

A stylized map of the Mediterranean region, showing the coastline of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. The map is rendered in shades of blue and green, with the landmasses in a light green and the sea in a light blue. The map is centered on the Mediterranean Sea.

**Banking transactions on the recto of a letter from
Nero to the Alexandrians (P.Genova I 10)?**

Serena Perrone

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Banking transactions on the recto of a letter from Nero to the Alexandrians (P.Genova I 10)?

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The papyrus collection at the University of Genoa includes a copy of a letter sent by the Emperor Nero to the city of Alexandria (inv. no. 8562v). The first edition of the text was published in 1969 by Augusto Traversa (reproduced in SB X 10615), immediately followed by Jean Bingen's review and a re-edition by Mario Amelotti and Livia Migliardi Zingale, which was then part of the first volume of the series *Papiri dell'Università di Genova* (I 10).¹ The letter was included in James H. Oliver's posthumous collection, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri* and most recently examined by Andrew Harker briefly in his volume on the *Acta Alexandrinorum*.²

The imperial *epistula* was copied onto recycled material, the back of a cut-out of a document which was then rotated so the head of the page became the footer. The lines are very long (as in other imperial epistles)³ and are not perfectly straight or aligned. The hand is hasty and there are abbreviations by suspension, an interlinear correction (l. 3) and some errors.⁴ All these characteristics are indicative of a private copy.

The text of the epistle is badly mutilated due to serious damage to the papyrus, especially in the left portion where the ink is abraded in several places. In the first three lines, we may read an extensive imperial titulature («Nero Claudius, son of the divine Claudius, grandson of Caesar Tiberius and Caesar Germanicus, descendant of the divine Caesar Augustus, Germanicus, pontifex, tribunicia potestas, consul, emperor»), from which we can infer the date of the letter: 55 CE.⁵ The letter is addressed to a *polis*, probably Alexandria (l. 3 Ἀ[λ]εξανδρέων τῆ πόλει χαίρειν). Such editorial restoration, which is palaeographically acceptable and fitting for the length of the lacuna, is founded on two elements: 1) a parallel with the wording in the letter from Claudius to the Alexandrians (P.Lond. VI 1912. ll. 15-16 Ἀλεξανδρέων τῆ πόλει χαίρειν)⁶, which also differs from other imperial letters to cities, where the standard address is usually broader: τοῖς ἄρχουσι καὶ τῆ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ, «to the chief magistrates and the council and the people» (an unsuitable formula for Alexandria,

¹ Bingen (1969); Amelotti / Migliardi (1970); Amelotti / Migliardi (1974) with some improvements in the reading of ll. 5 and 7. See also Williams (1975) 42 n. 11 = BL VII 274.

² Oliver (1989) 110-112 no. 33 (= BL IX 361). Harker (2008) 21, 50, 211.

³ The length is more than 50 letters per line. Other imperial epistles to cities, both from inscriptions and papyri, display similar characteristics. Epigraphic examples are Oliver no. 1 (Augustus to Samos) and other imperial letters from the so-called Archive Wall at Aphrodisias (nos. 48, 211, 218, 219). A worth noting papyrus example is the letter from Claudius to the Alexandrians (no. 19), in which columns have different widths: col. i (with the edict by the prefect) is narrower, while the following columns reproducing the text of the epistle (col. ii and iii especially) are wider, but then the last column (col. iv) narrows again probably for reasons of space, since even here (as in P.Genova I 10) the letter is copied onto reused papyrus material (see *infra*).

⁴ L. 3 Ποτάμων<ος>; l. 5 διαφυλάττωι for διαφυλάττω; l. 6 ἡδῖαν for ἡδεῖαν.

⁵ See Bingen (1969) 152. Cf. BL IX 361 for alternative restorations of the titulature.

⁶ P.Lond. IV 1912 vo = CPJ II 153 = Sel.Pap. II 212. «At Alexandria the word polis means the Demos plus at least the Jews», Oliver (1989) 5, cf. p. 83. Cf. also P.Oxy. XLII 3022 = Oliver no. 46, Trajan to the Alexandrians, where, however, the point is in lacuna (ll. 3-4 Ἀλεξ[]). In Oliver no. 5, Augustus to the Alexandrians, the formulation is Ἀλεξανδρέων δήμῳ.

which at that time didn't have its own *boule*), even though there are some epigraphic examples with the bare genitive of the demonym followed by τῆ πόλει (e.g. Δελφῶν τῆ πόλει);⁷ 2) Alexandria, as we will see, appears again in the unpublished text on the recto.

The subject of the letter remains somewhat obscure. It concerns a certain Potamon, son of Boccas, and his sons (ll. 3-4 \περὶ Ποταμῶν τοῦ Βοκκά | καὶ τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ] ἀ[.]φ[) and is a response to the numerous letters sent by Potamon to the emperor (ll. 4-5 πλεονάκις) ἐκ τῶ[ν] ἐπιστολῶν αὐτοῦ ἔγνων | περὶ ὧν καὶ αὐτ[.].⁸

In the little that we can read in the following lines, the emperor confirms an earlier decision (l. 5 διαφυλάττω).⁹ The verb διαφυλάσσω is frequently used in imperial epistles to indicate that a previous directive was being maintained, e.g. to confirm concessions granted by previous emperors (a typical theme in such epistles).¹⁰ It is the verb that guarantees the continuity of acquired rights and privileges (remembering that our letter dates to the first year of Nero's reign). Nero did indeed judge an *entole* to be valid (ll. 5-6 κεκρικῶς | ἐντολ[λ]ήν κυρίαν), probably a *mandatum* of his predecessor,¹¹ and is communicating his *krisis*, his decision, or –less likely– his verdict, if we agree with Amelotti and Migliardi that this is a judicial context.¹² What follows is even more uncertain. The emperor seems to show benevolence in mitigating something (l. 6 ὅπερ ταύτην ἡδύαν ποιῶ): a verdict according to Amelotti / Migliardi, or perhaps the *entole*, the *mandatum* of his predecessor, as I posit. The same adjective ἡδύς is used in an epistle by the emperor Hadrian to indicate a more favourable directive than his predecessor.¹³

We then have a reference in the genitive to two or more people, including a Potamon *neoteris*, probably one of Potamon's sons (l. 7] καὶ τοῦ νε[ω]τ[έ]ρου Ποτάμωνος), and to when they became ἐπ[. This latter term, mostly lost in lacuna, could perhaps indicate a public office (cf. l. 5 ὑπ' ἀ[ὐ]τοῦ ἀρχ[ῆ]ς). It is followed by the usual reference to the publication of the *epistula*, by its public posting (π[ρο]ετ[έ]θη) or public reading (ἀ[νε]γνώ[σθη] BL VII 274).¹⁴

⁷ Oliver (1989) 5: nos. 44, 57, 62, 75, 76.

⁸ There are other examples of imperial correspondence mentioning letters that the emperor is responding to: Oliver (1989) 2-4; e.g. no. 15, referring to an *epistole* delivered by an embassy, no. 138 responding to *grammata* from Vedius Antoninus. However, the emperor usually refers to a decree (*psephisma*) presented to him by an embassy. Cf. Anastasiadis / Souris (2000) ss.vv.

⁹ The hypercorrective *iota mutum* is a common error, occurring for example in P.Lond. VI 1912 (Oliver no. 19, Claudius to the Alexandrians), cf. Bell (1924). See Gignac, Gram. I 185.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Oliver no. 23.7 or 19.3.54, Claudius to the Alexandrians, this letter too dating back to the beginning of his reign, when the new emperor recognises and confirms the privileges granted by his predecessor; 29.6. See Anastasiadis / Souris (2000) s.v. On this point see Oliver (1989) 11, 23, Montevecchi (1970) 14 regarding Nero's letter to a polis and the so-called 6475, a group of privileged citizens (col. ii. 3).

¹¹ ἐντολή is a quite common word in papyri, both with the generic meaning of order, and with more specific meanings, such as mandate (e.g. P.Oxy. XXXVI 2771. l. 10), directive, provision given to local administrators (see Oliver [1989] 18 and cf. no. 40 *Entolai* by Domitian to the procurator Claudius Athenodorus), circular (e.g. P.Tebt. I 6. l. 10; P.Oslo II 49. l. 8), instruction given by a city to its delegates in an embassy (see Kayser [2003] 449 and cf. Oliver no. 5.5 Augustus to the Alexandrians), or authorisation (also of legal representation, e.g. P.Oxy. XLVIII 3389. l. 15). On the correspondence with the Latin *mandatum*, see Spicq (1991) 521-523.

¹² «Comunicazione della sua sentenza in seguito a ricorso in sede di giudizio». In line with the supposed judicial context, Amelotti / Migliardi speculated reading: ἀ[μ]φ[ι]σβητήσεως = *controversia* at l. 4.

¹³ BGU I 140 (Hadrian to the prefect Ramnius Martialis, 119 CE), ll. 16-20 ἥδιστα δὲ αὐτὸς προείπειν τὰς ἀφορμὰς δι' ὧν τὸ αὐστηρότερον ὑπὸ τῶν πρὸ ἑμοῦ Αὐτοκρατόρων σταθὲν φιλιανθρωπότερ[ο]ν ἐρμηνεύω. Cf. BGU II 372 (edict by Sempronius Liberalis, 154 CE, Arsinoite), ll. 14-15 ἵνα δὲ τοῦτο προθυμ[ό]τερον κ[α]ὶ ἥδιον π[ο]ι[ή]σῃ. See Anastasiadis / Souris (2000) s.v. ἡδύς.

¹⁴ The verb προτίθημι was frequently used in the publication of imperial letters (mostly edicts and rescripts): see Anastasiadis / Souris (2000) s.v. or, among other unrecorded cases, Oliver no. 38 l. 19. The restoration ἀ[νε]γνώ[σθη] proposed by Williams (BL VII 274) does not fit well the remaining traces, although it would have parallels in IGRR IV 1619 (Caracalla to Aurelius Julianus; 213 CE) read in the theatre, l. 26 (ἀνεγνώσθη), and

These letters generally ended with a date and closure greeting, but we are unable to read this part on our papyrus.

It is not clear what exactly the issue was that prompted Nero to intervene. It must have been something important to the city and Potamon must have filled a public role and had direct contacts linking him with the imperial power.

Imperial correspondence generally began in response to embassies, which were often sent by cities (or leagues or associations) in order to present honorary decrees, demonstrate merits and request concessions (typically recognitions of decision-making autonomy or tax privileges). But even a single individual in a prominent position could send a messenger with a request and receive an epistle in response from the emperor.¹⁵ The latter seems to be the case here (see ll. 4-5 with the reference to the many letters sent by Potamon). The fact that the reply is addressed to the entire city, and not to the individual, demonstrates that it was a matter of public concern and in that regard is similar, for example, to the letter from Antoninus Pius to the Ephesians concerning the benefactor Vedius Antoninus.¹⁶

So, who was Potamon? Ποτάμων is a relatively common name after all, and Trismegistos People indexes more than 260 attestations in papyri and inscriptions.¹⁷ If we restrict the search results to the first century CE, we can focus on a few main cases. Aside from the name Potamon mentioned in some papyri from Tebtynis,¹⁸ in Alexandria we have a Tiberius Claudius Potamon, *exegetes*, *hypomnematographos* and *strategos* of the city in 58 CE, to whom a request for *ephebatus* is addressed (P.Oxy. XLIX 3463). He could be tentatively identified as the Claudius Potamon of another Oxyrhynchus papyrus a few years earlier (P.Oxy. XLVI 3271, 47-54 CE), who acts as intermediary for a petition addressed to the prefect by a woman (his mother?),¹⁹ who owned properties in Alexandria. This Potamon is a man who obtained Roman citizenship under Claudius and who holds an important public office. Another suggestive occurrence of the name Potamon in first century Alexandria is that found in the aforementioned P.Lond. VI 1912, Claudius' letter to the Alexandrians dated 41 CE in response to the Greek embassy on the Jewish question, in which the father of one of the delegates is called Potamon (II 18 Πασίων Ποτάμωνος). Participation in embassies often allowed one to form fruitful relations with the imperial court, in some cases obtaining Roman citizenship or a prestigious position.²⁰ Several participants at this Greek embassy had quite

P.Lond. VI 1912, where the edict by the prefect orders the publication (l. 6 ἐκθεῖναι) of Claudius' epistle to the Alexandrians because not all the population could attend its public reading (ll. 2-5 ἐπειδὴ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς ἱεροτάτης καὶ εὐεργετικωτάτης ἰς τὴν πόλιν ἐπιστολῆς πᾶσα ἢ πόλεις παρατυχεῖν οὐκ ἠδυνήθην διὰ τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῆς).

¹⁵ Oliver (1989) 1. On embassies see also Kayser (2003).

¹⁶ Oliver no. 138 = SIG³ 850 (145 CE). Examples of imperial letters addressed to a single individual are quite rare (nos. 35, 263, 282, 287), and this is not surprising: these letters, as well as the letters with negative feedback, are far less likely to be granted eternal memory through engraving in stone. When dealing with individuals, imperial letters are usually about people who hold public office or benefactors (*martyria*), as in the case of Vedius Antoninus 3 RE a benefactor who requested aid from the emperor in order to keep his promise to construct buildings for the city. The emperor in his response refers to Vedius Antoninus' letters (cf. supra n. 8). See Kokkinia (2003).

¹⁷ TM Nam 5257. Cf. P.Count 47.1 11n. with II 320.

¹⁸ The name occurs in connection with some purchase contracts from the archive of Kronion, son of Apion, head of the grapheion of Tebtynis, for ex. P.Mich. II 126; P.Mich. V 238.

¹⁹ The edition reads δι(ὰ) δύο υἱ(ῶν) | Κλαυδίων Ποτάμωνος καὶ Ἀπολλ() | παρὰ Ἴσιδώρας (ll. 1-3) «by agency of (her) two sons Claudius Potamon and Claudius Apoll(onius?) from Isidora», but the phrasing is unusual and the reading δύο υἱ(ῶν) (l. 1) is quite unsure. Perhaps the Claudius Potamon and Claudius Apoll(onius?) were not relatives of the woman petitioning but officials supposed to receive the petition and transmit it to the prefect. I thank the anonymous referee for this point.

²⁰ Harker (2008) 19.

illustrious careers: we need only think of Chaeremon, who became the tutor of the young Nero, and Tiberius Claudius Balbillus, whom Nero would appoint prefect of Egypt in 55 CE. It is not inconceivable, then, that the Potamon of Nero's letter is linked to the family of one of the embassy participants, Pasio, son of Potamon. Harker hints at this possibility and also suggests a potential familial relationship with an Alexandrian philosopher named Potamon who lived at the time of Augustus.²¹ The name Potamon was handed down within the family even in the case of our papyrus, which refers to a Potamon junior. Unfortunately, the name Potamon is not exactly rare and the identifying elements are too fragile to fully rest on this enticing hypothesis. In addition to the question of who the subject of the imperial missive was, we must also ask: who might have an interest in copying this letter? We will return to this issue once we have examined the unpublished text on the recto of the papyrus.

It is worth pointing out that we have no information on the provenance of the papyrus (it was purchased on the antiquities market) nor on its exact date. The 55 CE date of the imperial epistle indeed only constitutes a *terminus post quem* for its reuse, but we do not know how much time elapsed before the epistle was copied on the verso of our papyrus,²² nor how many years prior the recycled material dates back. Nevertheless, a first century CE date seems consistent with the writings on both sides, which do not seem very far apart from each other.

The recto preserves the lower part of two columns, with a *kollesis* in between. According to Amelotti and Migliardi they were two different documents glued together in a *tomos sunkollesimos*, but they may actually belong to one single document.²³ The two columns resemble each other in script and in graphic layout (wide line spacing, column width). Seven and six lines respectively survive, with a lower margin of 5 cm.

Twentieth century editors of the epistle on the verso gave a rather brief description of the other side: «due documenti diversi, riguardanti alcune operazioni bancarie, compiute forse attraverso una banca di Alessandria», in one of which «sono menzionati la città di Alessandria, un *cheristes* di nome Alessandro ed una *kolubisti[ke (sic!)]²⁴ trapeza*, cui si debbono forse riferire le due somme finali che chiudono il frammento».²⁵

The column to the left of the join is in worse condition (as seen on the opposite side) than that on the right, with only scattered letters being legible. Some numerals are visible in a vertical column to the right and at least three of them are sums of talents (the ten or so at lines 2 and 7, five at line 5). Thus it is an account of money, but the few surviving traces are very difficult to decipher (perhaps ὄ[σ]τε εἰς at l. 5).

We'll focus on the better preserved right-hand column. There does not seem to be much missing to the right. A provisional transcription is:

²¹ Harker (2008) 21. Cf. Sud. π 2126. An Alexandrian Potamon is also mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae Philosophorum* I 21) as the promoter of an eclectic school.

²² Some *Acta Alexandrinorum* papyri testify to copies dating to two centuries after the events to which they refer: see Harker (2008) 24; Colomo (2016) 222.

²³ Amelotti / Migliardi (1970) 23 and (1974) 25, based their hypothesis on two main arguments: 1. alleged graphic differences («grafia alquanto diversa» and «diversa larghezza originaria»); 2. the *kollesis* more prominent than in a standard roll («giuntura molto più marcata di quella di un normale rotolo»). Both arguments seem questionable, and a *tomos synkollesimos* made to archive various accounts seems rather unlikely. On *tomoi synkollesimos* see Clarysse 2003.

²⁴ 'Sic' refers to making the double *lambda* single, a very common phenomenon in Roman papyri (see Gignac *Gram.* I 155), although not attested elsewhere for this specific term.

²⁵ Amelotti / Migliardi (1970) 21-23.

col. ii

1 καὶ ὅστ[ε] εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν κα [
 Ἀλεξάνδρῳ χειριστ(ῆ) Χοιάχ δ̄ [
 καὶ ε[ἐ]πιθήκη Απολλωνίου κολουβιστ .[
 Ἀ[λε]ξάνδρειαν διὰ Μαρτιάλα(ι) (δραχμαὶ)[
 5 γίνεται καὶ τούτων (τάλαντα) ι[
 γίν[ετ]αι ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀργ(υρίου) (τάλαντα) [
 <margin>
 «and for Alexandria ... [
 the cheiristes Alexandros Choiak 4 [
 and ... epitheke of Apollonius the moneychanger [
 Alexandria by agency of Martialis drachmas [
 and the total of these (entries) is: talents 1[
 sum total silver talents [»

This document too is an account with sums of money, in drachmas and talents. We can read the last two sections of the account (introduced by καὶ and each one arranged on two lines with a slight indentation). A total and an overall total follow. In both items, Alexandria is cited (ll. 1 and 4, in the accusative case), probably as the destination of the amounts. It would seem then to be a cash outflow account. In the first preserved item, a *cheiristes* named Alexandros is involved in a transaction dated the 4th of Choiak, probably involving the shipping down to the capital (l. 1 καταπλεῦσ[αι?]). The term *cheiristes* could be translated as ‘agent’ or ‘manager’, but it perhaps indicated a more precise role. In Ptolemaic papyri we find *cheiristai* connected to payments in grain, perhaps as agents of the *sitologi*, but also in the role of bank employees in charge of the transport of *basilika chremata*.²⁶ In Roman-era papyri, the *cheiristai* were often responsible for tax collection in villages and the subsequent deposit of the money in local public banks.²⁷ They issued receipts for tax payments²⁸ and presented monthly reports to the *praktors*. In fact, they seem to be assistants to the *praktors* in collecting taxes, with practical tasks including money transport.

The second item of our account is the one involving the *kollubistike trapeza*. Such exchange banks are already attested in fourth century Athens and in Egypt by the third century BCE, but the documentation indicates a significant expansion of this type of bank under Augustus and in the first century CE. Κολλυβιστικαὶ τράπεζαι were numerous, especially in Alexandria where they outnumbered other types of banks, though they were also present throughout the entire Egyptian territory.²⁹

Here, instead of κολλυβιστικὴ τράπεζα (as in Amelotti / Migliardi [1970] 23 and [1974] 25), I would read κολλυβιστοῦ, thus «of Apollonius the moneychanger». *Omicron* seems best

²⁶ In the P.enteux. 38 petition, dated to 221 BCE, the *cheiristes* of the royal bank of the Polemon meris rented 73 donkeys for this purpose.

²⁷ See Bogaert (1994) 348, 373, 381-2, 384. Also see P.Col. V p. 112: the *cheiristes* is the one who manages the payment. For the *cheiristai* as assistants of the *praktors* or other tax collectors see Preisigke (1910) 15 n. 2 referring to BGU III 991 (151 CE, Karanis, letter of a *praktor* to a *cheiristes* in which, however, the transport of the cash to the public bank is a task assumed by the *praktor* and not by the *cheiristes*), and Wallace (1938) 306, 310-311, 314. For the task of collecting taxes in the villages see P.Mich. XII, p. 52, especially for villagers not resident in their *idia* (cf. P.Princ. I 8), see Wallace (1938) 473. Bogaert (2001) 233 defines the *cheiristai* as «chargés de collecter les taxes, surtout la *laographia* payée en plusieurs fois». In rural estates of third century Egypt the *cheiristes* is apparently a manager as the *epitropos* and the *oikonomos*, and the title «did not denote specific functions» according to Rathbone (1991) 62.

²⁸ E.g. SB XVI 12238. See Bogaert (1994) 382.

²⁹ Bogaert (1983), Bogaert (1994) 4 and 410-411. On exchange banks see also Geva (2011) 144.

suited to the character at the edge of the break, which is rounded and a bit high on the line. Κολλυβιστής is much rarer in papyri than the more common κολλυβιστική τράπεζα, and in fact has been found only in 3 Ptolemaic and 2 early Roman documents.³⁰ Among these, BGU VI 1303 and P.Oxy. XXXVI 2772 are particularly relevant because they provide the earliest evidence of the role of banker, besides that of moneychangers: one could deposit money and have an account at a κολλυβιστής.

The Berlin papyrus is a letter from the Arsinoites³¹ in which a dealer gives instructions for the transport and sale of 1,780 *artabai* of grain. The author of the letter asks his correspondent to let him know the current value of silver and wait until silver or bronze is deposited with the moneychanger Apollonius³² (θεματίζ[ειν τό] τε ἀργύ(ριον) εἰς τε χα[λ]κὸν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀπολλ[λω]γ[ίου] [το]ῦ κολλυβιστοῦ). Apollonius is undoubtedly one of the most common Greek names, but it is impossible not to wonder whether the Apollonius moneychanger of this letter is the same one as in our papyrus. Such identification (which would provide a useful geographical contextualisation in the Arsinoites) seems, at first, chronologically difficult. The editor of BGU dated the papyrus to the end of Ptolemaic era, presumably on palaeographic grounds.³³ The letter bears a date, of uncertain reading, of the sixth regnal year. On that basis, one could infer a possible date of 75 BCE (Ptolemy XII Auletes) or 46 BCE (Cleopatra VII),³⁴ but it is impossible to assess the accuracy of such assumptions as there are no published images of this papyrus, which is now lost.³⁵ Facing such chronological uncertainty, perhaps a later date cannot be ruled out and the identification of the two Apollonius *kollubistes* is not impossible, though the hypothesis remains unprovable.

The Oxyrhynchus papyrus, datable to 10/11 CE, is a letter by a Roman who, writing in Greek with the Latin alphabet, instructs the *kollubistes* Archibius to pay 1,953 drachmas to his account with the *kollubistes* Harpochration.³⁶ This example of a transaction, a money transfer managed by a *kollubistes*, is interesting when considering what we read in our account.

Immediately before Ἀπολλωνίου, one can see the letters ιθηκη preceded by a letter with a horizontal stroke at the top of the line. The only possible restoration seems to be ἐπιθήκη.³⁷ A *epitheke* is a letter asking someone (acting as an intermediary) to pay a certain sum of money to someone else (the beneficiary).³⁸ This letter was sent to the beneficiary, who, with this document in hand, could go to the intermediary and withdraw the specified amount. It is not therefore a payment order but a letter of credit, a sort of check via an intermediary, not

³⁰ P.Petr. III 59a = P.Count 14.7 (III BCE, Arsinoite? a list of trades including 6 moneychangers [κολλυβιστῶν]); P.Tebt. III 1079. l. 49 (III-II BCE Tebtynis, account mentioning Πτολεμαίωι κολλυβισ(τήι)); BGU VI 1303 (see infra); P.Oxy. XXXVI 2772 (see infra); SB XII 10793 (18 CE, Arsinoite?). Cf. Bogaert (1983) 21-23.

³¹ Bogaert (1987) 74 suggests the letter's provenance is Crocodilopolis. Cf. Bogaert (1998) 179. On this letter, also see Rossi (2012) 650.

³² On Apollonius *kollubistes* (ProsPtol. 1159) see Bogaert (1983) 22 and no. 4 (= Bogaert [1994] 95).

³³ W. Schubart (1922) only noted «Aus dem Ende der Ptolemäerzeit», without any further explanation.

³⁴ Cf. Bogaert (1987) 74.

³⁵ Rossi (2012) 650. Among other things, the dating of this document is particularly important because it could be the first evidence of the presence of private banks in the metropolis of the Arsinoite nome: see Bogaert (1987) 73-74.

³⁶ Bagnall / Bogaert (1975).

³⁷ Probably ἐ[ν] ἐπιθήκη, or perhaps σ[ὺν] ἐπιθήκη.

³⁸ The classical reference on this financial instrument is Preisigke (1910), who, however, could only base his discussion on BGU IV 1064, and understood the *epitheke* as a payment order addressed to a bank. Also see Pintaudi (1976) «nel suo principale significato di assegno bancario il termine è ampiamente presente nella documentazione». A reassessment of the issue in Inoue (2000). Cf. also Concannon (2010).

necessarily a bank (in fact cases in which banks are involved are few and uncertain)³⁹ and the most appropriate translation may be ‘bill of exchange’.

The first reference to an *epitheke* in a papyrus dates to the second half of the first century BCE (SB 7530 letter from Herakleopolites, 38 or 16 BCE), and we have some direct examples from the third century CE (BGU IV 1064, SB XIV 12094, P.Laur. II 25, P.Oxy. LIX 3979). The *epithekai* could be used both in government⁴⁰ and in private transactions, and were common in commercial affairs, for example, to transfer a credit.⁴¹ This payment method was particularly useful when transferring money (virtually) to distant places (a sort of traveller’s check) and in this aspect the *epitheke* is analogous to the *permutatio*, used also in other parts of the Roman Empire.⁴²

The nominal value of an *epitheke* could be recorded in accounting.⁴³ Our account lists the value of an *epitheke* of the moneychanger Apollonius and, on the following line, there is a reference to Alexandria and the intermediation of a person bearing a Roman name, Martial. Thus we could envisage a situation where the *epitheke* was issued by the moneychanger Apollonius, perhaps on behalf of someone else who had paid him the money (the author of our account sheet?), the payee is located in Alexandria and the intermediary who will physically pay him the indicated drachmas is Martial (Μαρτιάλις or Μαρτιάλιος). Another possibility is that Martial is only the bearer of the *epitheke* letter being sent to Alexandria. Apollonius is the holder of an exchange bank in the *chora*: he had to have acquaintances in the capital and a good reputation of solvency, necessary conditions for the issuer’s *epitheke* to be accepted.⁴⁴

We cannot determine if the context is that of private business or government affairs related to tax administration, as the reference to *cheiristes* would suggest (l. 2), and often the two areas were closely connected. What seems clear is that these few preserved lines indicate movement of capital from the *chora* to Alexandria and demonstrate the use of financial instruments.

We shall now return to the question of who had an interest in copying a letter from Nero on the back of these accounts. Most of the imperial epistles we know are preserved through inscriptions, but in Egypt copies on papyrus could survive also.⁴⁵ These texts could obviously

³⁹ Inoue (2000) 91 stresses this aspect. Cf. P.Oxy. XLIII 3092 and PSI VIII 890. Inoue excludes the typical example of BGU IV 1064 because the address to a *trapezites* is from a restoration of uncertain reading (BL I 93). Cf. Concannon (2010) 84.

⁴⁰ P.Oxy. XLIII 3146. 8 (Oxyrhynchus, 347 CE).

⁴¹ Cf. e.g. P.Oxy. VII 1055 (267 CE).

⁴² Hollander (2007) 40-41. On money transfers in Greek-Roman Egypt see Geva (2011) 140-155.

⁴³ Cf. e.g. P.Oxy. XLIX 3505 (II CE), other examples in Inoue (2000). See Concannon (2010) 82, 83.

⁴⁴ Cf. P.Oxy.Hels. 48.11-15: εἰ οὖν οἶδας ὅτι ἐπιθήκην εὐρίσκομεν παρὰ σοὶ ὥστε μεταβληθῆναι τὸ κερμάτιον ἐνθάδε, ἔρχομαι πρὸς σὲ εἰς συνωνήν ἐρίων. Cf. Inoue (2000) 94-95. In addition, see the advice not to accept *epithekai* in P.Oxy. LVI 3864. 20-33.

⁴⁵ Considering letters, edicts, rescripts, instructions and speeches, Oliver (1989) numbered 44 papyri, some of which collect more than one text (e.g. P.Oxy. XXVII 2476, BGU IV 1074, P.Oxy.Hels. 25 and P. Oxy. XXXI 2610, collections of imperial letters to the synod of Dionysian artists). An updated list of imperial constitutions (but the new acquisitions are mostly epigraphic) is in Purpura (2009). A specific list of *epistulae* can be found in Hoogendijk / van Minnen (1987) 68-69. There are 12 papyri that preserve imperial epistles addressed to cities: Oliver nos. 5 (Augustus to the Alexandrians 10-9 BCE, P.Oxy. XLII 3020), 19 (P.Lond. IV 1912, see infra), 33 (our P.Genova I 10), 39 (SB XII 11012, see infra), 46 (P.Oxy. XLII 3022, see infra), 137 (Antoninus Pius to Antinoopolis’ citizens, P.Strasb. III 130, 149 CE?), 164-166 (three imperial letters to the citizens of Antinoopolis reported in a petition, P.Würz. 9, 161-169 CE Arsinoite), 174 (Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus to Antinoopolis’ citizens, BGU I 74, 166-169 CE Arsinoite), 185 (Letter of an emperor or usurper to the Alexandrians?, P.Oxy. LXVII 4592, Oxyrhynchus, 2nd-3rd CE), 283 (P.Ant. III 191, see infra), 292 (fragment of a letter along with edicts, P.Oxy. XII 1407, 240 CE?); plus at least P.Vindob. Graec. inv. 25945 (three letters

be of interest from a legal point of view due to their jurisprudential value, but in some cases, and especially in the case of letters addressed to cities, other political or economic interests could have played an important role. Some clues about the contexts which produced such copies can be found through examination of the material aspects and the cases in which copies are made on reused materials. It is significant that almost half of all emperors' letters to cities preserved on papyri are transcriptions on the backs of other documents. Besides P.Genova 10, other examples are:

- The repeatedly mentioned P.Lond. IV 1912 = Oliver no. 19 (41 CE): Claudius to the Alexandrians, a letter written by the emperor in response to the Greek embassy concerning the riots between the Greek and the Jewish communities of Alexandria (38-41 CE), a well-known story thanks to the literary reports by Philo (In Flaccum and De Legatione ad Caium) and Josephus (AJ XIX 278-285). The document is on the back of a tax register from 37/38 CE⁴⁶ and belongs to the archive of Nemesion, son of Zoilos, of Philadelphia. In the quick hand that wrote the error-filled transcript of the imperial *epistula*, we can recognise the handwriting of Nemesion himself. He was a capitation tax collector in Philadelphia during the reigns of Claudius and Nero, as well as a businessman active in sheep breeding and money lending. He was indeed a man of substance in the village. The documents of his archive show he had good connections with local government leaders and strong relationships with characters bearing Roman names.⁴⁷

- The Milan papyrus SB XII 11012 = Oliver no. 39 (55 CE Arsinoites): Nero to a *polis* and the 6475, copied on the back of a literary text possibly used in an education context (Aesopic fables), datable to the end of the first century BCE, and indicative of a milieu of low-culture Greeks or Hellenized people.⁴⁸

- P.Oxy. XLII 3022 = Oliver no. 46 (98 CE Oxyrhynchus): Trajan to the Alexandrians, copied in «a large crude hand» on the back of an unpublished private letter with many deletions.⁴⁹

- P.Ant. III 191 = Oliver no. 283 (end of the third century CE, Antinoopolis?): fragment concerning proceedings on the religious privileges of the Antinoites, quoting a letter from Gordian III to the judges, the council and the people of Antinoopolis. The text was copied «in an inelegant hand» on the back of P.Ant. I 37, affidavit of registration (209-210 CE). We can then assume, in this case, a juridical context.

All are private copies in quick and inelegant hands. That closest to ours is the papyrus from Nemesion's archive: both are letters to the city of Alexandria copied on reused accounting materials. Even the graphical aspect is quite similar, so much so that at first it made me consider a possible connection, though it was not confirmed.⁵⁰ While the framework of our P.Genova I 10 can be outlined only by hypotheses, in the case of the London papyrus we have accurate information about the person and the context in which the copy of Claudius' famous letter to the Alexandrians was made. Much has been written on this letter and many

from Gordian III to Antinoopolis' citizens, SB XVIII 13774-13776, 241-242 CE, ed. Hoogendijk / van Minnen 1987).

⁴⁶ P.Brit.Mus. inv. 2248, still unpublished aside a portion in Hanson (1984). Cf. Hanson (2010) 310-311.

⁴⁷ On Nemesion, see Hanson (1989), Clarysse 2012.

⁴⁸ Montevicchi (1970) 6.

⁴⁹ For the editor it is «possible that 3022 was copied as part of the *Acta* literature, not merely for its own sake».

⁵⁰ A more careful analysis shows that Nemesion's hand does not match that of the Genoa papyrus in the layout of several letters (*beta* and *tau* in particular).

have questioned why a tax collector in the Arsinoites, who was not a citizen of Alexandria, would be interested in copying it.⁵¹

It is possible that some of these imperial epistles –and in particular the one from Claudius to the Alexandrians for the topic which it addresses– were copied also for an interest in the so-called *Acta Alexandrinorum*. The circulation of this semi-fictional literature of anti-Roman propaganda in Egypt is well attested by papyri, but is often difficult to contextualise, apart from happy exceptions like the fragment in the archive of Socrates, another tax collector in an Arsinoite village (Karanis, 2nd CE).⁵²

It has been suggested that the Philadelphia elite was interested in the contrasts between the Greek community and the Jewish community in Alexandria because they experienced similar ethnic tensions at local level.⁵³ And Philadelphia was, in his own small way, a sort of mirror of the capital: the local elite, to which Nemesion belonged and for whom the letter was copied, was interested in the issues of the capital, which were not so different from the issues a small town of the *chora* might be dealing with. This is especially true in a region like that of Philadelphia, whose geographical position was a link to the capital, and where we know there was a large number of properties belonging to imperial family members or the friends and *liberti* of the emperor.⁵⁴ It is hardly surprising that the Greek or Hellenized elite of the *chora* would be interested in documents of this kind. They had a direct interest in what was happening in the capital and in the relationship with imperial power for the administrative positions they held, for local power management, for their businesses and for the privileges they hoped to achieve or maintain. Moreover, Alexandrian citizens often owned properties in the *chora* and local elite members aspired to acquire Alexandrian citizenship, as a first step to obtain Roman citizenship –and the tax exemptions and privileges that came with it.⁵⁵

It is no wonder, then, that a copy of an imperial epistle to the Alexandrians was produced in the context that we might imagine for the unpublished recto of Nero's Letter. Bookkeeping of relatively high sums of money, use of banks and financial instruments, a possible connection with tax collection and obvious economic and financial relations with the capital of Egypt are all elements that point to a context in which economic and political local elite looked to Alexandria and Rome to maintain and gain prestige, power and wealth.

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⁵¹ E.g. Pestman, *Prim.* 2, 105-109; Kayser (2003) 439.

⁵² Harker (2008) 4. For the fragment in the Socrates archive see Musurillo (1954) n. 22, cf. Harker (2008) 180. However, the idea that the fragment falls under the *Acta Alexandrinorum* genre has been called into question by Rodríguez (2009).

⁵³ There is no evidence of anti-Semitic sentiments in the Philadelphia of Nemesion's time: the alleged anti-Jewish elements brought by Schwartz (1985), and repeated e.g. by Harker (2008) 25, are based on incorrect readings of papyrus evidence. Yet there had to be a certain degree of separation between Semites and the rest of the population, given that, as Hanson (1992) pointed out, Arabs and Jews are the only ethnic specifications in the archive.

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