and certainly some time after Paul dictated the epistle. Without even looking at the fragments, they can be thus generally ascribed to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> thru the late 6<sup>th</sup> century. Upon my first visual impression, the date could be narrowed down to 2<sup>nd</sup> thru 4<sup>th</sup> century. To be more specific I needed to analyze the script.

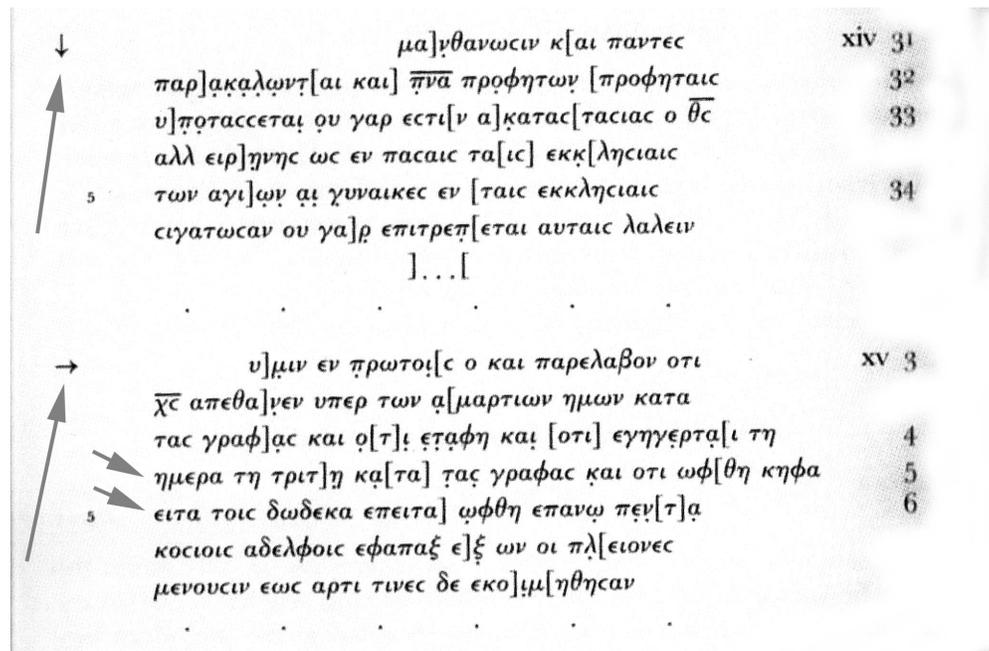
All I had to work with was the fairly decent color images, and the transcriptions of Thomas, as well as those of Dr. Kirk Jongkind, who also worked with images of the manuscript. Making an accurate reconstruction was my first priority. I make one as accurate as I can, one must fill-in missing words to compliment those which exist. The end results are very useful as the lines of text and the number of letters are clearly established, or accurately estimated. Such labor is not always appreciated or understood, as indicated by the comments of a (Mr.?) Schwender:

Something ought to be said about editorial practice here. For the most part, Dr. Jongkind offers a diplomatic transcript of the papyrus, something usually reserved in P.Oxy., and papyrological practice generally, for texts that are otherwise unknown (a new fr. of Sappho, say). When the text is known from other sources, a diplomatic transcript is generally regarded as superfluous.

G.W. Schwendner (comments made on the *Evangelical Textual Criticism Blog*, March 1, 2009).

Schwender saw no reason why one would make a rather formal transcription, if say the text was already well known (or, prior done by the editor?). In the case of P<sup>123</sup> the official editor presented a fine transcription of the recto side, BUT HIS VERSO SIDE CANNOT STAND, IT IS FLAWED. The problems lie largely in his **reconstruction of the text surrounding the visible letters**. Had it not been for the efforts of another examiner to first align the text as originally formatted on its leaf, then Thomas's misrepresentation would have prevailed until some other soul noted the inconsistency.

Below is Thomas's transcription/reconstruction of P<sup>123</sup>



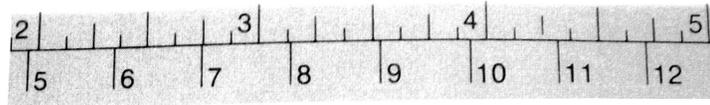
A casual observer might state that it appears quite proper. The transcription is letter for letter identical with the Nestle/Aland Greek New Testament. This fact seemed to please some examiners, but it raised a red flag in my mind, especially as I began to reconstruct the leaf and its original context. Below is my transcription of the verso, which shows the number of letters in each reconstructed line; each under-dot represents a partial letter or missing letter: (concerning the erroneous arrows ← and ↓ see end note).

VERSO – I Corinthians 15:3-6 ↓

1 ΓΑΡΥΜ]ΙΝΕΝΠΡΩΤΟ[ΙΣΟΚΑΙΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝΟΤΙΧ̄  
2 ΑΠΕΘΑ]ΝΕΝΥΠΕΡΤΩΝΑ[ΜΑΡΤΙΩΝΗΜΩΝΚΑΤΑ  
3 ΤΑΣΓΡΑΦΑ]ΣΚΑΙΟ[....]ΑΦΗΚΑΙ[...] ΕΓΗΓΕΡΤΑ[Ι  
4 ΤΗΗΜΕΡΑΤ]ΗΚ[...]ΓΡΑΦΑΣΧΑΙΟΤΙΩΦ[..  
5 ΚΗΦΛΕΙΤΑΤΟΙΣΤ̄Β]ΩΦΘΗΕΠΑΝΩΠΕ[.....  
6 ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙΣΕΦΑΠΛΑΞΕΞ]ΩΝΟΙΠΛ[ΕΙΟΝΕΣΜΕΝ  
7 ]..[

Now if I were to stop here at this point, my differences which conflict with Thomas's effort would require some explanation. The best explanation is visual, seeing the reconstructed text surrounding the visible text on the leaf. The next page shows this reconstruction, via *superimposing* the image over a proper text. There is no way that Thomas's reconstruction can fit into the actual fragment. Absolutely impossible as he has rendered it!

inches  
centimeters



per Mr. G. S. Dykes

1 ΓΑΡΥΜΝΕΛΠΡΟΤΙΣΟΚΑΙΠΑΡΕΛΑΒΟΝΤΙΧ̄Σ 34  
2 ΑΠΕΘΑΛΕΥΤΕΡΤΩΝΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝΗΜΩΝΚΑΤΑ 31  
3 ΤΑΣΓΡΑΦΑΣΤΙΟΤΙΕΤΑΡΗΝΙΟΤΙ 35  
4 ΤΗΜΕΡΑΤΗΚΑΤΑ 35  
5 ΚΗΦΑΕΙΤΑΤΟΙΣΙΒΩΤΤΕΝΤΑΚΟΙΟΙ 34  
6 ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙΣΕΦΑΠΞΕΞ 30  
7

I shall now discuss each line. After which we shall observe some paleographical aspects so as to tighten the parameters of the creation date.

VERSO - I Corinthians 15:3-6

LINE 1 - I would add to the beginning of the line to fill to the left margin. Thomas also does not place the abbreviated XC at lines end. My total letter count is thus higher than Thomas' 29, mine is 34.

LINE 2 - Nearly identical with Thomas, only he has the abbreviated XC added to the beginning. My letter count is 31 his is 33.

LINE 3 - Again nearly identical, though Thomas indicates more letters visible than I. (Remember he is working with the original manuscript). I must be more cautious, thus I read less and use under-dots more. He adds an article at lines end (TH), I do not. My line is 35 letters, his 37. There is a space before the final visible word εγγεραται. However the line fits well, as it has a number of narrow letters.

LINE 4 - It is in this line wherein Thomas and I part company. I found it impossible to fit his line into the fragments. Nor can the printed texts of Nestle/Aland nor the 38 fit. Our papyrus simply differs. Which is not rare for early Egyptian papyri, they often contain lines which are distinct from all other existing witnesses. For example papyri P<sup>16</sup> and P<sup>66</sup> and obviously this papyrus. The challenge is to add or subtract or alter to best fit the fragments, and to agree with the format of the fragments. I have presented my suggestion. Others certainly may exist, and I am not about to insist that my proposals are the final word. To meet the challenge, this is what I did:

I viewed as *not necessary*, the word for "third" (τριτη), as well as omitting the second article seen in the Nestle/Aland text (τη). In doing so, the reconstructed line fits quite well into the fragments. It should be mentioned here, that I moved the middle fragment right about 1/4 inch, which is clearly necessary for both sides of the manuscript. It was not correctly placed in the color images which appeared on-line. My letter count is 35, Thomas has 39.

The text is not any sort of quote. The primary word for the reference to the Scriptures would be "day", Christ was raised on the day prescribed by the Scriptures. Thus, one could perhaps see how this Egyptian scribe could alter or improve his text. I know of no other Greek manuscripts which omit "third". Consequently the value of this fragment is lessened. It is possible some other term or terms was omitted, perhaps "day", or several of the other articles: but certainly near the beginning of the line something must have been omitted in order for the line to match the existing letters visible in the manuscript. If "day" is omitted then we are left a nonsense line. Readers are encouraged to try their hand, and reconstruct the line. However it is done, Thomas's reconstruction of the context text is not correct. If I used my reconstructed text in a critical apparatus, I would indicate it as a "vid" reading, the omission of "third".

The scribe of our papyrus could have accidentally omitted the words as each has a similar ending (-τη), however, if this is an error on his/her part, then another major error occurs in the following line. In light of these "omissions", one is inclined to suppose that the changes were intentional, or accurately reflected his/her exemplar. And as prior stated, as yet, no known manuscripts omit these words.

LINE 5 - In this line Thomas shows 28 letters, which if one tries to place them into the fragment (superimposing them) one would soon learn that Thomas's reconstruction again cannot stand. He cannot squeeze 20 letters at the beginning of the line, prior to the visible -ωφθη. Even when δωδεκα is properly abbreviated, his line is too long. In my conjecture, I use the abbreviation for 12 (ιβ) and would omit επειτα. I also "cram" in in a supra linear fashion, the final letters of πεντακοσις. The tops of the πε- are visible, and fit the proper transcription, hence forming the parameters of the visible portions of our line. One may not agree with my reconstruction, but it works. Whereas the Thomas reconstruction is an impossibility.

Dr. Jongkind I believe, first suggested the abbreviated form of 12, and it is certainly reasonable as it is seen in codex Sinaiticus of this passage. One is reminded of the famous Magdalen papyrus (P<sup>64</sup>), in which fragment 3, verso, line 2 has an identical abbreviation, which was not recognized for some time. NOTE: many Coptic MSS abbreviate both "third" and "twelve"!

LINE 6 - This line seems to just fall into place in my reconstruction. Both Thomas and I agree, but I add several letters at the terminus. This gives me a satisfactory letter count of 30.

LINE 7 - Not much visible here, and I am not about to insist on any definite transcription. Especially as I have not recourse to the original document.

As to the recto side, I see no problems with the recto side, but I have only cursorily examined it.

#### THE DATING FACTOR

As is well known, no dated New Testament papyri are known to exist. Thus, one must carefully compare with dated materials which differ

somewhat from such Biblical "literary" materials. The documentary and literary papyri offer some hands which can serve for comparisons.

Thomas dates P<sup>123</sup> in the fourth century, (A.D. 300 - 400). This is a possible date, it seems to be on the upper end of the spectrum to me. It is a date which can be defended, but so can an earlier date. Below are some further observations which I submit (recall, that I have not read why Thomas dates in the IV<sup>th</sup>, he may not even justify his date, resting perhaps upon his vast experience instead).

First the format of the fragments:

I assume we are dealing with a codex having multiple quires. If it were a single quire codex, then it may not have been a full praxapostolos text, perhaps just a portion or single Pauline epistle. Instead, the multiple quire format seems more reasonable, but no one can be certain.

Using 32 as the average number of letters per line, we can reconstruct the leaf as one having 22-23 lines per page. This would give us a text block size of about 10.2 cm x 18.3 cm. Since we have no remaining left and right margins, (nor bottom margin, nor a full top margin) I conjecture a page size of 15.1 cm x 23.3 cm ( $\pm 1$  cm). These measurements place us in the categories of 7 and 8 of Turner's *Typology*. Thus these measurements would suggest a third or fourth century date (A. D. 200 - 400) per Turner.

Two little supra linear "dashes" (") occur on the recto side, near the end of line one. If original, one is left to ponder their meaning. I suggest that they possibly refer to a marginal note. It may also mark the final nu of this word, which mark is seen in other (later) manuscripts (especially over particles and certain letter combinations such as over Δ€). Their position would not reflect any known variant reading, nor would they serve to throw suspicion upon the passages here about women being silent in the public worship services. Since our papyrus was found in a rubbish heap, one is left to conjecture as to why it was placed in the "trash". Was it because of numerous errors, or was it because invaders threw it there? Was it a rejected miscellany from a scriptorium located in Oxyrhynchus? One does not know, but the slashes could also mean "bad" page, and so marked for discarding. This too is pure conjecture.

As concerns the script, our scribe presents a practiced script. He/she does not long labor over each letter-form. It is the script of a professional writer. It is consistent, and displays the usual contractions and expansions of various letter-forms so as to produce lines of appropriate lengths. The scribe seems to follow preëstablished guidelines.

As to the letter forms we might observe these:

alpha			
epsilon			
kappa			
rho			
phi			

Reference to the color images is made for the numerous other letter-forms. Those above are interesting.

Note that the alpha, has a slightly rounded yet narrow bowl. The letter is the union of two strokes, not cursive at all [though one alpha may be cursive - hard to determine]. Some of the alpha's seem to have a small curved finial at the extreme upper stroke, a minor decorative feature, seen also on some of the cross strokes of the tau's.

The epsilon is a sigma, with an extended central stroke. It is definitely a two stroke letter, possibly even three.

The kappa is a two stroke letter, the upper branch of the extenders has a decorative finial, but not always.

The rho is interesting. The bowl is small, the descender quite long with a backward curve.

All of the phi's vary. The central ovals, are usually round, but one is angular. All of them are two stroke creations.

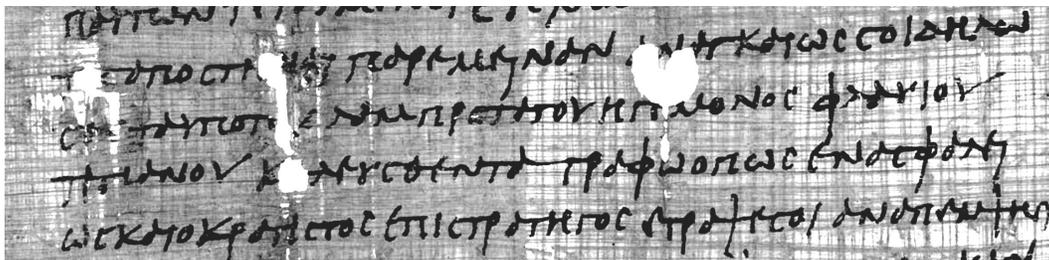
All in all, the letter-forms lack a cursive nature. One of the phi's has a cursive feature, but is still a 2 stroke letter. Occasionally strokes (tau, epsilon) touch or join with the following letter. But this union is not a cursive form. In my opinion, the script can be early third century A.D 225, and it may even extend into the 300's.

A similar upsilon as seen in our papyrus, is seen in many papyri, for example: having 2 strokes,



from Hesiod's Opera, P.Oxy. XVII, 2091. Third century.

Consider also,



from P.Oxy. vol. XVIII, No. 2182, Letter of A Strategus, dated A.D. 165. Which is obviously more cursive, but has similar letter forms!

2 <sup>ND</sup> CENT		3 <sup>RD</sup> CENT
16	17	18
ΑΑ	ΛΑ	αα
ΒΒ	Β	β
ΓΓ	Γ	Γ
Δ	Δ	ΔΔ
ΕΕ	Ε	εε
Ζ	Ζ	Ζ
Η	Η	Η
Θ	Θ	θ
Ι	ΙΙ	Ι
Κ	Κ	κκ
ΛΛ	Λ	λλ
Μ	Μ	Μ
Ν	Ν	Ν
ΞΞ	Ξ	ΞΞ
Ο	Ο	ο
ΠΠ	Π	Π
Ρ	Ρ	Ρ
Σ	Σ	σσ
Τ	Τ	Τ
ΥΥ	Υ	υ
Φ	Φ	φφ
Χ	Χ	χ
Ψ	Ψ	ψ
ΩΩ	Ω	ωω

table from Kenyon, *The Palaeography of Greek Papyri*, I have indicated agreements with our papyrus <sup>p</sup>123.

gamma largely 2nd century

epsilon 2nd century

eta largely 2nd century

kappa 2nd century

nu 3rd century

omicron 3rd century

rho like first and third forms (2nd/3rd)

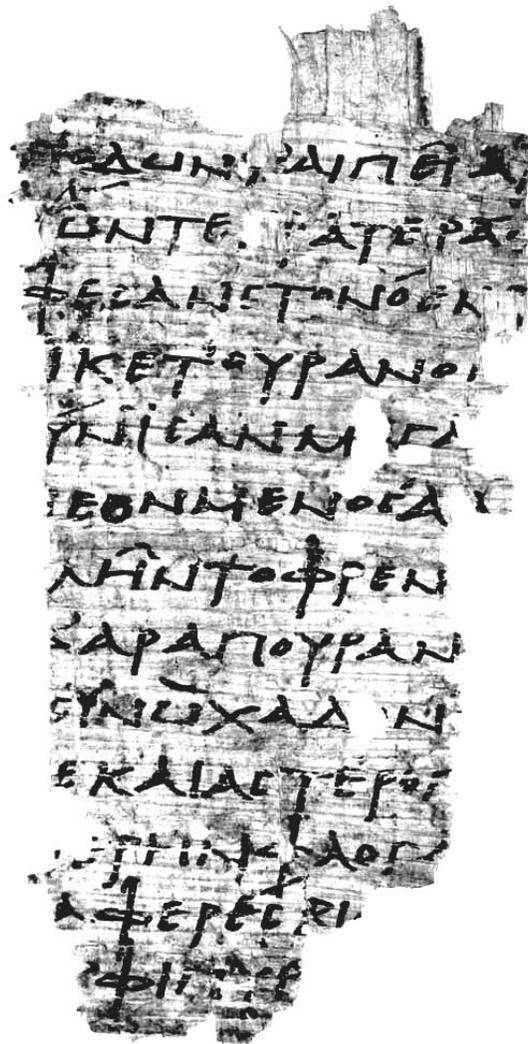
sigma's like the 3rd forms

upsilon, like first form (2nd century)

omega, one like third form, (2nd century)

In Kenyon's table above, we note some correspondences, many are indicated as 2nd century, but some of the letters are of the third century as they appear in our papyrus  $\text{P}^{123}$ .

A few further points:



from P.Oxy.XXXII, 2648 Hesiod, *Theogony*, circa third century.

P.Oxy. 2648 is most definitely not a cursive document. It perhaps is one the most similar documents to our papyrus, which I have found, though the alpha's and phi's differ greatly, and it is void of any decorations. The overall ductus is similar.

As concerns NT papyri, P<sup>15</sup> (papyrus Oxy. 1008) is quite similar as well as P<sup>110</sup>. In all these, our papyrus, 1008 and 2648; we note a script which leans to the right, each possessing numerous similarities of style: this style seems to have been popular in the third century. In our papyrus, the style is typically observed best in the sigma's, the tau's, the rho's, the omicron's, whereas the upsilon's, the kappa's, the nu's, and the nice full omega's hark back to the second century. Since we have third century letter-forms, (see Kenyon's table above) the dating seems best as A.D. 225 - 275, in my opinion.

Given enough time I could display letter-form after letter-form, *ad infinitum*. However, there appears to be no feature amongst the letter-forms of papyrus P<sup>123</sup> which forces the script into the IV (fourth) century. [Knobbed alphas and phis are seen in the first century A.D.!]. Consideration, should probably be given to an earlier date than that which was suggested by Thomas.

#### TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

Textually speaking, P<sup>123</sup> is not representative of any of the major text-types. As per most early papyri from Egypt, it reflects an erroneous or an altered text. The precise nature of the omissions are difficult to determine, but they exist, leaving us with a rather poor New Testament witness.

#### THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, as that being on the third day, is not made absolutely clear in any single OT passage (as "according to the Scriptures", must refer to the OT). The plural "Scriptures" intimates that we are dealing with a group of passages which relate to the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord (for example, the chief passages alluded to are

doubtless Isaiah 53:5, 8; Daniel 9:26; Psalm 22; Zechariah 12:10; together with such types as the offering of Isaac (Genesis 22) and the Paschal lamb, *et cetera*. With "the third day" in the dative case, indicating time "when", we see the need for "third"—it provides clarity concerning the day. [Such as at John 2:1]. If "third" was originally omitted, the "day" could still refer to time in a general sense, but the passage is clearer with "the third". Without further manuscript support, I must see the probable omission of "third" as an error.

Old Testament references to a "third day" in connection with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, are vague—Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:10; Hosea 6:2; Jonah 2:10—Jonah probably died in the belly of the great sea creature, and was resurrected three days later (based upon a literal interpretation of Jonah). Certainly "day" in our papyrus, is the essential word, yet without "the third" it loses some clarity.

Perhaps the greatest value of our papyrus, lies in the clear fact that it documents Paul's actual statement that women should be silent in the public worship services. If they prophesy, they should do so at home, and with long hair for a head covering. They may not teach in the public fellowship assembly, they certainly may teach at home and in special situations. These injunctions are still valid today as nothing stated by Paul prohibits their universality. In the churches which I have visited which practice these behaviours, there was a certain orderliness and solemnity observed. If other folks in other cultures object (as did certain scribes), then they may follow their culture, or the very words from God. As for me, the texts stand, and  $\wp^{123}$  is an additional reënforcement.



END NOTE:

I did email Professor Thomas, he has responded. He has also graciously sent me a copy of the relevant pages in the published edition of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*.

I immediately noticed that Thomas confuses the sides (recto and verso) of the fragments! Note (above) in the image of his reconstruction, that he has the first text shown as/with ↓! The fibers are clearly →.

In his email he still defended the text on this side as reflecting the direction of this arrow. Perhaps I am mistaken, but does not the direction of the arrow in papyrus documents indicate the direction of the fibers? Certainly this is standard usage in many papyrological works (such as: seen in Susan Stephen's - *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library II.*, for example). At any rate either he (and D.C. Parker) made a serious error, or a misprint occurred, as certainly the text of I Corinthians 14 is on the recto side with the fibers running with the script, and the verso side has the fibers vertical. Thus this leaf would occur in the first half of a quire.

In light of the above mistake, it is possible to even miscalculate the size of the papyrus. Both Thomas and I disagree as to the length of the lines, the number of lines, the size of the text block, and the size of the leaf. Thomas even states that an upper margin survives, or in his words, "...incomplete on all sides except the top". The very top is missing!

His date of the 4th century is not convincing, he states that it can be placed in the "fourth century with some confidence and probably in the earlier part of the century". This he fails to prove, he simply states that it has a similar script to P.Herm. 4, dated c. 320. ("c" meaning circa!?). I challenge his fourth century date. As stated above, the third (even early third) seems preferable.

In closing, Thomas (who lays blame at the three editor's feet) has made some serious blunders as concerns his examination of P<sup>123</sup>. It is hoped that this present effort and the efforts of others can rectify the mistakes.