

Episode 7

Bex: Welcome back to the Nile Chronicles. This is episode seven. That was an abrupt intro, um, and I'm sorry about that. But what's funny is that the letters I'm about to read are a little bit abrupt in the writing of it. So I wanted to go back, um, To the Isadora and Asklepiades dossier. And this, these letters were written previous to the ones I just talked about, uh, but And I realized I probably should have done this in chronological order, uh, but the way that my brain functions, it makes perfect sense to go forward and then go backward and then go forward even further, um. Cause yeah, why, why do something that makes sense when you can have fun with this? So anyway, the Isadora to Asklepiades dossier, what you need to know about it, Is, there's a mummy cartonnage that discovered a lot of papyri. And it was discovered in the 20th century by German excavators at Abusir el-Malik. In the northern part of Herak, Herak, sorry, Herak El Polite, Heraklepolite that's what it looks like, um, Heraklepolite Nome. Uh, the best known part of the discovery was a body of documents for Alexandria, but that's only a small part of what the cemetery has yielded. Some of the letters are complete, others are in part. There are at least eleven that were preserved. Um, Asklepiades is the receiver, Isadora is, refers to Asklepiades as her brother, and there's other brothers that appear As well, it remains unclear which are biological and if any of them are married to one another. So it's nearly impossible to identify the individuals confidently with anyone known from other texts. And then it compares it to another collection of papyri. So that's the intro, um, of, from the book, from the Bagnell and Cribiore book on page 114.

So this first one I want to read is titled *Isadora to Asklepiades. Reply to me quickly*. Once again, I want to Emphasize that Isadora refers to Asklepiades as her brother. So there's a little sister-brother correspondence happening and it reads exactly like that. This was written in twenty-eight BC. Location written, probably the Heraklepolite nome. Location of addressee, probably Memphis, because that's where I believe it says Asklepiades resided, um, or at least have spent some time. Location found, of course, the Abusir el-Malik. And this letter was written in Greek.

So, it says, Isadora writes, here we go.

“Isadora to Asklepiades, her brother. Greetings and health always. I have enclosed under the same seal to you the letter to Paniskos. So send me the reply to everything quickly because the ship is departing. And continue to bear up bravely until it arrives. And take care of yourself so that you may, so that you remain healthy, which is most important. Farewell” year three. “Send the child's sleeping rug.”

And it says, this is the hand of a scribe or secretary, not Isadora herself, from whom the next letter we know for a fact is written by her hand. In this hand though, It is a minute hand fast and more ligatured than a standard letter hand. The letter is written in good business Greek, connective Particles are used correctly and with a good sense of style. The letter's contents are brief and elusive and take for granted earlier correspondence from which we would know what ship was meant. And whether it was traveling from Oscar Pades to Isadora or from Isadora to some other location. So this one's very brief and very quick, but there is discussion to happen around this letter. Bex So, some of those things to pull out and to point out in this very short letter, uh, that Isidora writes is that she does have that greeting, right? We have Isidora to Asklepiades her brother. Greetings and health always. We see the I hope you're good. I hope you're well. I am writing to you. You are my brother. Greetings. And greetings here is in the plural. Which is interesting because I want to. Almost talk about how much that changes the word. So if you say greetings or just greeting, how do you interpret that? Going from the singular to the plural or from the plural to the singular, If you read, if an email comes to you, or an email, I mean, a letter, and it says, greetings, how do you interpret that? Is it like, Many greetings, is it greetings to you and whoever else is on this email chain, but if the letter or an email is just addressed to you and you say, and you read the word greetings plural, how do you interpret that? How does that, what's the connotation behind greeting versus greetings?

Because for me, if I, you know, I'm in a setting and I'm the only recipient of something and somebody says greetings, I feel like it's warm. It's a warm- Way. And it's not just greeting. It's not just saying hello. You know, when I think of just greeting, I'm just thinking of hello. But if I think of greetings, you know, I feel like it... It has more to it. It's, you know, it's saying, hello, how are you? Um, and then it goes to the end health always and I hope you're well. But it's funny that Uh, in the first few letters that I read where it was, uh, Dionysia to Theon or the grandma suggesting the name or, uh, Isaias to Hephaestion. A sister writing to her brother or a husband or a wife writing to her husband. There was that extra line in there that was, um, I hope you are well. See it to the gods that you be well because I have prayed for that to be so. And I think in Dionysia, or Messias two Hephaestion, we saw that. Did we not? I don't think we did. Okay, so writing from a sister writing to a brother, they're just like, hope you're well. Um, I'm not praying for you to be well. Um, but... I hope you're good. That's interesting. Uh, but I guess it makes more sense is that just is reflective of the relationship that family members had with each other and how, How likewise it is still the same today. Uh, you know, if you get something from your parents, then it's a lot more personal, a lot more love behind it. Um, whereas between siblings, it's just gonna be very plain.

Depending on your sibling relationship, uh, you're probably gonna make fun of each other. Again, it's all depending on personal relationships and everything, but I just find that interesting. So anyway, she gives the greeting and then all she says, um, but she does mention and take care of yourself so that you remain healthy, which is most important. Which I love. Um, because she's like... And I feel like this goes back to gender roles, if nothing else, being like, take care of yourself so that you remain healthy, which is most important, you know? It could be read in a way that she's saying, please stay healthy because we need you for XYZ. We need you to do the things that we can't and that could be physical labor. That could be looking over land if women didn't, if Isadora or anybody else in this family didn't want to do it. And it also could just be read as, I don't want to lose you, like, you know, if I don't get to see you all the time, I hope you're well, and it's important that you stay well, um. We don't have the ages of the, of Isadora or Asklepiades, which is a shame because I would love to know. Uh, but I did want to make a note when she says send the child's sleeping rug, um, after her farewell. I want to say that that was just the ancient Egyptian way of saying postscript. Um, P.S. Send the child's sleeping rug, uh, It's very brief, it's very quick, but I think that would be the equivalent today. Uh, being a postscript after the farewell. Um, and you know, again, there's a lot that we don't know about this letter. As far as what ship was coming and arriving. But I love that she's so very straightforward in saying, so send me the reply to everything quickly because the ship is departing. She... She is giving him urgency, being like, you need to reply to this as soon as you get it because so help me if the ship is gone. I don't know what to do. Um. So I love the sense of urgency in this sister to brother writing. And the next letter that I'm going to read is written by her hand. This is, let me make sure it's the right one.

Yes, okay. So this is, again, written by Isadora to Asklepiades in twenty-eight BC, and it just says *Instructions*. Um, location written, probably the Caracapolite, no. Location of Addressee, probably Memphis. We're assuming Asklepiades is still in Memphis. Location found, of course, Abusir el-Midli. And this letter is also written in Greek. And the docket says received year three, half year eight.

She writes.

“Isadora to Asklas, her brother. Greetings and health always just as I pray. I have received on the 27th the letters which you had written via something. It's nice of you to try to make me responsible for the lentils and the peas, for you are not even consistent with yourself since you have written to Paniskos that we sold. That we sold them. For we have not sold them yet, but do as you wish. Only bear up bravely in the reckoning and in the collection so that when Paniskos arrives in Memphis, you don't fall into difficulties. I sent you the price of the bedding, 140 drachmas, but you should know if you come who received it. It is not ellipses, we don't know. Give Alexion the Dyer on my account 100 drachmas for a bed rug and for the child Artemis. Solid, not empty. Do not detain Kilius,

but give him the two boats because he is going to Hermopolis. And take care of yourself so that you may be well. Farewell. year three, Faufi twenty-eight”

The notes on this letter say I'm... This two-column letter was preceded on the papyrus by another multi-column letter of which only traces of the end are preserved. This letter was written by Isadora herself with Detached characters that are uneven and sometimes retracted. The individual letters, however, are formed with a certain elegance. And again, we know that this family was of Wealthier status, so it would have come to no surprise if Isidore herself was literate. And in this letter, since it's written by her own hand, we can determine that she was. The Greek of the letter is vigorous and idiomatic, but not very polished. There are mistaken case forms here and there. The subjunctive form in line seventeen has an unwanted temporal augment. The difficulties caused by Isidore's erratic Greek add to the problems of interpreting the letter. It concerns matters of business, including the sale of produce, the transfer of money, not, uh, the ordering of bedding, And the provision of boats for a trip.

Isadora does not hesitate to tell Asklepiades in brusque, um, tones that he is wrong about this or that item. So... A couple notes. Asklas is a short form of Asklas. So boom, right there. People gave each other nicknames in ancient Egypt is what I'm reading from this and what I'm taking from it. Pretty cool. Asklas is such a, Asklas is short for Asklepiades Very, very interesting. On the 27th of Faufi, the day before the letter is dated, um, Hermopolis It is unclear which of the places with this name is meant, but perhaps Hermopolis Magna or Magna is more likely than the village in the Aristophanes. Arsinoites or the city in the delta. So they do give a picture of this letter in the book and it exists in the Cairo Egyptian Museum where it should be. It's rough. Um, it's very rough looking. I, I would love to know how long, and maybe it says in this book somewhere, I'm not, I'm uncertain. Uh, I would love to know how long it took to translate some of these. I mean, it's gotta be a year, like, it's gotta be a while, at least a year, um, I would think. Maybe not. I could be underestimating the talent of the transcribers, um. Or not the transcribers. The translators. Sorry. There we go. Translators. Um, of the letters. Could take them like a couple days, but I don't know. I guess it depends on how well it's preserved.

So anyway, going into discussion of this particular letter. Now, as I said previously, we didn't have the, in the greeting, we didn't have the just as I pray. But in this one, we do. So I wonder what really the difference is. And I guess the previous letter is more of just a quick, hey, do this quickly. I don't have time to tell you that I have been praying for your health. But it is most important that you stay well. So maybe that ending saying for it is most important, your health is most important. Maybe that's a way of making up for the lack of praying in the greeting, uh, so to speak. And again, she's very, very quick with the farewell of it all. So what else is there to this letter? Well, I love, I love her mocking him. Um, excuse me. So Paniskos is one of their other brothers and we know that from, um,

another letter. But I love how she's like, it's nice of you to try to make me responsible for the lentils and the peas. It's siblings, uh, siblings, siblings, siblings, um, sisters, uh, to brothers. It's, she's saying, hey, I have my responsibilities, um, And the fact that you're trying to add another one, not cool, dude. Um, it's nice of you to try to make you responsible for the lentils of the piece. I love it. Um, and I love how she just goes to really criticize him and make fun of him saying, for you are not even consistent with yourself since you have written to Paniskos that we sold them. She's like, and she basically is like, I don't want to catch the blame, uh, you know, when Paniskos shows up here and we actually have the lentils and the peas, you know, because Paniskos, Excuse me. Uh, Isadora goes, you know, if he gets word that there's no lentils and peas, who knows, he may take it upon himself to bring said lentils and peas and then you have too many lentils and peas. You know. Problems that you would have in ancient Egypt. So anyway. And then I love how she's just like, but do as you wish. Um, she's like, I'm not gonna stop you. Um, I'm not gonna stop you.

You can't go back on your word because you said that we sold them, but I am not taking those lentils and peas. To my own responsibility. I love the boundary setting here. Truly. Um, what else? What else is, uh, in here? The drachmas. So we have... So that bedding, right, that child's rug that we saw at the end of last, of the last letter, send the child sleeping rug. I want to assume it's the same thing that she's collecting here. Because bedrug for the child could be a completely different one, but we see a record of transaction here. Saying that she sent the price of the bedding being 140 drachmas, so we know that they were using drachmas during this period. But you should know if you come who received it. It is not blank. I would love to know who actually received it. Um, and then we talk, you know, she talks about The dire on her account 100 drachmas for bedrug for the child Artemis.

I'm not entirely sure what solid not empty means. Maybe she's referring to her account. I don't know. So we see a few things in this letter. We see bickering between siblings, boundary setting. Maybe a bit of gender roles, um, because this is transactional and Isadora is basically saying I have my own funding as I sent you the drachmas. Which is really cool, again, to see because this is a woman who is participating in the economy. Granted, is it on a personal level? Yeah, absolutely. But nonetheless, there is an exchange of money. Therefore, the economy is affected. So I love this letter. I've loved these two letters and they are quite shorter, which is why I included them in the one episode. I personally don't have much else to say on these two other than Isadora and Asklepiades. Are very entertaining, uh, and the letters that have survived in the Magdal and Priyabori book. So if you ever get your hands on it, do pay attention to them because they are, Isadora is quite comical. So that's all my notes on those letters. Um, once again, I hope you enjoyed yourself. I hope this made you think. I hope you learned something new and I hope you took something away from it. The next episode will be the last episode of the

project, well, actually I lied, it'll be the last letter I read and then I'm gonna do a little conclusion like I did, um, intro for this project portion of the podcast. Until then, on the Nile Chronicles.