

## Episode 6

Bex: Welcome back to the Nile Chronicles. This episode is all about taking one letter and really looking into it and pulling it apart. I believe we are, we are on episode six, if I'm not mistaken. Truthfully, I'm starting to lose track. Um, but this is really getting into some of those letters from, uh, the Bagnall and Cribiore source. And I wanted to start with one from the Xenon archive for Xenon. It's spelled Z-E-N-O-N. Xenon? Xenon? Um, I don't know. Anyway. I'm gonna read the background of these letters and who Zenon was. So here we go. It says, Zenon was of Agrephon. Zenon, son of Agrephon, was an immigrant to Ptolemaic Egypt from Caunos, a city in ancient Heria on the southwest coast of Asia Minor. The assemblage of papers of which he is the central figure is the largest papyrological archive known with nearly 2,000 texts. Now, this archive has 2,000 texts with one guy being the main central character. So you put the pieces together and try to figure out why this man was written about so much. Was he well liked? Was he famous? Or was he just in a role where he got a bunch of complaints? So it continues. During the early part of his career, he was a business agent for Apollonios. The finance minister of Ptolemy II, Philadelphos. He spends a considerable period in Palestine and Syria than in various locations in Egypt before being made. In 256 BC, the manager of the largest state in the Fayum near Philadelphia that the king had given to Apollinios. In 248, under circumstances that Romaini only partly understood, he left Apollonios' service but remained in Philadelphia as a local notable. The archive includes numerous letters, but very few of them are from women, and women in general play a minor role in the documents of the archive, making up only 2% of the individuals mentioned in it. It is not even known if Zenon was married and the documents reflect much more a male-oriented existence. The letters included in the present collection reflect mainly his role as the most important person in Philadelphia looked to for resolving many problems. So there's your answer. There's 2,000 letters in this archive because people went to him to solve problems. And he was a notable person in Philadelphia to do so, I suppose. Um, now it's said that... A lot of these letters are not written by women, but there's one that I, that really caught my eye and a warning that it is about a son being beaten.

Um, so this mother wrote in 257 BC, her name is Simale, and she wrote to Zenon about her son. So we're not sure where this was written. Location of Addressee was Bernicus Hormos, and this letter was found in Philadelphia, and it was written in Greek. And I believe it is a complete letter, which is pretty, pretty epic. Um, and it is from... It is located by the Columbia University in New York in their rare book and manuscript library in the papyrus collection, inventory number 268. I'm not sure if copyright would allow me to take A screen grab of the letter because they do have an image of it in this book. Um, I'll look into it and if I can, it'll be in the document, um, associated with this episode. Let's get into the letter.

So Simale writes,

“Simale, the mother of Hierophantus to Xenon, greeting. Since I heard that my boy had been mistreated and rather badly, I came to you and after arriving I wanted to petition you about these matters. But when Olympicus prevented me from seeing you, somehow I was brought in the presence of my child and found him lying down in a hardly laughable state. And seeing him was enough for me to grieve. But when Olympicus arrived, he said that by beating him rotten, he would make him, or that he had already made him as someone who was already nearly decent. Thus I beg and beseech you to concern yourself with these matters and to report to Apollinus in which way my child has been continuously maltreated by Olympicus. As if he were responsible for his illness. For I, in addition to the fact that I have received exactly nothing for a year, Already except for the manna and three artabas of wheat since the month distros of When Herr Fantus has come to you, the boy himself tells me of the goodwill of Apollinus and yourself that you keep on showing him. I ask you, therefore, and beg you that If Apollinus has ordered to pay him anything, his wages be paid to me. Rest assured that as soon as the God sets him free, I shall bring him back to you so that I may see you with regard to the rest. Learn the rest from the person who brings you this letter, for he is not a stranger to us. Farewell.”

On the back, it says, to Zenon, from Simale, the mother of Hierophantus, year twenty-eight Peritros six in Wernicus Hormos.

The book says in the section underneath the letter, the letter is written in a capable, fluent, and clear hand that is not completely even, of medium size with uniform characters and regular line spacing. The writer leaves even margins on all sides. The scribe was probably a professional. That enough right there is really cool because in this letter we are able to see How to tell if a scribe wrote a letter. And this one it says is very capable and fluent and clear and there's margins on all sides. We know that a scribe wrote it, somebody who was very literate. I would not have any insecurities about writing. It continues to say orthography, morphology, and syntax are remarkably correct, and there is a good variety of clauses. as in other Ptolemaic letters. Some unevenness can be perceived only toward the end, where a sentence is left unfinished. This letter has many characteristics of a formal petition. In the first part, which is full of the pathetic and personal details so common in petitions, Simale informs him of the ill treatment of her ill treatment that her son Herophantus was receiving at the hands of a certain Olympicus. The boy was in the retwine of Apollinus, but not everything is clear about the connection and the financial arrangements. Involved. Note Herophantas, probably a minor since his mother has claim on the money he receives. CF Contracts of Apprenticeship. There's a lot in this letter. And I think it's interesting that the book states this is a typical format for a petition because it talks about the bad things that have occurred. And I think it's also interesting that the mother is asking for any payment that were to go to her son. And, you know, as the book notes that he was probably a minor since the mother was asking for this, but this

goes to show and to reinforce that. The idea that women had economic status, they were able to carry money. Um, they were able to carry their own money and their own income, but they were also able to act as a stand in for. Underage, they're underage children, um, which is very cool. And it goes back, uh, you know, that women had rights in ancient Egypt. I think I mentioned that this was written in 257 BC, but if I didn't, there it is again. Um, so this is, this is a heavy petition.

Um, and it's written by a scribe, but it's written from the voice of a mother, a concerned mother, a very concerned mother. The line that really gets me, um, that really hits hard is when she says, I was brought in the presence of my child. And I found him lying down in a hardly laughable state and seeing him was enough for me to grieve. Those lines alone really put into perspective that this mother basically went to ha- went, you know, went first off because she heard of the mistreatment, but when she saw her son, he was basically left for dead. Right? It's heavy. It's heavy. Um... But the way she just states it, I was brought in the presence of my child. Not my child was brought to me. No, it was I went... To go see my child and found him lying down and he was in such a bad state, seeing him was enough for me to grieve. And I didn't even know that this kind of abuse took place in ancient Egypt, and I suppose because of the times, it does make sense. Um, I wish we knew the social status of Simale and her son and those arrangements that were made because that would really really helped in the sense of knowing if they were, if Hierophantus was a slave boy or, you know, if it was a lower class family and they sent their son to go work because the mom, you know, had her own things to do. Or what not. And I think this character of Olympicus I guess he's kind of like a bodyguard to Xenon, um, because she says, but when Olympicus prevented me from seeing you, somehow I was brought into the presence of my child. So is he a, I guess if he directly oversees her son it makes sense, but would he be a bodyguard to Xenon or Zenon? I can't decide which way to pronounce it. Um, and of course Google was no help. Would he have been a bodyguard or would he have just been running interference, uh, to try to protect Zenon from these complaints, so to speak? And I truly wish we had... I don't think we have the response. Um, I would love to see the response to this letter truthfully. And I also want to talk about how She's not talking directly to Zenon. She is, but she isn't. So, you know, she greets him. Also, greeting, I want to note, is singular. And there's no wishes of him being well. And that And I'm assuming that that format changes when it's a citizen writing to somebody of a higher status. But I would also expect to see it in these types of letters because, you know, between the family members that I talked about previously, in those letters, it's greetings. I hope this letter, you know, in modern language, I hope this letter finds you well. If you are well, it is... That I had prayed to the gods for you to be well. We don't see that here. And I find it very interesting because this could just be a very angry mother writing. But it also... At the same, you know, just being short with him being greedy and you get nothing else. And maybe, so it could be that. From the other side of it, I see that, you know, Zenon could have not been well liked, um, at all. Because

she's very short, she's very sweet, there's no mentions of health, there's really no mentions of the gods. Except when she talks about... Rest assured that as soon as the gods sets him free... Now, God, once again, is singular, and at one point in time, Egypt did.

Did become monotheistic, but for the majority of Idrus, it really depended on what Pharaoh was ruling because they did like to change the religion around quite a bit. Um. And it was really just to undo what the previous pharaoh had done. Kind of like what we see in today's political climate. But, um, I'm trying to think. I'll make a note in the document. What Pharaoh was ruling around. 257 BC um, and figure out if it was a monotheistic society or if they had switched or if they were still polytheistic and if they were polytheistic then why is God only Singular. Because the god is not named. And I don't think we see gods being named in any of these letters. It's just the gods. Whereas in, um, Greek and Roman letters... They have a certain format, too, and they start with an invocation of the gods. I think it occurs in Roman letters. It's been a while since I've taken Roman history.

But I know for a fact in Greek letters it was an invocation of the gods and you named specifically the god that you were in, um, that you wanted help from. But in these ancient Egyptian letters, We don't see that. We just see gods, goddess. I don't even think we see goddess. Maybe we do. Um, I haven't, truthfully, I haven't read every single letter in this book because I've had so much to do. But I still think it's interesting that God is plural and we don't name, or they don't, they hadn't named those gods. And You know, rest assured that as soon as the god sets him free. So I assume she's talking about her son and that makes me think that he's under some kind of employment, whether being a slave or a worker. A worker boy? A worker kid? I don't know. Um, and it's interesting because there's no other mention of family members. It is just give me his wages to me and, you know, rest assured. I shall bring bring him back to you so that I may see you with regard to rest. And I also love this kind of I don't know, snotty, not snotty, that's not the right word. Just the ending of this letter being, learn the rest from the person who brings you this letter for he is not stranger to us. Farewell. Very abrupt ending, but Very much so, like, if Xenon read this letter with the person who brought it to them, first off, who is bringing the letter, who is the messenger in this context if he is not a stranger to us? Would the scribe have taken and been a messenger as well?

I don't know the answer to that. Would it have been another family member? Would it have been maybe Or is it just a good neighbor? You know, there's so much left to the imagination in this letter, which is, which is why I wanted to really talk about it. And there is, there's not necessarily an appeal to the gods, but there's appeal to Zenon being like, the boy himself, referring to her son, tells me of the goodwill of Apollinus and yourself that you keep on showing him. So, she's appealing to, you know, the fact that her son has reported to her that Apollinus and Xenon are fair people and show goodwill. You know, so she's just stroking their ego a little bit or appealing to them and their character,

you know, which is, which is in a petition in very important, right? So I think that This letter reflects so much. So much. And she, she's bashing on Olympicus. He's the bad guy. He's the antagonist in this letter. And she's, you know, she's saying the goodwill of Apollinus and you please, I beg you, give me his payment so we can basically continue to live. And she said she went on. Uh, what did she say? I have received exactly nothing for a year already except for the manan, which I believe are dates, and the three artabas of wheat since the month Distress. How?

Okay. I'm curious to what Simale did for work, right? I'm curious to what her specific status in society was and we can kind of tell From the letter, if she had a professional scribe write it, then she must have had been somewhat well off in order to hire said scribe, unless that scribe was a family friend of theirs. I don't know. There's so much, like I said, there's so much left to the imagination, but I'm thinking if you haven't received anything for a year and it's you and your son or mother and her son. How, how are you living? Um, is my question. And maybe, you know, Simale partakes in the economy where maybe she's In a religious role in society, I just would love to do a deep dive into who she was and how did they survive? If her son is not getting paid, if they only had Three, artabas of wheat, and I'm gonna look up how much artabas is and write that in the document. Um, how do you, how do you survive on that, right? And I feel like this letter specifically Really makes me want to talk about the ancient Egyptian economy and I actually know very little about that. So again, uh, I might do a whole episode on that.

And I just, okay, the whole, this whole sentence in this whole section when she says, but when Olympicus arrived, he said that by beating him rotten, right, the word rotten, Leads to a connotation of death. He would make him or that he had already made him as someone who was already nearly decent. What? Um, so I guess the way to interpret, one of the ways to interpret this letter, because in this line, because of course there's so many different ways. By beating him rotten, he would make him or that he had already made him. I wonder if that's alluding to making him more of a man? Um, is my initial gut reaction to this? I just can't get over by beating him rotten. And you know, it adds, it adds another layer to when she says, I found him lying down in a hardly laughable state. He was beaten rotten. And you know, Olympicus had tried to defend why he had beaten him rotten, which is disgusting. But again, that's just the modern, that's the modern lens of this. I'm like, I'm like, this is terrible. But I'm like, then again, this was life in ancient Egypt. Um, and we learn a lot about personal life through these letters, which is why they're so incredibly important. Once again, I still want to know who this letter is and she just says farewell. I mean, who this stranger is. For he is not a stranger to us, the person who brings you this letter.

And I love how she's just like, learn the rest. Which is... I'm going back to that because she gives the pathetic, how does the book call it, full of pathetic and personal details so common in petitions She talks about the ill treatment of her son. And I just want to say, if there's more to this, if there's more to this story, I hope it is found one day. I would love to know everything. And I, and I think there's also kind of bringing it into the modern light. Talking about formal petitions, so it is in a very formal tone as we know Scribe had wrote it and we can tell that because of the margins and the handwriting and it's very good and fluid and everything. This is also just an example of how to write concisely. Writing a petition, you have to really state the purpose of that petition. And you appeal, you know, and this is kind of the way that the ancient Greeks, at least the men wrote, right, the orators, orators, orators, I think orators, yeah, um, the speech givers. They wrote, they appealed to ethos, pathos, and logos, right? And we see this happening in this letter that Simale wrote because She's appealing to, oh, it's been a while since I've taken an English class, um, what ethos is, is emotion, I believe. Sorry, I was thinking E and E, um, although I have taken ancient Greek, so I really should know this. Um, pathos being emotion, she's writing to Zenon and, you know, she gives, being like, my son was beaten rotten, and I saw him in a state where I was going to grieve because I thought he was dead. It's how I interpret it, right?

And then when it comes to ethos, she appeals to ethos by saying um, where is it? Hold. The boy himself tells me of the goodwill of Apollinus and yourself that you keep on showing him. Boom! That's ethos. You're appealing to their credibility. Is there logic behind this letter? I feel like there's an argument that there is logic. And, I mean, evidence? Her son's lying there dead, like, you know, beaten rotten. Sorry, not dead, beaten rotten. I feel like there's a logic there. Um, using evidence to persuade in this petition. Which I think is a really cool connection because even if the ancient Egyptians didn't have ethos, pathos, logos, those words. At the time of writing this letter, and again, I don't know, this is 257 BC and I have to do a deep dive into when Ethos Pathos logos first appear in Greek texts or If it wasn't Greek text, what text was it? But I think it's really interesting that we see all three of those elements being used in this letter. Now again, in the context of this letter, it was a petition, so it does make a lot of sense. But my question still remains of did this mother know about Ethos Pathos Logos before Ethos Pathos Logos was a thing? Or if Ethos Pathos Logos was already a thing? How did she learn about it? If she learned about it, that means she was educated at some point, right? So there's a lot to consider.

There's a lot to pull out of this letter. And like I said, the reason I chose it is it, it shows a lot. It shows the economic status of women when her, uh, when his moms like give me his payments, it shows that women, uh, could write these petitions even if it wasn't by their own hand. They had that right to petition for something. Which is great. Um, so it does reflect the gender roles. It reflects personal emotion. It is a heavier letter, but like I said, that's how we read it with the modern brain. That's how you read it with the modern eye. That was life in ancient Egypt. Um, it wasn't glamorous. It definitely was not glamorous at times, uh, based on research. But I feel like we have a tendency to romanticize it because of Egyptomania and that, that craze of Egyptomania. Um, but I think this letter really reflects the rawness of everyday happenings in ancient Egypt and there's no comedy to it. It's very formal. It's very This is what happened. Um, that type of writing. So anyway, that's the first letter. I hope you enjoyed it. Um, I do wish I had somebody on this podcast to kind of talk about it. Uh, But maybe I'll set up a comment portion on my website or but that uh, that of to something. Zenon.

I hope this episode really made you think and that maybe you learned a thing or two. That was Simale to Zenon about her son. Until next time on The Nile Chronicles.