

Miszelle

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P.Oxy. VI 866: A Fragment of Comedy or Historical Prose?

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P.Oxy. VI 866, which comprises some small parts of the first seven lines of a column, was first published in 1908 by Grenfell and Hunt as an unidentified “prose fragment”, possibly from a historical work. The fragment was dated by its editors to the first century AD on palaeographical grounds. Several decades later, in 1968, Turner edited a 62-line fragment of Menander’s *Karchedonios* (P.Oxy. XXXIII 2654), a fragment apparently written by more than one hand, one of which, as the editor noticed, is “very like” the hand of P.Oxy. VI 866. The latter fragment also happens fortunately to contain the word Κ|αρχηδονιο (l. 5). Turner subsequently suggested that these two fragments might come from the same work and indeed from the same roll.

Although Turner, who reedited P.Oxy. VI 866, implied that the fragment does not have to be metrical, and that “certainty in regard to identity is unattainable”,¹ the possibility of its being attributed to Menander has exercised a strong appeal. The fragment was included in *CGF* (as Menander fr. 158),² in Arnott’s Loeb edition of Menander’s *Karchedonios* (as “tentatively assigned” to this play),³ and in the recent Budé edition of the same play by Blanchard, where it is integrated into his reconstructed version of the *Karchedonios* as directly following from P.Oxy.

1 P.Oxy. XXXIII p. 8.

2 C. Austin, *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta in Papyris Reperta*, Berlin 1973, 169.

3 W. G. Arnott, *Menander*. Vol. II, Cambridge, MA 1996, 98–99.

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XXXIII 2654.⁴ All three subsequent editions largely adopt Turner's text,⁵ which is the following:

]πολιςμου[
]αιτυθομε[
]οβαλουση[
]εκαθολου[
 Κ]αρχηδονιο[5
]ρενειςπι.[
]ρεν[

After a new examination of the fragment, I propose the slightly altered text below:⁶

]πολιςματ[
]αι πυθομε[ν
]οβαλούση[
] ε καθόλου[
 Κ]αρχηδονιο[5
]ρεν εις πι.[
]ρεν[

1. 1]πολιςματ[: Turner and Grenfell and Hunt printed]πολιςμου[and]πολις μου[respectively, but an α after μ here is just as likely as an ο. There is a trace of a further letter after α that could suit either a τ or an υ. Turner's alternative suggestion]πολιςμημ.[is palaeographically weaker than either]πολιςματ[or]πολιςμου[.
1. 2]αι πυθομε[ν: It is reasonable to supplement a ν here, as did Grenfell and Hunt.
1. 3]οβαλούση[: Grenfell and Hunt printed]οβαλουσι[; but the last letter cannot be ι, as the horizontal stroke of an η is clearly visible. We may supplement άπ]οβαλούση[or πρ]οβαλούση[or ύπ]οβαλούση[and assume either a genitive or a dative case.
1. 4] ε: There are traces of a letter before ε.
1. 6]ρεν εις πι.[: This is the word division proposed by Grenfell and Hunt. It is conceivable that we have here the ending of a verb in the third person of a

⁴ A. Blanchard, *Ménandre*. Vol. III, Paris 2016, 144.

⁵ But they print]αι πυθομε[(l. 2), άπ]οβαλουση[(l. 3; the supplement was proposed by Turner in a note to his edition), and]ε καθολου[(l. 4).

⁶ I have studied the text from the scan of the papyrus found at: https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/SS7730556_7730556_9246175;requestId=8a61009e73d702bf7f50dcdc3621d7ef (Special Collections and Archives, Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College). Last access: 15 August 2018.

past tense (ἴδεν), followed by εἰς (preposition) or εἶς (numeral), and the beginning of a word (πῖ .|).

Let us now revisit the two arguments in favour of the attribution of the fragment to Menander's *Karchedonios*. The first argument stems from the similarity of the hand of P.Oxy. VI 866 with one of the hands of P.Oxy. XXXIII 2654, which ostensibly encourages the attribution of both fragments to the same papyrus roll and to the same Menandrian play. However, the similarity is not close enough⁷ to guarantee that the two fragments were written by the same hand. In other words, the palaeographical argument may be taken to be indicative of a single hand and a single roll but cannot be conclusive. It is also worth further stressing that even fragments which are written in a seemingly identical hand may come “from the same roll, from two different rolls of the same work, or two different works”.⁸

The second argument in favour of a Menandrian attribution rests on the word Κ|αρχηδονιο (l. 5). As far as content is concerned, this is the only possible point of correlation between our fragment and Menander's play. The text is otherwise too meagre: P.Oxy. VI 866 contains substantial parts of only 5–6 words,⁹ only one of which (καθόλου) is fully legible (and these words are hardly enough to either prove or disprove the use of metre). The word Κ|αρχηδονιο, however, may equally point to a work of historical prose, as was noted already by Grenfell and Hunt.¹⁰ Carthago and its fortunes are indeed a frequent topic in Greek historiography, most famously in Polybius' *Histories*, which includes a first-hand account of the sack of Carthago by the Romans in 146 BC, and in the works of Diodorus Siculus and Appian. Moreover, Strabo, Plutarch (especially in his *Timoleon*) and Dio Cassius are further notable sources for Carthago's history. Additionally, as the following small selection shows, there are verbal similarities between our fragment and passages from Hellenistic and Imperial prose writers that refer to Carthago. These similarities include the use of πολίσματα or πολισμάτια (if the reading]πολισματ[in l. 1 is correct), the participle πυθόμενος and the adverb καθόλου.

⁷ Cf. Arnott (n. 3) 83. The form of the letters ρ and μ differs, as Turner noted.

⁸ G. W. Houston, *Inside Roman Libraries: Book Collections and Their Management in Antiquity*, Chapel Hill 2014, 295 n. 50.

⁹ Regarding their possible relevance to Menandrian vocabulary: for πόλισμα, cf. Men. *Sam.* 325; Menander uses πυθόμενος frequently; his plays include two ἀπέβαλεν (*Epit.* 471; 503), but no participle form of this verb; καθόλου (occasionally written: καθ' ὅλου) does not occur at all in Menander's plays and is much more common in works of prose (especially from Aristotle onwards, as TLG searches show) than poetry.

¹⁰ P.Oxy. VI p. 173: “A mention of the Carthaginians in l. 5 suggests that this fragment ... is historical, but the context is quite uncertain.”

Polyb. 1.24.13: τὴν δὲ Καμαριναίων πόλιν μικρῶ πρότερον ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀποστᾶσαν, τότε προσενέγκαντες ἔργα καὶ καταβαλόντες τὰ τεῖχη κατέσχον· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἔνναν καὶ ἕτερα πλείω **πολισμάτια** τῶν **Καρχηδονίων**.¹¹

Diod. Sic. 14.54.4: οἱ δὲ **Καρχηδόνιοι πυθόμενοι** τὸ μέγεθος τῆς τοῦ Διονυσίου δυνάμεως, ἔκριναν πολλὴ ταῖς παρασκευαῖς αὐτὸν ὑπερθέσθαι. (= Erphorus fr. 204)

Cass. Dio 15.57.28: ὅτι ὁ Σκιπίων **πυθόμενός** τινὰς παρασκευάζεσθαι τῶν Ῥωμαίων τὴν τε Ῥώμην ἐγκαταλιπεῖν καὶ τὴν Ἰταλίαν ὅλην ὡς τῶν **Καρχηδονίων** ἐσομένην ...

App. Pun. 211: οὐῶν δὲ οὔτε **Καρχηδόνιοι** τῶνδε οὔτε Ῥωμαῖοι **πυθόμενοι**, οἱ μὲν ἐπέστελλον Μάγωνι, ξηνολογοῦντι ἔτι Κελτούς, ἐσβαλεῖν εἰς τὴν Ἰταλίαν ...

Plut. Vit. Dio 25.11: ... καὶ θέοντες ἐλαφρῶς πεμπταῖοι κατὰ Μίνωαν ὠρμίσαντο, **πολισμάτιον** ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ τῆς **Καρχηδονίων** ἐπικρατείας.¹²

Diod. Sic. 5.38.3: **καθόλου** γὰρ ἀεὶ **Καρχηδόνιοι** διεπολέμουν ...

Polyb. 1.20.2: ἐλπίσαντες δὲ **καθόλου** δυνατὸν εἶναι τοὺς **Καρχηδόνιους** ἐκβαλεῖν ἐκ τῆς νήσου ...

It is necessary to ask whether]οβαλοῦση[(l. 3) would fit within the sort of historiographical context which is suggested by the above quotations. While compound verbs of βάλλω are generally very common, TLG searches prove that feminine aorist participles which could correspond to]οβαλοῦση[(l. 3) are not. Possible supplements include ἀπ]οβαλοῦση[, πρ]οβαλοῦση[and ὑπ]οβαλοῦση[. Among these, ἀπ]οβαλοῦση[is the most likely supplement, as it is the most common form, and its sense fits the type of context suggested here. One possibility is that its subject is a feminine noun such as Καρχηδών or πόλις. In a political/military context, the participle's possible objects include τὸν στρατόν/τοὺς στρατιώτας, τὴν δόξαν etc. (cf. Diod. Sic. 18.21: οἱ μὲν οὖν Κυρηναῖοι καὶ αἱ περιοικοῦσαι **πόλεις** τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον **ἀποβαλοῦσαι** τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ὑπὸ τὴν Πτολεμαϊκὴν βασιλείαν ἐτάχθησαν).

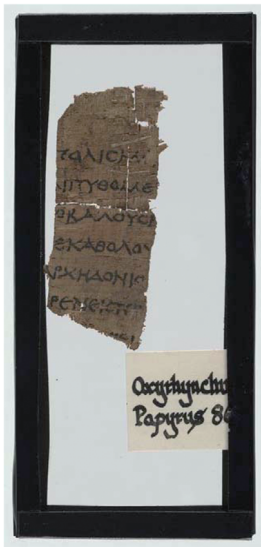
In addition to showing the verbal affinity between our fragment and prose texts of a historiographical bent, the above passages further serve as a reminder that references to Carthago are spread across texts that range widely in theme, date and focus. Our fragment could thus come from any text that refers systematically or

¹¹ Cf. 1.53.12–13: οἱ δὲ **Καρχηδόνιοι** συνεγγίσαντες τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐπέβαλλοντο πολιορκεῖν τούτους, ὑπολαβόντες τοὺς μὲν ἄνδρας καταπλαγέντας εἰς τὸ **πολισμάτιον** ἀποχωρήσειν, τῶν δὲ πλοίων ἀσφαλῶς κυριεύσειν.

¹² Cf. Vit. Tim. 11.5: Ὁ δ' Ἰκέτης **πυθόμενος** τὴν τοῦ Τιμολέοντος διάβασιν καὶ φοβηθεὶς, μετεπέμψατο πολλὰς τῶν **Καρχηδονίων** τριήρεις.

occasionally to Carthago. One attractive possibility is that it originates from a lost work dedicated to the history of Carthago or Magna Graecia. Fragments from such works are collected in *FGrH*,¹³ and the authors mentioned there include, for the classical and Hellenistic periods, Philistus of Syracuse, a historian of Sicily (*FGrH* 566), Timaeus of Tauromenium (*FGrH* 556), whose *Histories* treat the history of Italy and Sicily until the first Punic war, and Menander of Ephesus (*FGrH* 783), author of a *Phoenicica*. Another notable work on Carthago, the lost Greek *Carchedoniaca* of the emperor Claudius,¹⁴ may (but does not necessarily) postdate our papyrus.

In conclusion, the extreme brevity of our fragment means that its genre cannot be determined with certainty, but the above discussion suggests an even better case for the fragment's assignment to a piece of historical prose rather than to a Menandrian play.



P. Oxy. 866. (recto).

Special Collections and Archives, Trexler Library. Muhlenberg College.

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¹³ F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Vol. II–III, Berlin 1926–1958.

¹⁴ The work is mentioned by Suetonius (*Claud.* 42.2).