

**Max NELSON**

**It's in the Mail: Two Lost and Unpublished Papyri from Roman Egypt**

In early 1932, A. E. R. Boak of the University of Michigan purchased about a dozen papyri (probably originally from Oxyrhynchus) from a dealer named M. Nahman. Though some of these papyri were kept in the Michigan collection, others were given to Columbia University and, apparently, to the University of British Columbia. An extant letter from O. J. Todd of U.B.C. to Boak dated October 22, 1932 confirms the receipt of two papyri. Apparently now lost, the contents of these papyri can be reconstructed from the careful transcriptions of Todd as well as J. G. Winter (who replied to Todd's letter on Boak's behalf), which can currently be found in the Kelsey Papers in the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. I intend to discuss the contents of these as yet unpublished papyrus documents (permission to do so has already been granted by the Bentley).

The first papyrus, dating to the second century A.D., is an invitation for a dinner of Sarapis of a well known type. M. Totti (*Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* 1985, 125-127) listed sixteen such texts, to which now can be added three more published examples (*P.Oxy.* LXII.4339 and LXVI.4539 and 4540) as well as our unpublished text. All of these date from the first to the third centuries A.D. and include the name of the host, the function (usually stated as being a dinner at the couch of Sarapis), the place (usually the Sarapeum, but sometimes another sacred or secular locale), and the day (without the month) and the time. Our example is remarkably similar to *P.Oxy.* I.110; even the sender of the note has the same name (Chaeremon). The importance of our text, however, lies in its newly attested date for such a dinner, the fifth of an undisclosed month. Scholars in the past have been divided, unsure whether to identify these Sarapis dinners as taking place on special religious festival days or whether to interpret them rather as secular gatherings occurring on no particular day. Our new date, which does not fit with any known Sarapaic or Isaic festival day (see R. Merkelbach. *Isisfeste in griechisch-römischer Zeit* 1963, esp. 77) may further support the latter hypothesis.

The second papyrus, also from the second century A.D., contains a fragmentary letter from an anonymous sender to her/his mother. It follows closely well known epistolary formulas of salutation and inquiry and includes the promise to come visit and the corresponding invitation for the mother to come visit. The importance of our letter lies in the fact that a new town, apparently in Roman Egypt, is named. In line 10 we learn that the mother addressed in the letter lives in Tyris. Todd suggested that Tyris was a variant of Tyras, a Greek city on the north coast of the Black Sea. Winter, however, more plausibly suggested that it was the name of an Egyptian village, otherwise unattested (see A. Calderini. *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell' Egitto greco-romano*, 1972- [including supplements]).