

# **‘Letter Carriers in Personal Letters among the Papyri and Pauline epistolary communication strategy’**

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Abstract: This paper discusses the roles assigned to named letter carriers in around 40 personal letters among the Greek papyri. The role of named letter carriers in Paul's epistolary communication strategy is discussed in the light of this papyrological evidence and in critical interaction with recent work by Stirewalt and Richards.

## **The Letter Carriers of Oxyrhynchus**

### **1. Introduction:**

This paper offers some preliminary results from a research project on Letter-carriers and the Pauline tradition. The aim of this research project is to study the identity and function of the letter-carriers of the Pauline epistles within the twin contexts of Greco-Roman epistolary practice and Paul's own communication strategy. This paper reports on the initial stages of this project in terms of the use of letter carriers among the personal letters in the papyri.

### **2. Method:**

Essentially the method applied so far is quite simple. Reading through examples of letters in various collections of ancient letters revealed that letter carriers were often referred to in various ways, there was no standard terminology used for letter carriers and therefore no way to collect examples of the role and function of (named) letter carriers from straightforward computer searches of the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri. I was also concerned to find ways to move beyond the anecdotal or ‘best-example’ style of appeal to ancient epistolary conventions that is often characteristic of publications in this area. So I resolved to read as many ancient Greek letters as I could find.<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on the initial research: to begin with I read all the letters published in the sixty-eight volumes of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (with a particular focus on material between 200 BC and AD 200). I was looking for information about delivery, letter-carrying, couriers etc. Of the 450 letters published so far in

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<sup>1</sup> Chan-Hie Kim ‘Index of Greek papyrus Letters’ *Semeia* 22 (1982), 107–112.  
[NB. This is very incomplete, even for the volumes listed]

that collection (not date limited), exactly 100 letters provided some relevant information about the delivery of the letter (often this is no more than an address on the back of the letter), and around 40 named letter carriers. These named letter carriers from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri will be the focus of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Four Samples:**

Before summarising the general results of the survey of this material I will introduce four texts in some measure of detail. The aim is to show examples of some of the different roles of letter-carriers.

#### **3.1. P. Oxy 113 (II): Letter from Corbolon to Heraclides**

This is a rather complicated letter about various transactions.

‘Corbolon to Heraclides, greeting. I send you the key by Horion and the piece of the lock by Onnophris, the camel-driver of Apollonius. I enclosed in the former packet a pattern of white-violet colour. I beg you to be good enough to match it and buy me two drachmas’ weight, and send it to me at once by any messenger you can find, for the tunic is to be woven immediately. I received everything you told me to expect by Onnophris safely. I send you by the same Onnophris six quarts of good apples. I thank all the gods to think that I came upon Plution in the Oxyrhynchite nome. Do not think that I took no trouble about the key. The reason is that the smith is a long way from us. I wonder that you did not see your way to let me have what I asked you to send by Corbolon, especially when I wanted it for a festival. I beg you to buy me a silver seal and to send it me with all speed. Take care that Onnophris buys me what Irene’s mother told him. I told him that Syntrophus said that nothing more should be given to Amarantus on my account. Let me know what you have given him that I may settle accounts with him. Otherwise I and my son will come for this purpose. I had the large cheeses from Corbolon. I did not however what large ones, but small. Let me know of anything that you want and I will gladly do it. Farewell. Payni the 1<sup>st</sup>. (PS) Send me an obol’s worth of cake for my nephew.

It seems that Corbolon has sent two couriers with various items (introduced with ἐπεμψα σοι διὰ ...): Horion brings a key and a piece of material—this is explicitly described in line 5 as being included ἐκείνη τῆ ἐπιστολῆ thus confirming explicitly in the case of Horion and implicitly in the case of Onnophris that the expression ἐπεμψα σοι διὰ relates to the sending of a letter. Onnophris brings the lock with (I presume in line with what I have just said) this letter, and is mentioned in several other connections in what follows.

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<sup>2</sup> I subsequently studied 528 entries produced by a search of APIS for ‘Letter’ (between 200 BCE and 200 CE).

Onnophris is described as ‘the camel-driver of Apollonius’, presumably in the employ of Apollonius and involved in the transportation of goods (and letters).<sup>3</sup> In carrying Corbolon’s letter Onnophris is making a return journey (having proven himself trustworthy: ‘I received everything you told me to expect by Onnophris safely’).<sup>4</sup> Alongside the lock he brings some goods – ‘six quarts of good apples’. In this case the original expression—ἐπεμψα σοι δια Οννωφριος—is supplemented in the left hand margin with του αὐτου: ‘I send you by *the same* Onnophris ...’<sup>5</sup>

Heraclides is later urged to ensure that Onnophris fulfils a further task for Corbolon that seems to have been an orally-delivered task: ‘Take care that Onnophris buys me what Irene’s mother told him.’<sup>6</sup> This is not the only additional task given to Onnophris: ‘I told him that Syntrophus said that nothing more should be given to Amarantus on my account.’ It is quite clear that Corbolon expects a further return of Onnophris along with a return letter from Heraclides detailing the accounts owed to Onnophris for the completion of these tasks.

This letter is a little complicated and there are things we don’t know about the various people mentioned and the tasks assigned to Onnophris. Onnophris is clearly a professional courier of some sort shipping letters and goods for ‘customers’ who clearly include Corbolon and Heraclides. He is not an independent operator but is in some sense ‘the camel-driver of Apollonius’. Alongside the letters he carries goods referred to in the letters and additional tasks delivered orally and referred to only rather vaguely in the letter itself. He relates in complex ways to both sender (Corbolon) and receiver (Heraclides), so to take the extreme example: Onnophris is given a verbal task by Irene’s mother; this task is to buy (and presumably bring back) an unknown object for Corbolon; but Heraclides is given a charge to ensure that this task is carried out satisfactorily. Other, apparently verbal, messages supplement the written communication.

### 3.2. P. Oxy 292 (c. AD 25): Letter of Recommendation; Tyrannus to Theon

This letter is a fairly straightforward representative of a common type: the letter of

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3 Cf. P. Oxy 300 (i): ‘I sent you the bread-basket by Taurinus the camel man’ (ἐπεμψα σοι δια του καμηλειτου Ταυρεινου το παναριου); P. Oxy 498 (ii); 710 (ii BC); 3788; 3854. Cf. R.S. Bagnall, ‘The Camel, the Wagon, and the Donkey in Later Roman Egypt’ *BASP* 22:1-4 (1985) 1-6; R.W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*; A. Leone, *Gli Animali da Trasporto nell’ Egitto Greco, Romano e Bizantino* (Papyrologica Caesariensis, 12[9?]; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 47-88: use of camel used widely only in Roman period (p. 47 note 56); G. Nachtergaele, ‘Le chameau, l’âne et le mullet en Égypte gréco-romaine. Le témoignage des terres cuites’ *CE* 64 (1989), 287-334; *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume 12, The Crisis of Empire, AD 193–337*; 417-418.

4 This translation is a little free, since the original makes explicit the written nature of the communication: ἐκομισαμην πανθ ὅσα ἐγραψας κομισασθαι με παρα Οννωφριος ὑγιη. This is another expression (κομιζω with παρα and a name) that is used relatively often in connection with receiving goods along with a letter (but is elsewhere often more ambiguous).

5 Noted in ed. prin. (precedes rather than follows δια).

6 ἄ αὐτωι εἶρηκεν (supplemented in the margin with: μητ Εἰρηνης).



have to explain verbally what he wants from the receiver.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3. P. Oxy 3313 (II): Letter from Apollonius and Sarapias to Dionysia

Apollonius and Sarapias to Dionysia, greeting. You filled us with joy by announcing the good news of the wedding of the excellent Sarapion and we would have come immediately to serve him on a day greatly longed for by us and to share his joy, but because of the circuit sessions and because we are recovering from illness we could not come.

There are not many roses here yet; on the contrary they are in short supply, and from all the estates and from all the garland-weavers we could hardly get together the thousand that we sent you with Sarapas, even by picking the ones that ought to have been picked tomorrow. We had as much narcissus as you wanted, so instead of the 2,000 you wrote we sent 4,000.

We wish you did not despise us as misers so far as to laugh at us and write that you have sent the money, when we too regard the young people as our own children and esteem and love them more than our own, and so are as happy as you and their father.

Write to us and anything else you want. Give our greetings to the excellent Alexander, and to Sarapion and Theon—may the evil eye not touch them!—and to Aristoclea and to Aristoclea's children.

Sarapas will tell you about the roses—that I have made every effort to send you as many as you wanted, but we could not find them.

We pray your health, lady.

In this interesting letter Apollonius and Sarapias respond to 'the good news of the wedding of Sarapion' announced, doubtless in a letter to which this is the reply, by Dionysia.<sup>12</sup> Their letter conveys their regrets at being unable to attend the wedding, reinforces the depth of their relationship with the children of Dionysia, and explains the considerations which meant they were unable to fulfill the request for flowers which apparently accompanied the announcement of the wedding.

Dionysia had clearly requested a large number of roses for the wedding.<sup>13</sup> We don't know the number, but the writers emphasise the lengths to which they have gone: there are not many roses in the area, they are in short supply, they've gathered roses from all (their) properties and all the garland-weavers and by harvesting some prematurely they've gathered the 1,000 roses that they are sending. By way of compensation they double the number of Narcissi from the 2,000 requested to 4,000 supplied.

In terms of delivery it is apparent, although no formal expressions are used, that Sarapas, who is said to be bringing the 1,000 roses (line 11-12: ἃ ἐπεμψαμεν σοι δια Σαραπα), is also carrying the letter.<sup>14</sup> Along with the letter and the vast bulk of flowers to transport, Sarapas is also a resource who will be able to explain further about the roses, or even to testify to the truth of the emphatic assertions contained in the letter: μαρτυρησει σοι

<sup>11</sup> Stowers: 'the writer frequently envisages a face-to-face introduction upon the reading of the letter' (*Letter Writing*, 153).

<sup>12</sup> The announcement of the wedding is not explicitly written; but the senders of this letter do refer to a written request for 2,000 narcissi (line 14). In line 21-22 the senders of this letter request further written clarification: περι ὧν ἄλλων θελεις γρ[α]ψο[ν] ἡμ[ι]ν.

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps we should at least note that the crucial term 'wedding' is largely reconstructed by the editors (τον γ[α]μον], line 4), and there are no other specific indications that the occasion is a wedding.

<sup>14</sup> The editors agree: 'Sarapas is evidently the bearer of the letter as well as the escort of the flowers' (*OxyPap* p. 103).

Σαραπας περι των ροδων οτι παντα πεποιηκα εις το οσα ηθελεις πεμψαι σοι, αλλα ουχ ευρομεν (lines 25-27). In this way Sarapas is expected to be able to supplement the emphasis of the letter itself with his own testimony about the crucial point: the problem of the roses.

### 3.4. P. Oxy 3505 (II?<sup>15</sup>): Papontos to Alexander

This final example is a letter about a commercial arrangement between Papontos the supplier and Alexander the retailer relating to some sheepskins and mats.

Papontos to his own Alexander, greetings.

I have sent you through Didymus some sheepskins – the same Didymus will let you know how many of them there are – and some mats, of which thirty-eight, dyed red, belong to me alone, eighty-two I own together with Heracleides; half of these are mine, but all the expense for the sheepskins and for all the mats is for Heracleides to pay. If you collect the money, send it to me at once by letter of credit. Tell me how many sheepskins you received and at what price they are selling, and how many mats are in stock from the last shipment and how many are in stock counting these. You are to let me know all this through the same Didymus. Let the same Didymus go at once, so that he may not be detained longer with you ... letter of credit ... to (?) Dioscurides and ... send me ... Sarapias and all those in the household greet you. I, Dionysius, greet you.

(2<sup>nd</sup> hand) Farewell.

(1<sup>st</sup> hand) 15<sup>th</sup> year, Mecheir 6<sup>th</sup>.

If the boatman Pausanias needs any money, give (it to him), and let me know how much he got.

No carrier is explicitly identified, but the general circumstances and the language of the opening of the main body of the letter (διεπεμψαμη[ν σοι δια Διδυμου ...), and the repeated references to Didymus make him the obvious candidate. Beyond his name we learn no personal details about him. He is bringing the goods (sheepskins and mats) from Papontos to Alexander. Alongside the letter he will be able to declare the exact number of sheepskins that he has brought. This immediately suggests that Papontos regards him as a trusted courier, both because the number of sheepskins is not specified in the written correspondence;<sup>16</sup> and because Papontos presumes that in this situation this additional information will be conveyed orally, alongside the letter, by the letter-carrier. Here of course the ‘additional information’ is a concrete number of sheepskins, but the extent of trust placed by Papontos in Didymus is emphasized in the later part of the letter as well. Alexander is instructed to give Papontos a general stock and sales report (sheepskins received, sales price, mats in stock etc.) (δηλωσον μοι ...) which is to be delivered through Didymus (ταυτα δε παντα δια του αυτου Διδυμου δηλωσεις μοι).<sup>17</sup> This language—using δηλωω— does not by any means require a

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15 The editor notes ‘the hand is a large, sprawling, upright cursive, difficult to date. The greeting formula points to the middle of the first century as the earliest possibility ...’ (*Oxy Pap*, p. 236).

16 Very often in business letters the amount of goods carried by the courier/letter carrier are carefully specified so as to ensure that the amount of goods can be checked by the receiver. EXAMPLES.

17 The actual spelling of the two key words in the papyrus is: δηλωσον and δηλωσις. The same term is reconstructed in the closing sentence of the letter as well: ‘If the boatman Pausanias needs any money, give (it to him), and let me know how much he got (δη[λωσο]ν μοι ποσα ελαβε).’

written transmission, and would certainly be compatible with an oral report transmitted by Didymus on his return to Papontos (although one suspects that a written note may have been made).<sup>18</sup> Papontos is also keen that Didymus should return as soon as possible: εὐθὺς δε τον αὐτον Διδυμον ἀπολυσον, ἵνα μη ἐπι πλειον παρελκηται παρα σοι.

So according to the situation reflected in this letter, the communication between Papontos and Alexandria consists of both the letter itself and the supplementary communication mediated (orally) by the trusted letter carrier.

### 3.5 Summary

These four texts were chosen as exhibiting some of the complexities involved in understanding the role of the letter carrier in the communication process between sender and receiver. In each case the role of the letter carrier was not exhausted by the physical delivery of the letter, but the letter carrier had an important role in continuing or supplementing the conversation initiated (or at least expressed) by the written letter. This could be additional tasks only hinted at in the letter itself (as in the first two examples), providing additional testimony regarding the main point of the letter (as in the third example), or additional points of detail regarding some of the things mentioned in the letter (as in the fourth example).

## **4. Generalisations about Letter Carriers**

In this section we shall move from these four case studies to attempt some generalisations about the various roles of letter carriers on the basis of the rest of the evidence available from the personal letters from Oxyrhynchus. Some of these generalizations arise out of our earlier discussions.

4.1 One general concern throughout the papyri letters is the need for a trustworthy courier for the letter (and any other material that accompanies the letter).<sup>19</sup> Sometimes a letter-writer will comment about the search for such a courier, ‘We were looking for someone reliable (ἀσφαλῆν) who could deliver it.’<sup>20</sup> Or they will comment on their unsuccessful search: ‘Theon the father of Petosiris gave you a jar of meat. We could not find a safe person (ἀσφαλῆ) who would bring it to you.’<sup>21</sup> This concern stands behind the request to confirm receipt of whatever is shipped with the letter: ‘I sent you a jar of wine by one Patas, a sailor.

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18 P. Oxy 3993 (ii/iii) line 30-32 does use *dhlow* in a written context: ‘If you write to Theon, let him know ...’ (ἐάν γὰρ γραφῆς τῷ Θεῶνι, δηλώσον αὐτῷ ...).

19 Cf. P. Oxy 1676 (III): ‘I rejoiced greatly at receiving your letter, which was given me by the cutler; I have not, however, received the one which you say you sent me by Plato the dancer’s son.’ P. Mich. 499: ‘... Often I wrote to you, but the negligence of the couriers slandered me as neglectful.’

20 P. Oxy 3991 (II/III): Sarapion to Ischyron. This relates to a cotton tunic made by the writer’s mother.

21 P. Oxy 3993 (II/III). This letter contains a further reference to an official dispatch carrier (ἐπιστολαφόρος, line 9) who had delivered a letter from the addressees.

Let me know whether you received it ...' (P. Oxy 1488, II).<sup>22</sup>

4.2 More often the availability of a carrier provides an opportunity for the writing and sending of the letter. For example a letter, which unfortunately lacks the names of sender, receiver and carrier, opens with the following comment: 'Since ... is going upstream I judged it necessary to salute you by letter and invite you to write to me about whatever you may want.' (P. Oxy 3806, AD 15) Similar sentiments are found in a number of other letters: 'I found the boat sailing down and I thought that I ought to let you know about what I have said' (P. Oxy 1153, I); 'having met with a man who is going to you I greet you most kindly ...' (P. Oxy 933, II); 'Since Achilles was going downstream I decided that I must greet you in writing ...' (P. Oxy 2680, II/III); 'Since I am in process of sending for my sister, I send you a letter, as in duty bound, by the hands of those whom I have dispatched for this purpose' (P. Oxy 3067, III); 'As an opportunity was afforded me by some one going up to you I could not miss this chance of addressing you' (P. Oxy 123, III or IV).<sup>23</sup>

4.3 Many letters, like the 'letter of recommendation' which we have already noted (above 3.2), specify someone as the 'bearer of the letter'.<sup>24</sup> This includes other 'letters of recommendation',<sup>25</sup> as well as letters which incorporate a recommendatory section within the letter. In these examples the letters have some other primary function, but include an additional recommendation of the letter carrier. A notable example is a rather damaged letter of 2BC (P. Oxy 743) which, among other things, describes the dispatch of Damas—clearly—to collect rents and recommends him to the receiver: 'Whatever service he may require from you, stand by him, as he will agree in everything for you just as for me. ... Damas has agreed in everything with me. It is well for him to come quickly for he will instruct you.' This is a very clear example of an active and trusted messenger functioning as the representative of the sender (he agrees in everything with the sender: ἀνωμολογέομαι lines 34, 40) and continuing the discussion (he will instruct the recipient: ὑφηγέομαι line 42). Another examples is P. Oxy 293 (AD 27); this letter from Dionysius to his sister Didyme asks about

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22 For requests to confirm receipt cf. also P. Oxy 1153 (I); P. Oxy 2786 (I); P. Oxy 300 (late I);

23 For other examples cf. BGU 665 col 3: 'Don't think that I neglect to write to you; we don't have anyone with whom to send (a letter).' Cicero to Atticus: 'What renders me rather dilatory... is the difficulty of finding a trustworthy carrier. How few of these gentry are able to convey a letter rather weightier than usual without lightening it by skimming its contents! ... Accordingly, I don't venture to trust either Achaeans or Epirotes with a letter somewhat more outspoken than usual. Now some events have occurred... worth my writing to you, but they must not be trusted to the risk of a letter being lost, opened, or intercepted.' (Perseus, XVIII, AI, 13)

24 For two other examples see P. Oxy 3356 (AD 76); P. Oxy 530 (II) which both concern the transfer of money and which are further discussed below.

25 E.g. P. Oxy 746 (AD 16): Letter of Recommendation from Theon to Heraclides: Ἐρμόφιλος ὁ ἀποδιδούς σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐστὶ ...

some clothes and then introduces Theonas: τῶ δὲ φέροντί σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν Θεω[ν]ᾶτι ἱκκανὸν ποιήσον [πε]ρ[ὶ] οὗ ἐ[ὰν] θέλῃ (‘Provide the bearer of this letter, Theonas, with any assistance that he wishes for ...’).<sup>26</sup> In these examples, as with the straightforward letter of recommendation, the personal introduction serves to initiate a conversation that then concerns issues raised by the bearer of the letter with the receiver (independently of the letter itself).

4.4 Letter-carriers very often deliver goods or money which are also mentioned in the letter. Many of these can be identified as letter-carriers only through the use of various simple formulae (‘I have sent by ...’ or ‘receive through ...’) and by discerning the whole situation implied in the letter. In some of these cases one might surmise that the letter functions as a check on the proper delivery of the goods, and a control on the trustworthiness of the courier. In many examples the primary role of the letter-carrier is as courier of the consignment of goods, the letter functions as an interpretative supplement to the consignment of goods. These are sometimes commercial arrangements reflecting fairly large stocks, others are more clearly friendly or familiar gifts sent with a letter of greeting.

If we take this group as a whole it represents a large number of letters (and named letter-carriers) from Oxyrhynchus. Some of these are relatively straightforward: ‘Receive through Pases (κόμισαι διὰ Πάσηους) the piglet and ... rush-mats ... [various other food-stuffs] ...’ (P. Oxy 3061, I). Or, explicit about the letter-carrier: ‘Receive from Petechon, who is bringing you the letter, a pair of sandals worth 4 dr.’<sup>27</sup>

Cf. P. Oxy 300 (late I): Letter from Indike to Thaisous: ‘I sent you the bread-basket by Taurinus the camel man; please send me an answer that you have received it.’<sup>28</sup>

P. Oxy 529 (II): This letter to Athenarous almost certainly fits this type: ‘Please receive through Cerdon (κόμισαι διὰ Κέρδωνος ...) for Dionysius 4 cotylae of unguent and a basket of dessert containing 100 figs, 100 nuts, and half a chous of oil ...’

P. Oxy 531 (II): Letter from Cornelius to his son Hierax: ‘Receive by Onnophris the white robes ...’ (κόμισαι διὰ Ὀννωφρά τὰ ἱμάτια τὰ λευκά ...).

P. Oxy 2593 (II): Letter of Apollonia to Philetus (re collecting woollen yarn and expenditures): ‘I send my very best wishes to you and Heraclides and I have dispatched to you by Onnophris the younger (ἐπεμψα δέ σοι διὰ Ὀννώφριος νε(ωτέρου)) the materials for Heraclides’ outfit.’

P. Oxy 936 (III): Letter of Pausanius to his father: ‘Receive from the bearer of this letter a basket containing 40 eggs (?) and a Canopic basket with 4 pairs of loaves and 6 pairs of ... (κόμισαι παρὰ τοῦ κομίζοντός σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον ...).

Sometimes it is money rather than goods that is delivered along with the letter: ‘I sent

<sup>26</sup> Cf. also P. Oxy 63 (II or III): This is a semi-official letter from a senior to a minor official, but its function is clearly to introduce Panemouos and ensure that Archelaus acts in the best interests of Panemouos: τοῦ ἀναδιδόντος σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιόν μου ναυκλήρου Πανεμουώτος = ‘The bearer of this letter is the captain Panemouos ...’

<sup>27</sup> P. Oxy 3356 (AD 76): Letter of Harpocras to Thracidas: Κόμισαι παρὰ Πετεχωῶντος τοῦ καὶ κομίζοντός σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν σανδάλιον δραχμῶν δ.

<sup>28</sup> This would presumably have required a written response.

you by Papiris 24 dr. 2 ob., which you are to pay out ...' (P. Oxy 2786, I);<sup>29</sup> 'Please receive from Chaeremon the bearer of this letter 112 drachmae of silver ...'.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes it is both money and goods (P. Oxy 116, II): 'I have given to Calocaerus for Dionysius 340 drachmae ... I send you by Calocaerus in my portmanteau a measure of dates from Ombos and twenty-five pomegranates under seal. ... I send you by the said Calocaerus a box of grapes ... and a basket of good dates under seal.'<sup>31</sup>

4.5 Several of these categories have already documented the issue which was raised in each of our four sample texts, that is that the letter carrier can have an important role in the communication process, in supplementing verbally material that appears in written form in the letter, continuing or extending the conversation of the letter.

This can involve further discussion and the return of the letter-carrier, as in a letter from a Heraclides to Asclatas concerning taxation (P. Oxy 296, I), where it is clearly envisaged that the bearer of the letter will return with the money and with further information: 'Give the bearer of this letter the poll-tax of Mnesitheus and the naubion, and send me word about the documents, how you have completed them'<sup>32</sup>

In a letter to his sister an unknown man refers to the letter carrier several times (P. Oxy 3990, II): 'Give the Theban bringing you the letter 24 drachmas, which are owing to him, when you have taken delivery of the 16 (?) vine bundles.' Later we read: 'Take delivery of a sack from the Theban. Tell him to set out quickly, since he is going to stay at the dyke himself. He says that he also knows about fishing.'

P. Oxy 1295 (II or early III): Letter of Tasois to Dionysius: '... please send me a payment for two months through the bearer of this letter (διὰ τοῦ ἀναδιδόντος σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον) and the cloak, and let me know how much money you have given to him and whether you have received the cloak.'

P. Oxy 937 (III): Letter of Demarchus to his sister Taor: 'Write me a reply through the man from Antinoopolis ... if the man from Antinoopolis wants anything provide him with it ... You will receive three bags from the man from Antinoopolis who is the

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29 Cf. P. Oxy 1756 (I): Letter from Sarapion to father Dionysius: 'Receive through Kephalatos ..... my poll-tax'.

30 Κόμισαι παρὰ Χαιρήμονος τοῦ κομίζοντός σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον ἀργυρίου δραχμᾶς ἑκατὸν δέκα δύο (P. Oxy 530 (II): Letter of Sionysius to (mother) Tetheus concerning money matters. The money was needed in order to redeem his clothes from a pawn-broker (cf. P. Oxy 114). The letter closes with a post-script: 'Send me word about this immediately after the festival, whether you received the money and whether you recovered my clothes.'

31 Cf. above 3.1 for the repeated formula ἐπεμψά ὑμῖν δια Καλοκαιρου (here lines 10-13 & 17) used to introduce the letter-carrier. P. Oxy 117 (II or III) includes the same formula to introduce Diogenes: 'I send you some good melon seeds through Diogenes he friend of Chaereas the citizen, and two strips of cloth sealed with my seal ...' Another examples is P. Oxy 2726 (II): Letter of Panechotes to Hephaestion which refers to 'the man who delivers the letter to you' (τῷ γὰρ ἀναδιδούντι σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον) as someone carrying other documents and funds alongside the letter.

32 δὸς τῷ κομείζοντί σου τὴν ἐπιστολὴν τὴν λαογραφίαν Μνησιθέου καὶ τὸ ναύβιον ...

bearer of this letter.’

P. Oxy 2727 (III/IV): refers to ‘the man who brings you this letter’ (τῷ τὰ γράμματά σοι ἐπιφέροντι) who will return to the sender.

A late, but quite explicit example of this is found in P. Oxy 1679 (III): Letter of Apia to Serapias: ‘Receive, lady, from the seamstress the saffron clothes of your daughter, a tunic and ..., and a tunic for Heraclammon. I think that you will recognize which are your daughter’s, for I wrapped them up together. The seamstress will inform you verbally what I told her (ἢ μεταδώσει σοι διὰ λόγων ὅσα αὐτῇ εἶπον), for I am writing this to you very late.’<sup>33</sup>

4.6 A common form of interaction between letter-carrier and recipient involves the situation where we have examples of a reply to a previous letter which refers to the carrier of the previous letter. In each of these it seems likely that the same carrier is being sent back with the reply. So, for example, Apollonius writes to his son Apollonius (P. Oxy 1153, I): ‘I have received through Heraclas the boxes with the books as you write, and the half-chous jar of oil which Nicanor writes that he has sent.’<sup>34</sup> Heraclas, who is a boatman, has also presented a freight bill to Apollonius, is clearly returning, at least to Nicanor, and probably carries this letter of reply as well.<sup>35</sup> In a letter requested the payment of a debt, Heraclides writes to Hatres (P. Oxy 532, II): ‘Be sure therefore to give this sum [20 drachmae, previously mentioned] at once to the bearer of this letter, that you may save me too from trouble.’<sup>36</sup> In a respectful, perhaps semi-official letter accompanying a gift (P. Oxy 931, II) we read: ‘As you wished, sir, I have sent by the guard who brought the letter from you (ἔπεμψα διὰ τοῦ κομίσαντος τὸ ἀπὸ σοῦ ἐπιστόλιον φύλακος) the ounce of purple to be presented at the entertainment to the little one; for I guessed that you were in attendance upon his excellency to praefect.’

Cf. also possibly P. Oxy 1291 (AD 30): Letter of Zois to (brother) Ischyriion: ‘No one has brought me a letter about the bread, but if you send a letter by (*dia*) Colluthus, an artaba will come to you immediately’.

For clear later examples:

P. Oxy 2596 (III): Letter from Sarapammon to Andronicus: ‘Sarapammon to Andronicus his brother many greetings. I received your letter by Psais. I learned that

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33 Cf. also P. Oxy 3644 (III): ‘I have sent you our Harpochras ... Harpochras will tell you what he heard in the city ...’. Another example of this may be P. Oxy 3853 (III): Letter from Ischyriion to Cornelius: ‘I received your letter through Serenus, and I learnt about my mother.’ Perhaps this refers to two aspects of the communication: letter and other information as well.

34 ἐκομισάμην διὰ Ἡρακλάτος ... ὡς γράφεις....

35 ‘The blankets have been cut out; the account of them (ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτῶν), as you write, shall be sent by Diogas to Nicanor through Heraclas. A pattern of the colour of the dress that is being made is enclosed in this letter; give it to Nicanor to look at, in order that, if he likes it, he may write to us, for it has not yet been given out.’

36 ἀναγκάως οὖν τῷ ἀναδιδόντι σοι τὸ ἐπιστόλιον τοῦτο εὐθέως ἀπόδος ὅπως καμὲ ἄσκυλτον ποιήσης

you and all our friends are well. I received from the same Psais the basket containing 5 salt fish and 4 fine loaves and a small quantity of unguent (and) two pieces of papyrus. Receive from the same Psais one vessel of wine, very old and good, at the request of my father Lamystes (?).<sup>7</sup>

P. Oxy 1066 (III): Letter of Nemesianus to (brother) Sarapammon: ‘You did well to send me the file, but you sent me one which is too fine. So I send it to you by Apollon (*dia*) with the pattern in order that you may go by that. You write to me in the letter, ‘I send you a boy’s linen cloth’, and I have received nothing. Apollon told me, ‘He gave me nothing’. I send you the tripod by Apollon (*dia*); and if you want anything reply to me by the said Apollon (*dia*), so that I may send it you, and do your best to get me the file, and send it by Apollon; and look for a file which files not only wood but iron tools ... and indicate ... I pray for your lasting health.’

5. The information we have gleaned from the letter-carriers of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri—although limited to a first-stage exploration of the vast amount of papyrological material that is available—provides some potentially important insights into the role and function of letter-carriers in the delivery of personal letters. Without defending the point at any depth we could note that the points raised above do not appear to reflect idiosyncratic Oxyrhynchite concerns, but seem to represent some general issues, as far as we can tell, relating to letter delivery in the Roman period.

Perhaps the crucial point for our thinking about the delivery of Pauline letters is the understanding that the trusted letter-carrier often has an important role in extending the communication initiated by the letter. The evidence from Oxyrhynchus agrees with an earlier letter which closes with the comment ‘The rest please learn from the man who brings you this letter. He is no stranger to us’ (P. Coll. III.6). We also have the example of the re-organisation of the Roman administrative postal networks under Augustus, which placed a great emphasis on the importance of the letter-carrier:

To enable what was going on in each of the provinces to be reported and known more speedily and promptly, he at first stationed young men at short intervals along the military roads, and afterwards post-chaises (*vehicular*). The latter has seemed the more convenient arrangement, since the same men who bring the dispatches (*litteras*) from any place can, if occasion demands, be questioned as well. (Suetonius, *Augustus* 49.3)

The letter-carrier thus brings fuller personal knowledge into the communication process, which is only partly embodied in the letter. This is particularly the case with the type designated as ‘Letters of Recommendation’ (a genre influential in Paul’s letters precisely when introducing letter-carriers), where the bearer invariably has a crucial role in explaining in person the generally fairly coded requests for help. It is generally accepted that the Pauline co-workers who functioned as letter-carriers had an important role in the communication

strategy of Paul, offering a personal representative to present his letter (already a speech which substitutes for the apostolic presence). The papyrological evidence surveyed here supports the further idea that in the Pauline tradition the accredited letter-carriers functioned not only as personal private postmen, but as personal mediators of Paul's authoritative instruction to his churches, and as the earliest interpreters of the individual letters. They related the specific material in their letter to what they knew of Pauline teaching more generally.

This model suggests that the earliest reception of specific Pauline letters would have been accompanied by a Pauline representative who could relate the specifics of the letter to the general Pauline tradition known to him (or her). But we leave that for another day.

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