

A Ptolemaic petition from a 'Judeo-Egyptian' (Ἰουδαίολοιγύπτιος)

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ABSTRACT This article presents an edition of an unpublished Ptolemaic papyrus presently housed in the Matsushita Museum of Art in Kirishima, Japan. The papyrus comes from a village in the meris of Themistos in the Arsinoite nome (Egypt) and dates to the late third century BCE. The most noteworthy aspect of this fragmentary papyrus, which preserves a petition, is that the individual who submitted it bears the compound ethnic identifier 'Judeo-Egyptian' (Ἰουδαίολοιγύπτιος), which is hitherto unattested.

THE Matsushita Museum of Art in the southern Japanese city of Kirishima (Kagoshima Prefecture) possesses a small collection of Greek and Demotic papyri.¹ According to the catalogue records, the pieces were all purchased together between 1970 and 1973 by Kanetomo Matsushita (1905–1989), the founder of the museum, while travelling abroad in Egypt.²

We would like to thank Ms Ibuse, curator of the Matsushita Museum of Art, for assisting us during our visit and for allowing us to image and publish the papyri in the museum's collection. We also want to thank Dr Kyoko Yamahana of Tokai University for apprising us of the papyrus collection in the Matsushita Museum of Art. Lastly, we would like to thank Gert Baetens, Willy Clarysse, Tal Ilan and Csaba La'da for reading earlier drafts of this article and providing valuable feedback. We also thank the anonymous reviewers who recommended various emendations that improved the article. Any errors or infelicities in this work are the sole responsibility of the authors. For editions of papyri, we have used the abbreviations given in the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets* found online at <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist>; accessed 16 May 2024.

1. The collection consists of about 30 fragments, 20 of which are written in Greek and 10 in Demotic.

2. The catalogue records indicate that the pieces were purchased in Cairo, but they provide no additional information. The acquisition of these papyri was part of a larger campaign by Kanetomo Matsushita to obtain 'Western' artefacts and art following the end of World War II. While the bulk of the materials contained in the museum consist of Renaissance art, and the museum boasts paintings by Monet, Renoir and Picasso, it also has a modest collection of ancient artefacts from Egypt, Greece, Italy, Syria and North Africa. While these artefacts were initially kept in the personal collection of

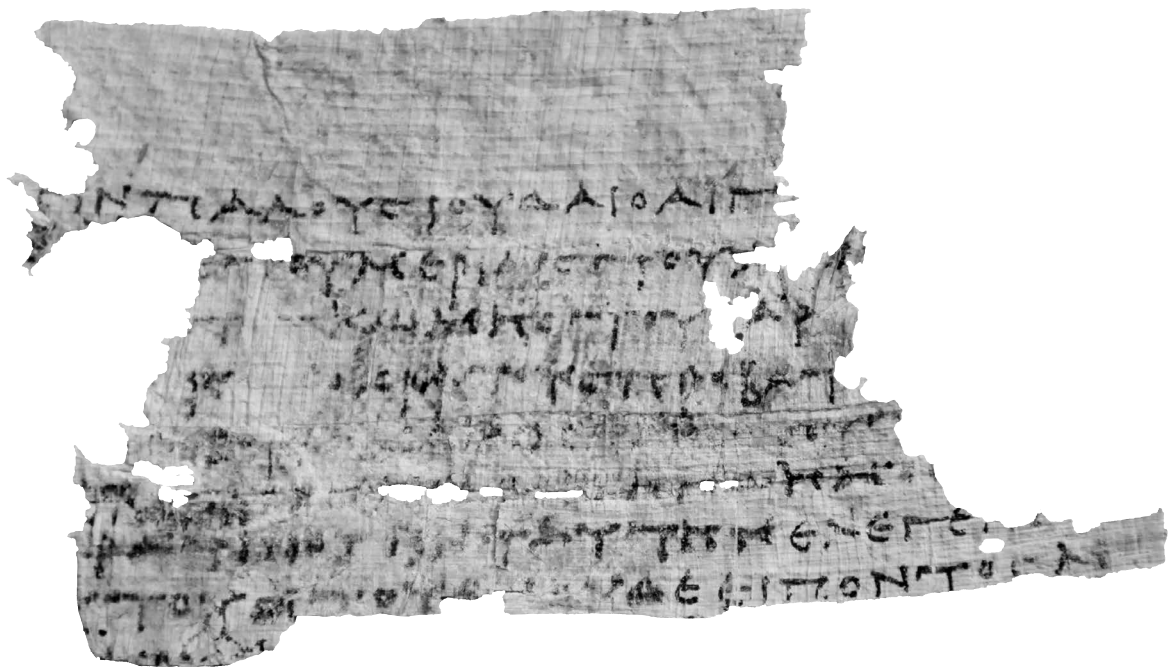


FIGURE 1 The papyrus petition. (Photo: Lincoln H. Blumell.)

A cursory survey of the Greek pieces, which are all fragments and do not contain a single complete text, reveals that most of them come from the Ptolemaic period (c. 332–30 BCE) and that many contain traces of white gesso, indicating that they were reused as cartonnage. One Greek piece that stands out preserves nine fragmentary lines of text. Despite the fragmentary nature of the piece, the first line can be reconstructed somewhat beyond the margins of the papyrus since it forms the first line of the document and begins with a formulaic phrase that reveals that it is a petition.³ On the extant portions of this line the petitioner, a man bearing the name ‘Palous’

Matsushita, they came to be permanently housed in the Matsushita Museum of Art in 1983 when it opened. The Greek and Demotic papyri were initially kept together in a box, but were collectively mounted under a single framed sheet of glass in 1979. During our visit we were permitted to open the framed glass, clean the papyri, and then separate and remount the papyri in multiple panes. In the original mounting the papyri were held in place by a large piece of construction paper that was backed by folded newspapers. The newspapers bore dates ranging from early to late spring 1979.

3. That the first extant line of the papyrus is the first line of text is evident because there is a 2 cm blank space on the papyrus immediately above this line.

(Παλοῦς), self-identifies using the compound ethnic identifier ‘Judeo-Egyptian’ (Ἰουδαioαιγύπτιος). While the papyrus breaks off midway through αἰγυπτίος, this is the only tenable reading and is significant as this compound ethnicity is previously unattested.⁴ Additionally, as this is the only extant royal petition from Ptolemaic Egypt where the petitioner is identified with an ethnicity containing *Ioudaios*, it would make this piece the earliest such petition as it dates to the last quarter of the third century BCE.⁵ Therefore, even though it is fragmentary and the purpose and contours of the petition cannot be ascertained with certainty, it is a noteworthy document.

Description and date

The papyrus measures 8.5 × 13.0 cm and is written against the fibres (ι); the reverse side is mostly covered with thick chunks of white gesso and appears to contain a few scattered traces of ink, although none of them is legible. There is collesis (horizontal) 5 cm from the top of the papyrus. On the text side of the piece there are distinct horizontal folds between lines 1 and 2 and then again through line 6, suggesting the piece was folded.⁶ The unfortunate result of the fold through line 6 is that this line is badly damaged and mostly illegible. The reconstructed prescript formula in line 1 establishes

4. Other compound ethnicities that employ -αιγύπτιος as the second component are attested from the same period and locale as this papyrus and are discussed below.

5. Four other petitions from roughly the same period mention *Ioudaioi*, but in no case are they the petitioner: *CPJ* 1.38.2 (=P.Enteux. 2; 11 May 218 BCE; Krokodilopolis): ἀδικοῦμαι ὑπὸ Σεώτος Ἰουδαίου (‘I am wronged by Seos the Jew’); *CPJ* 1.128.2–3 (=P.Enteux. 23; 11 May 218 BCE; Magdola): τῶν [Ἰου]δαίων (‘of the Jews’); *CPJ* 1.129.5 (=P.Enteux. 30; 11 May 218 BCE; Magdola): ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (‘in the prayer house of the Jews’); *CPJ* 4.598.1–2 (=P.Sorb. 3.103; 22 January 221 BCE): ἀδικοῦμαι ὑπὸ Ἡρακλείδου τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων ἐμ Μούχει τῆς Πολέμωνος μερίδος (‘I am wronged by Heraklides one of the Jewish settlers in Mouchis in the meris of Polemon’). See also Josephus, *Ant.* 12.258–61, where he cites a petition (ὑπόμνημα) presented to Antiochus IV Epiphanes by a group of Samaritans to secure the right of their temple on mount Gerizim. At present there are 18 petitions (ὑπομνήματα) that relate to the Jewish *politeuma* from the second century BCE: *CPJ* 4.577 (147–6/136–5 BCE; Herakleopolite nome); *CPJ* 4.557–72 (=P.Polit.Jud. nos 1–17; all date from c. 143–132 BCE; all come from the Herakleopolite nome except no. 8, which comes from the Oxyrhynchite nome).

6. Fold lines are especially common on both petitions and letters as they were often sealed before they were sent. While letters frequently have an address on the back that was visible on the exterior of the folded text, generally petitions lack an exterior address. See E. Bickerman, ‘Beiträge zur antiken Urkundengeschichte. III. Ἐντευξις und ὑπόμνημα’, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 9 (1930), pp. 156, 158, 170; cf. G. Baetens and M. Depauw, ‘A Demotic Petition about the Misconduct of an Official in the Papyrus Museum in Syracuse (P. Syrac. 262)’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 197 (2016), pp. 191–94; G. Baetens, *A Survey of Petitions and Related Documents from Ptolemaic Egypt* (Trismegistos Online Publications Special Series 5, 2020), p. 220, discusses the absence of the exterior address on *enteuxeis*, *hypomnemata* and *mqmq*.