

## A SYRIAC LETTER ON PAPYRUS: P.BEROL.INV.8285

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- [1] In a recent number of *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, W.M. Brashear published an article entitled “Syriaca” (44, 1998, pp. 86–127, with plate XIII), in which among other things he provided a useful survey of Syriac papyri so far known; as the centre piece of his article, however, he provided the first publication of P.Berol. Inv. 8285, containing a private letter in Syriac, probably dating from the seventh century (pp. 96–100).

- [2] In a number of places the transcription and partial translation that he gives can be improved upon, thanks to the provision of a photograph of the papyrus; accordingly, I offer here a new and more complete reading of the text, accompanied by a translation. Since it is probable that some further readings could in due course be extracted from the photograph and (above all) from a close examination of the papyrus itself, the present reading is simply intended as a preliminary aid to further work.



Line 12 : *hnyt*: it is insufficiently clear from the context whether this is intended as 1st or 2nd sing. (see translation). *tnn*: Brashear read *lk*, but while *l* and *k* are possible, there is a clear *n* between them.

Line 14 : *hms[m]ʔ*: *h* (also read by Brashear) is far from clear.

## TRANSLATION



[5]


- ] to him love of brothers, it is a wall [  
                   ] this is invincible armour: the arrow of the enemy  
 [does not] strike it, and the lance of envy does not penetrate it.  
 [The pro]phet thus praises it in the spirit, saying,  
 5 [How good and how fair for brothers wh]en they dwell together  
   (Ps 133:1).  
   (only the illegible ends of lines 6–8 are preserved)  
   [                   ] going to [                   ]  
 10 [           ] but [                   ] not  
   their commandment, nor it is possible even to eat bread; \*but you  
   did not  
   come and see\* here [   ] you have authority to go  
   to wherever you want, and not only at the [ti]me you did not come  
   here, but (there was) not even a written (message). I have heard that  
   there was [l]oss  
 15 to you. It is not in pride that I say this to you, for had he come here  
   there would have been no loss to you. Now through him who  
   comes inform  
   me concerning your health. Our brother Papa greets you, and John  
   son of Hormizd the priest, and Dositheos and the rest of the boys  
   whom I have in the house. Be well, and pray for me.

\*—\* (lines 11–12): this could equally well be translated “otherwise I would have come and seen,” but the “here” in line 12 suggests that the verbs are 2nd person, not first.

## CONCLUDING REMARK

[6]

Owing to a misreading of  as  (“feast”), Brashear suggested a context for the letter in the conflict between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians in Egypt. On the basis of the reading of the text suggested above, it would seem that instead we are dealing with some sort of community, where the writer of

the letter is in a position of authority, and the addressee has failed to do something (or go somewhere) as bidden. If  in line 18 is to be taken literally as “boys,” then perhaps the writer was in charge of a church (or monastery) school; but the term may well be just a colloquialism, “chaps.” Papa is best taken as a name of Persian origin, along with Hormizd; Egypt was of course in Persian hands for a period, during the third decade of the seventh century.