

# Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215

Post by "Don" of August 16, 2022 at 3:53 PM

I was working through Les Epicuriens before I have to return the interlibrary loan book and came across this in the section of Epicurus' writings. I was not aware of Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215, but it appears to possibly be an unknown text of Epicurus although some scholars debate this attribution. It could just be a section of a known work that doesn't have the title at the end, too. It is definitely an Epicurean text, that's not debated.

The "O man" translation part includes ὦ] ἄνθρωπε, μακαριώ[τα]τον which is indeed, "O human being (anthrope)," then a word directly related to the word usually translated as blessed when describing the gods in PD1 and elsewhere.

I was also skeptical of the "By Zeuz - as they say, right", but it does seem to imply this in the Greek.

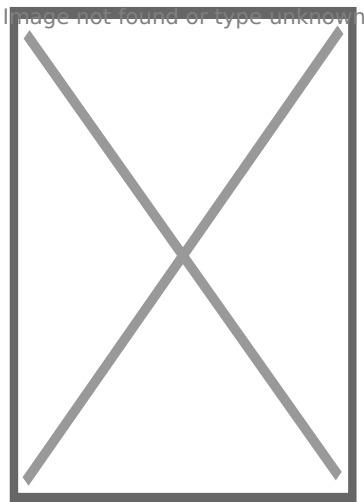
Here's the Wikipedia article on the papyrus:

[Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 215 - Wikipedia](#)

Here's the transcription on the Papyri.info site:

[DCLP/Trismegistos 59745 = LDAB 849](#)

Here's a link to the transcription at Internet Archive which also includes part of an English translation:



[The Oxyrhynchus papyri : Grenfell, Bernard P. \(Bernard Pyne\), 1869-1926 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Here's the French translation from Les Epicuriens (I had to type in to Google Translate, so I figured someone else most likely has better French skills than me so I'm sharing it):

.1. Il n'y a point de vraie piété quand on (amoindrit) ce qui -- comme je l'ai dit -- est propre à la nature, ni quand du moins, pardi, les mots suivants sont (repetés) par les premiers venus: "Je crains tous les dieux (et) les vénère; et pour eux je veux faire toutes sortes de sacrifices et d'offrandes." De fait, un tel homme est sans doute de meilleure compagnie que d'autres, de simples profanes; néanmoins, ce n'est pas non plus encore ainsi que la piété acquiert une réelle solidité.

Pour ta part, o homme; tiens pour une chose au plus haut point bienheureuse le fait d'avoir la belle préconception de ce que nous sommes capables de penser comme (l'être) le meilleur parmi les êtres; admire cette claire perception et révère (sans crainte) cette perfection. Puis (missing 2 lines) comme (missing 2 words) lorsqu'ils ont l'intention de (lui) rendre un culte, mais (garde-toi) seulement de méprise une si grande majesté en l'envisageant par comparaison avec le bonheur qui est le tien. Et, pardi, à propos de cette (joie) qui découle de la ... .2. (missing plusieurs lignes) (sache profiter...?) (de ce qui est) à même de (missing 1 word) et fait plaisir, si l'occasion s'en présente, en (honorant) la contemplation même (des dieux) qui est la tienne au moyen des plaisirs naturels de la chair -- pour peu qu'ils soient convenables -- , mais parfois aussi en te pliant aux lois.

En outre, n'introduis pas ici de la crainte, en supposant que des dieux pourraient te manifester de la reconnaissance d'agir ainsi. Car, au nom de Zeus, -- comme on dit, n'est-ce pas? -- à quoi bon éprouver de la crainte? Penses-tu que ces êtres-la aient un comportement injuste? Si oui, à l'évidence tu les rabaisse: comment peux-tu donc te représenter la divinité comme un être qui ne soit pas vil, si justement celle-ci s'abaisse à ton niveau? Ou alors, ton comportement injuste t'a fait imaginer qu'en agissant de la sorte tu adouciras (un dieu), et que celui-ci, prenant la chose en compte, ferait quelquefois remise aux hommes de chatiments qu'il leur destinait? Car aussi bien, (certains) croient que, s'ils doivent les craindre et les honorer, c'est pour retenir par le (sacrifice les dieux) de s'en prendre à eux; (de la sorte), ou leur croyance est juste et ils n'auront pas du tout de ceux qui honorent (les dieux est nulle...(??)) (missing 1 line)...

.3. (missing several lines) brûle. De fait, (être pris en faute) causerait du tort (si l'on) s'attendait à (être récompensé). Et indépendamment de ces considérations, (parce qu'ils cherchent à obtenir) par leurs prières des marques de gratitude auprès (de dieux) qui ne leur en (fournissent) pas, et (parce qu'ils ont l'espoir) qu'ils viendront (plus) facilement à eux, à eux-mêmes et à ceux (qui leur sont chers), ils (les) (invoquent) précisément de toutes les manières possibles, (en donnant des gages) pour (se protéger (??)) du chatiment et détourner d'eux la (punition. Et) il faut calculer que ... (remaining 7 lines damaged)

And here's what I got from Google Translate:

There is no true piety when one (diminishes) what -- as I said -- is proper to nature, nor when at least, of course, the following words are (repeated) by the first comers : "I fear all the gods (and) worship them; and for them I want to make all kinds of sacrifices and offerings." In fact, such a man is probably better company than others, mere laymen; nevertheless, it is not yet in this way that piety acquires real solidity.

For your part, O man; hold for a thing at the highest point blessed the fact of having the beautiful preconception of what we are capable of thinking as (the being) the best among beings; admire this clear perception and revere (without fear) this perfection. Then (missing 2 lines) as (missing 2 words) when they intend to worship (him), but (beware) only of despising such great majesty by considering it in comparison with the happiness which is yours. And, of course, about this (joy) which stems from the... (missing several lines) (know how to take advantage...?) (of what is) even from (missing 1 word) and gives pleasure, if the opportunity presents itself, by (honouring) the very contemplation (of the gods) which is yours by means of the natural pleasures of the flesh - as long as they are suitable -, but sometimes also by bowing to the laws.

Also, do not introduce fear here, assuming that gods might show you gratitude for doing so. For, in the name of Zeus, -- as they say, right? -- what is the good of feeling fear? Do you think these beings behave unjustly? If so, obviously you lower them: how can you represent the divinity to yourself as a being who is not vile, if precisely this one lowers itself to your level? Or else, your unjust behavior made you imagine that by acting in this way you would soften (a god), and that this one, taking the thing into account, would sometimes give men the punishments he intended for them? For as well, (some) believe that, if they must fear them and honor them, it is to restrain by the (sacrifice the gods) from attacking them; (so), or their belief is right and they won't have any honoring ones at all (the gods are nothing (les dieux est nulle)...(?)) (missing 1 line)...3. (missing several lines) burned. In fact, (being caught) would cause harm (if one) expected (to be rewarded). And independently of these considerations, (because they seek to obtain) by their prayers marks of gratitude from (gods) who do not (provide) them, and (because they have the hope) that they will come (more) easily to them, to themselves and to those (who are dear to them), they (them) (invoke) precisely in all possible ways, (by giving pledges) to (protect themselves (?)) punishment and divert from them the (punishment. And) it is necessary to calculate that ... (remaining 7 lines damaged)

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 16, 2022 at 5:28 PM**

Thank you for all that Don. It's easy to see why the general tenor is judged to be Epicurean - I would agree with that, if this reconstruction is halfway accurate.

## Post by “Don” of August 16, 2022 at 10:42 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Thank you for all that Don. It's easy to see why the general tenor is judged to be Epicurean - I would agree with that, if this reconstruction is halfway accurate.

It appears the papyrus is surprisingly intact, so a reconstruction isn't nearly as necessary as it is in some other texts. I take this to be predominantly reliable.

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## Post by “Martin” of August 17, 2022 at 4:31 AM

I found no obvious difference in meaning between the French version and the Google translation during a quick read. It seems that the missing accents were no problem for Google.

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## Post by “Don” of August 17, 2022 at 6:56 AM

I just reread the Archive link and noticed them saying "The paragraphi are original, but the other punctuation marks.... added later."

A paragraphus is a "short stroke in the margin marking a break in sense."

From Greek, παράγραφος (sc. γραμμή), ἡ,

"A line or stroke drawn in the margin, with a dot over it, to mark the change of persons in a dialogue, or the corresponding parts of a chorus or parabasis"

Hmm, so there's something to look for in the older manuscripts although that punctuation could have been obsolete by the time we get to the 1100-1500s unless the scribe was copying exactly what they saw from earlier manuscripts.

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of August 17, 2022 at 9:44 AM

I like this definition of “god” as “(the being) the best among beings”. I’ve recently come to see how functional and non-abstract the word “god” can be employed in our casual vernacular. If I ask you whom the “God of Rock” or “God of Pop” is, we’ll probably come up with a few similar answer. We experienced the “Lord of the Dance” without being confused into believing that Michael Flatley was a Creator-deity. If a person walks by and someone remarks, “he is a god” or “she is a goddess”, we know they are commenting on some semblance of physical perfection. Similarly, the “God [of a human]” would be that human's prototype of the perfect person, thus, being a reflection of our inner ideals.

I am partial to an idea expressed by Xenophanes: *“Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired [...] But if horses or oxen or lion had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had”*. Unsurprisingly, then, the god of the poor is a martyr, the god of the monarchs is kingly, the god of the pacifists is peaceful, and the god of the warriors is sacrificial (or some fascile thereof).

I am coming to appreciate how insightful Epicurus' observation was. There is a preconception of “god” because we can employ the phrase so easily with common language to express “the perfect version [of]”. Prior to getting subsumed by the theological rabbit hole, we already know what a “god” is and are comfortable assigning people we find extraordinarily skilled or admirable the designation of “[a] god” or “goddess”. For the sake of prudence and practical wisdom, it would be dysfunctional, or at least linguistically odd to assume that “[a] god” could be something other than “perfect”. How could the God of Rock make mistakes on a guitar? Why would the God of Dance trip over their own feet? Why would the God of Living Beings incite trouble or death that would threaten the lives of other beings? If there were a Creator that occasionally destroyed its creations, why would we identify that being as a “god”? That's just a bad Creator.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 17, 2022 at 10:55 AM**

I very much like your train of thought Nate.

I think it bears also on the phantom I am always wanting to fight - the implication that "being satisfied with what we have" leads inexorably to "it's perfectly fine for us to spend our lives in a cave eating bread and water."

The reason it is NOT fine to "live in a cave eating bread and water" is that we have the "instinct" to know that we can do better than that. Given that inbuilt feeling of the "perfect," the

idea of us being satisfied with a cave-dwelling life should never even be a temptation to us.

We can at one and the same time understand that (1) living in a cave on bread and water may in fact be appropriate under certain circumstances but also (2) that such circumstances and manner of living is not the norm nor should it be accepted as a norm.

There may be better words than "instinctual" but I am using that to cover the drift of your post and your quotes. We might also be talking about "art" or "archetypes" or other words. But something inside living things that's connected with the way we function doesn't require elaborate logical syllogisms to understand our own natures, and that something helps us "see" or "feel" what kind of things we are capable of and/or can aspire to.

As such I can see this "Epicurean attitude toward divinity" being much more significant in the Epicurean worldview than it is given credit for today. It helps bridge that "Why NOT live in a cave if absence of pain is the highest pleasure?" problem in a way that doesn't rely on Platonic forms, divine intervention, or dry syllogisms.

And if in fact this line of thought such as you are discussing is correct, it's a major issue that needs emphasis and development to help flesh out a truly usable modern understanding of Epicurus.

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## Post by "Kalosyni" of August 17, 2022 at 4:50 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We can at one and the same time understand that (1) living in a cave on bread and water may in fact be appropriate under certain circumstances but also (2) that such circumstances and manner of living is not the norm nor should it be accepted as a norm.

This may be outside the original subject matter of this thread, however I feel the need to examine more closely this phrase: "living in a cave on bread and water". I know it represents "asceticism", and that an Epicurean would not choose to live an ascetic lifestyle. Yet what about others who are not yet Epicurean or who are new to Epicureanism -- what would this actually look like? What are the ways in which people try to retreat from civilization?

1) Moving to a remote mountain cabin (or to the desert).

2) Someone who is retired and lives alone choosing to live so frugally that they only leave the house for occasional grocery shopping.

3) Seeking an ascetic spiritual life - moving into a Catholic or Buddhist monastery.

Why would someone choose this for themselves? (I doubt anyone would choose an ascetic lifestyle if they could easily live normally).

1) Lack of finances

2) Social anxiety disorder

3) Spiritual retreat for religious reasons or self-reflection (probably caused by an "existential crisis")

Could there be aspects of Epicureanism which could help people who are considering living as an "ascetic", due to feelings of anxiety, etc? Is it possible that Epicurus had teachings on psychological remedies, and those writings were lost? From Book 10 of Diogenes Laertius we know that he wrote an entire book "Of Choice and Avoidance" (and also other books).

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2022 at 5:08 PM**

My first comment is that while I do think the issue is real, and that's why I talk about it, I also think that the most pressing part of it is not those who actually do retreat from society, but those who think that it is great intellectual fun to sarcastically or caustically observe that Epicurean philosophy is just as full of wholes as any other because it seems to preach pleasure but at the same time preach asceticism.

In other words I think there are many who like to talk about Epicurean ideas of tranquility but few who actually try to live it (for the same reason they don't love Stoicism).

They are fixating on impractical and "wrong" ideas as what Epicurus taught, and then that gives them license to keep him on a bookshelf with 100 other gurus who they pull out when they want an intellectual challenge but otherwise ignore.

Having said that, yes the questions Kalosyni raises are good ones. In many of those cases a person considering those alternatives would really be in a downward spiral even to be considering them. Such situations don't call for retreat to "mind over body" as much as they probably call for focused action to attack the problems causing the issues.

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### **Post by "Bryan" of May 16, 2024 at 12:13 AM**

I mentioned the difficulty with the translation of Oxyrhynchus 215. I wanted to show a bit about what I was talking about: Early on, we have the word ***Chapiésteros, Χαπιέστε[ρο]ς***. This is not a word I have been able to find anything about. This may be the only preserved instance of the word, a Hapax legomenon. This, of course, makes figuring out the meaning difficult.

[col. 1, line 1-11] ...nor whenever, by god, it is spoken again like this by the common people "I fear all the gods whom I revere and to them I wish to sacrifice all things and to dedicate to them." [line 11-16] Indeed, such a person possibly at times is ***Chapiésteros*** than other laymen -- but still, not in this way at all does the firmness of piety exist.

[col. 1, line 11-16] ***Χαπιέστε[ρο]ς*** μὲν γὰρ ἴσως ποτὲ [ὁ τ]οιοῦτος ἄλλων ἰδιω[τῶ]ν ἐστίν, ὅμως δὲ οὐ[δὲ] ταύτη πω τὸ βέβαιον [εὐ]σεβείας ὑπάρχει.

<sup>10</sup>[τ]αθύειν καὶ τούτοις  
[ἀν]ατιθέναι". ***χαπιέστε-***  
***[ρο]ς*** μὲν γὰρ ἴσως ποτὲ  
[ὁ τ]οιοῦτος ἄλλων ἰδιω-  
[τῶ]ν ἐστίν,

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## Post by "Joshua" of May 16, 2024 at 1:39 AM

Words that start with Χαπ- seem to be exceedingly rare. I did not find any in the two volume ~1500 page Cambridge Greek Lexicon on my book shelf. Χαρ- and καπ- are way more common.

If the word is actually Χαριέστερος (or -ον) this is a word that Epicurus does use in the [Letter to Pythocles](#);

### Quote

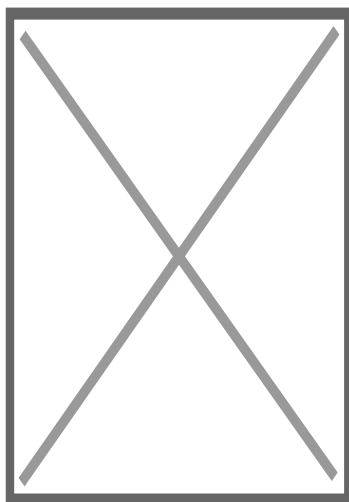
οὐδὲ γὰρ <ἀν> εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον κἂν μικρῷ χαριέστερον ἢ, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐκπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς παντελῆ εὐδαιμονίαν κεκτημένον.

Bailey: For not even the lowest animal, although 'a small thing gives the greater pleasure,' would be seized by such foolishness, much less one who was possessed of perfect happiness.

Yonge: Nor can such folly as this occur to any being who is even moderately comfortable, much less to one which is possessed of perfect happiness.

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**Post by “Don” of May 16, 2024 at 7:14 AM**



[The Oxyrhynchus papyri : Grenfell, Bernard P. \(Bernard Pyne\), 1869-1926 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

26 35 43

archive.org

Grenfell has χαριέστερον.

[χαρίεις - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

Comparative

χαριέστερος

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, χα^ρίεις](#)

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**Post by “Bryan” of May 16, 2024 at 11:16 AM**

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Words that start with Χαπ- seem to be exceedingly rare.

Very good point, the fact that "Χαπ-" does not seem to even exist as the beginning of any word should have been my clue that one letter probably needs to change!

[Quote from Don](#)

Grenfell has χαριέστερον.

It is interesting that Grenfell comments on the ος/ον change but says nothing about χαρ/χαπ.

Χαριέστερον must be the answer. Thank you both!

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I see Grenfell translates it as "more taste on his part"

I think I will go with "more refined" for the moment:

"Indeed, possibly such a person at times is more refined than other laymen, but still not in this way at all does the firmness of piety exist."

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### **Post by "Don" of May 16, 2024 at 8:00 PM**

I've been looking for an image of P.Oxy.II 215 online for us to make up our own minds, but I've been unsuccessful thus far.

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### **Post by "TauPhi" of May 16, 2024 at 9:41 PM**

[Bryan](#) You mentioned you were looking for an English translation. Take a look here. I hope it helps.

[Laudator Temporis Acti: P. Oxy. 215](#)

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### **Post by "Bryan" of May 16, 2024 at 10:53 PM**

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2638-papyrus-oxyrhynchus-215/>

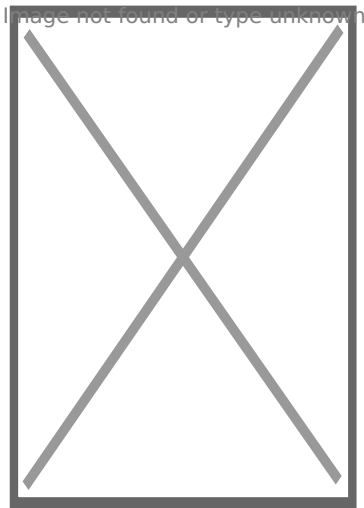
Excellent! Thank you very much TauPhi!

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### Post by “TauPhi” of May 17, 2024 at 5:30 AM

When I was checking the sources mentioned in that translation, I learnt two things that may be of interest to someone:

1) The source of the image is available on archive.org and there's a lot of additional good stuff there (in German):



[Sitzungsberichte Der Koniglich Preussischen Akademie Der Wissenschafte : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Erster Halbband. Januar bis Juni (Acc. No. 26838); Zweiter Halbband. Juli bis December (Acc. No. 26839)

archive.org

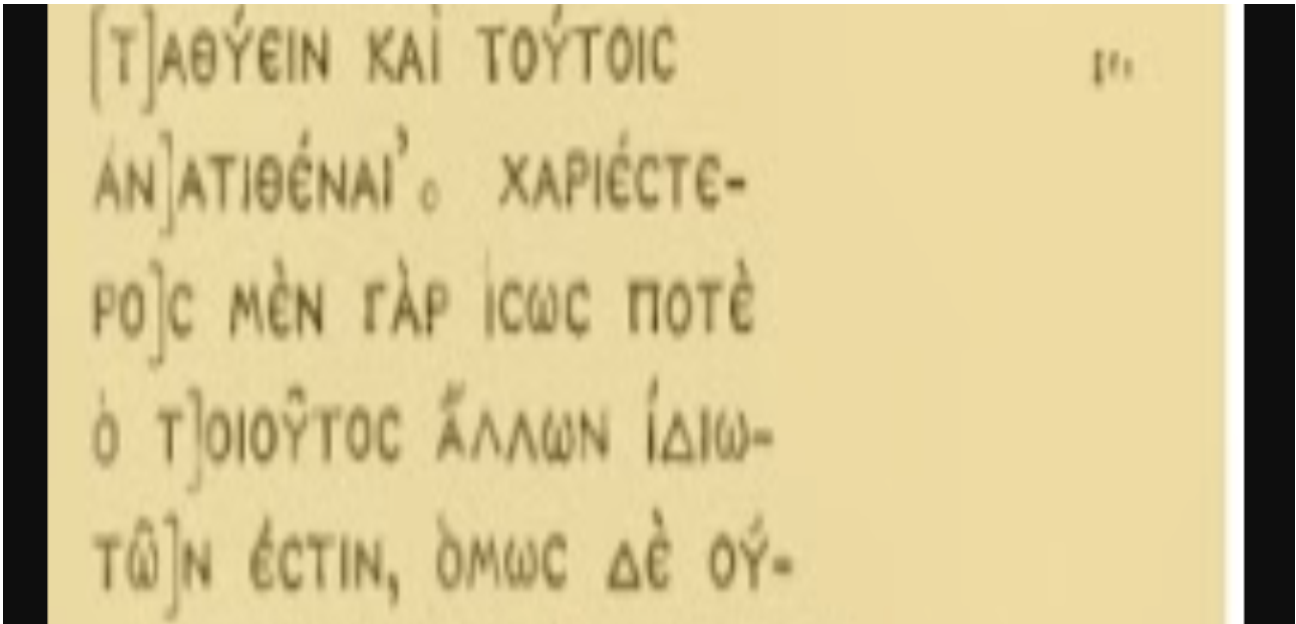
2) C. W. Chilton (mentioned on that webpage) also wrote: **Diogenes of Oenoanda, *The Fragments. A Translation and Commentary.*** Both in Latin and English. I guess there are new fragments available since the date of the publication (1971) but I thought I would mention this work just in case.

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### Post by “Don” of May 17, 2024 at 6:48 AM

These are great, [TauPhi](#) !! Well done and THANKS!!

To circle back to [Bryan](#) 's question: Both of those document χᾶριέστε[ρο]ς...



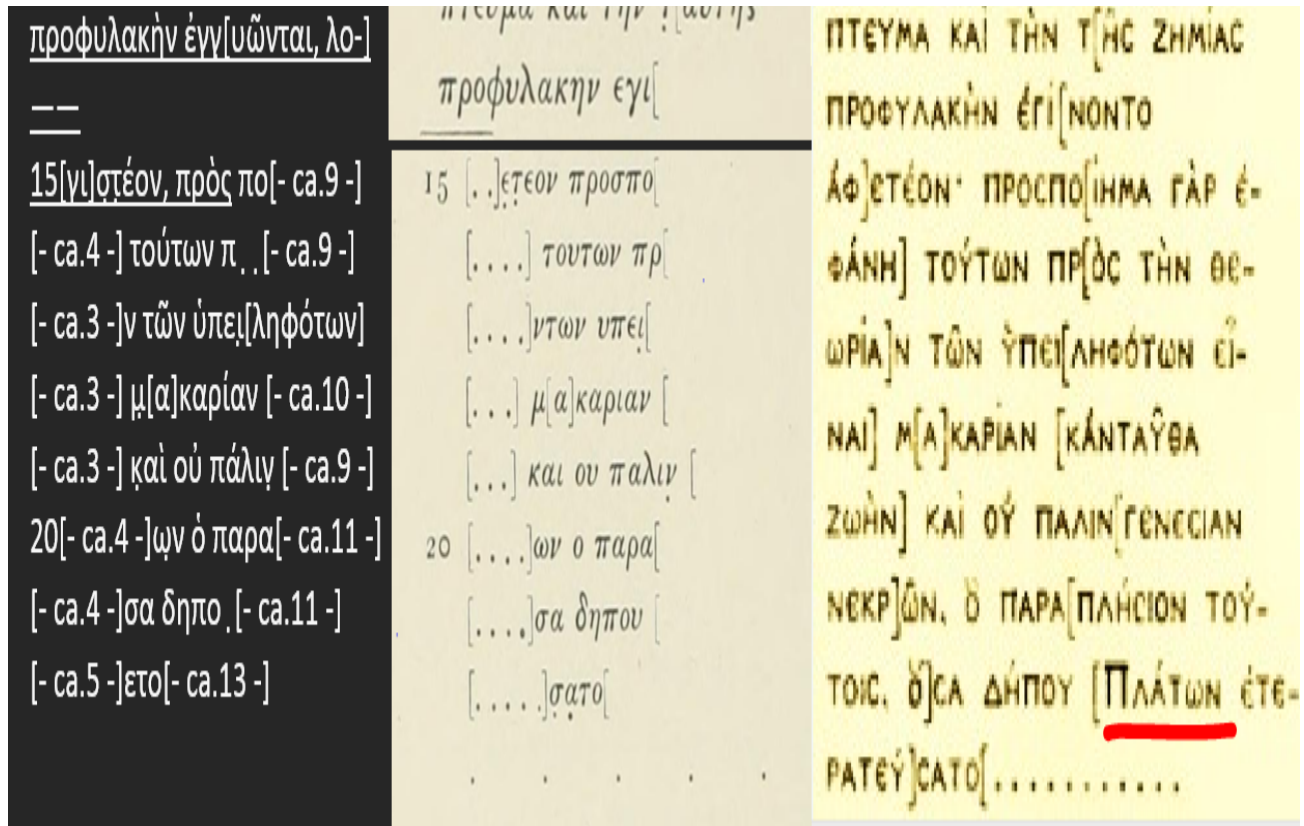
Ox. Pap. n. 215 (II S. 30).

.....]Ν[...]]ΙΟΥ[....  
[·]Α ΓΙΝ[Ε]Ι[Θ]ΑΙ ὅΤΑΝ ΚΑΘ[Η-  
ΚΗ], ΤΗΣ ΕΥΣΕΥΣ, ὡς ἔλεγον,  
οἰκείον, μῆδ' ὅταν γε,  
ἢ ἢ ΔΙΑ ΟΥΤΩΙ ΛΕΓΗΤΑΙ ΠΑ-  
ΛΙ]Ν ὑΠὸ ΤῶΝ ΤΥΧόντων  
'ΔΕΔΟΙΚΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΘΕΟΥΣ ΠΑΝ-  
ΤΑΣ Κ]ΑΙ ΣΕΒ[Ο]ΜΑΙ [Κ]ΑΙ ΤΟΥ-  
ΤΟΙ]Σ ΒΟ[Υ]Λ[Ο]ΜΑΙ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΚΑ-  
[Τ]ΑΘΥΕΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥΤΟΙΣ  
ΑΝ]ΑΤΙΘΕΝΑΙ'. ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΕ-  
ΡΟ]Σ ΜΕΝ ΓΑΡ ΙΣΩΣ ΠΟΤΕ  
Ο Τ]ΟΙΟΥΤΟΣ ἌΛΛΩΝ ΙΔΙΩ-  
ΤΩ]Ν ΕΣΤΙΝ, ὍΜΩΣ ΔΕ ΟΥ-  
ΔΕ] ΤΑΥΤΗ ΠΙΣΙ Τὸ ΠΕΒΑΙΟΝ

**Col. 1** *Unter Frömmigkeit verstehe ich nicht etwa die Beobachtung der üblichen religiösen Obliegenheiten, obgleich die Darbringung von Opfern zu den geziemenden Festzeiten, wie ich bemerkte, ein natürliches Erfordernis ist, auch beim Zeus nicht, wenn etwa der oder jener wieder spricht: „Ich fürchte alle Götter und ehre sie und will ihnen mein ganzes Hab und Gut opfern und ihnen Weihgeschenke errichten“. Ein solcher Mann ist ja vielleicht lobenswerter als andere Laien, aber auch damit ist noch nicht die feste Grundlage für Frömmigkeit gelegt. Nein, du, o Mensch, hast*

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Post by “Bryan” of May 17, 2024 at 10:58 AM



Thank you TauPhi! I was surprised yesterday to see Plato mentioned in the Chilton translation. It is a shame the mention of Plato in this text is just speculation by Diels.

[Chilton trans.] ...a marvel not less unlikely than those which Plato imagined.

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Post by “Don” of May 17, 2024 at 1:24 PM

.... And that's why it's so lucky that we have all these digitized resources available to us! For all its shortcomings, the Internet *can* be a wonderful thing!

## Post by “Bryan” of May 17, 2024 at 1:25 PM

Apropos to the Anselm discussion:

[P.Oxy. 2.215, col. 1, lines 11-16] And you, Sir, should consider it a great blessing to have rightly grasped the best of all that exists which we are able to conceive – and you should marvel at this understanding (διάληψιν) and you should revere it with freedom from fear.

[Chilton] You, my friend, must know that the most blessed gift is to have a clear perception of things; that is absolutely the best thing that we can conceive of here below. Admire this clear apprehension of the spirit, revere this divine gift.

[Grenfell] But do you, sir, consider that the most blessed state lies in the formation of a just conception concerning the best thing that we can possibly imagine to exist; and reverence and worship this idea.

[col. 1, lines 11-16] σὺ [δ', ὦ] ἄνθρωπε, μακαριώ[τα]τον μὲν τι νόμιζε τὸ [διε]ίληφέναι καλῶς ὃ τὸ [παν]άριστον ἐν τοῖς οὐσι [δια]νοηθῆναι δυνάμε[θα], κα[ὶ] θ[α]ύμαζε ταύτην [τῆ]ν δι[α]λήψιν καὶ σέβου [ἀδ]ε[ί]α τοῦτο.

Taking διανοηθῆναι in the middle voice, but a passive construction is also possible (with no real change in meaning).

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## Post by “Bryan” of May 17, 2024 at 11:46 PM

Trying to bring it all together, here are my notes so far. Perhaps over-produced. Please point out any errors you notice, they are certainly there.

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## Post by “TauPhi” of May 18, 2024 at 5:03 AM

I can't point out any errors as I don't know any Greek but I certainly can point out that this is a great effort. My little Epicurean library just got a little bigger. Thank you very much [Bryan](#)