

## Episode 8

Bex: Welcome back to the Nile Chronicles. This is the last episode of me reading letters written by ancient Egyptian women, or at least the words of ancient Egyptian women, whether written by their hand or not. And I wanted to end on these two letters in particular because I think it really rounds off women in ancient Egypt as a whole. And even in the intro section. The collection of these letters says a lot. So these letters are from the dossier of Thermouthas. This dossier includes two letters written by Thermouthas. to her quote-unquote brother Apollinaris. As usual, their family relationship is not entirely clear, meaning we don't know if they were strictly brother and sister or if they were related Uh, via marriage. Apollinaris was away and Thermouthas reported to him on a number of matters. She planned to go visit him with a whole group of women. Both letters, and in particular the first one that is labeled BGU 1.261, give a vivid picture of a world of women who gave birth, traveled, took loans, And like unrepentant, Pisces refused to pay money that was due. The Malthus perhaps wrote the first one in her own hand, but had recourse to a scribe for the second letter. The first one is titled Thermouthas and Valeria to Apollinaris about travel and money, 2nd to 3rd century AD. Location written, unknown. Location of addressee, unknown. Location found, arisnotte, known. Arisnotte, no, there we go.

This letter is written in Greek and it reads,

“Thermouthas to Apollinaris, her brother, many greetings. I want you to know I and Valeria, if Herios gives birth, we are praying to come to you. For it is necessary. We want to bring Demetrius to sail down with her mother. You write to me. Take care of Zoidus. We do not see that she has done anything. She has nothing in view except the interest on the money which you gave her. You gave her ten staters to the tax collector of Cares Scotia. And as to what you said to me about Tysus, I received nothing from her. Didi Marion will testify to you that Tysus said, quote, I'm not giving anything to Thermouthas. Because Zoidius said, “don't give her anything.” You and your sister know that you wrote to Hera so that he might serve us. We thank him. Longina greets you. She... Meaning Valeria, we're unsure, greets you. And Zoidas, her sister, we greet Serenos, Herias, and all those in the household greet you individually. Farewell.”

And the address says delivered to Apolinarious from Valeria and Thermouthas. The note on this letter says, this is the hand of an unpracticed writer. Thermalysis is or someone else who helped her. It shows bad alignment, difficulty in controlling ink flow, and low speed. The final farewell is in a larger and bit smoother characters. The writer's use of Greek is colloquial and wastes no words. Spelling is frequently phonetic and occasionally unclear. Thematic forms ditto me appear. Apart from greetings, the letter has two subjects. One is the hope of Thermopolis and Valeria to sail downriver to Apollinaris once Herios, who is in their household, has given birth, along with another couple of

women. Presumably, they want to be present for the birth. There is no sign that any men are expected to be part of the woman's party. Women's party. The rest of the letter is devoted to some financial matters involving a loan and a tax payment. And it says, note, Thermouthas, the letter is written in her name, but she quickly associates Valeria with herself and her address even puts Valeria's name first among the senders. The unspecified subject of, quote, greets in line twenty-nine may be Valeria. The location of this papyrus is in Berlin in the Statlichemusen. Um, in a specific, uh, in the papyrus mulung. Sure. Um, that's that. So looking at this letter. Uh, that's photographed and in this book, it's lengthy. Um, and I see what they're saying when they're talking about the larger characters, uh, specifically in that farewell. Um, And she probably- my thing is she probably wrote- you ever get a piece of paper and- You don't know how much you're gonna write, so you start really, or on the smaller side, and then by the end you have a bunch of space to fill, so you just write bigger characters. That's kind of what, uh, Thermouthas did, it appears, because these letters are quite larger, uh, compared to the beginning of the letter, which I think is interesting.

So like the intro said for this letter, it talks about women making their own plans without a man, right? You know, she's saying to her brother, who also may be her husband, That is unknown. You know, there's somebody giving birth. We'd love to be there for the birth. Um, either way we're preparing to come to you and it's necessary. It doesn't say why it's necessary. Um, he could be the father. He could be an uncle. He could just be an important family member to this unborn child. And then I think it's interesting this kind of back and forth of this, like, tax collector and this character of, um, Tysis and how Thermouthas has not received anything from her and This character Zoidus said, Zoidus, don't give anything to her. I wonder, I wonder who these characters are. Um. And what this scuffle is about money and these back and forths. But Thermopolis, or sorry, Thermouthas is not leaving anything out to Apollinus. I mean, sorry, Apollinaris. So many names, so many places, so many things in my head.

And I think it's interesting that she's not leaving anything out. And it is cool that we know that it's for sure in her handwriting that And how she uses phonetics. Spelling is frequently phonetic and occasionally unclear. And like, like the note says, there's two subjects, one of hope, right? The hope of the birth of this child and I would also argue the health and wellness of the mother as well. And I love how She starts this letter by saying, many greetings. So, many greetings. And I think it's because she's writing On behalf of the whole family, which is why she, she puts many in front of the plural greetings to emphasize there's many of us here, but I am the one writing, which I think is really. I guess poetic in a way. I think it's very cool that she's not trying to take all the credit being like, I'm the only one writing to you. Um, rather she's saying many greetings from all of us. And then in her, her farewell, she says that all those in the household greet you individually. And if I was reading, if I was receiving a letter and that was the ending, I

would for sure feel special. Um, being like, oh, everybody in the household bids you or bids you farewell or What is it? Uh, greets you individually. I would feel super special. But then again, I would think, well, I'm only receiving one letter from Thermouthas. Um... So is she just writing on everybody's behalf? Do the other people in the household know that she's writing? Um, and maybe that's because there's a price on papyrus. Again, I don't know much about the ancient Egyptian economy, but maybe papyrus was on the pricier side and it was only affordable for them to get one sheet of papyrus, I suppose. Which could be the case. And I also find it funny because we still do this today. Um, or at least some people do. You know, it's like when you receive a letter and it's from one family member and it's just like you can tell that one family member wrote it. But then they put, uh, if it's like a happy birthday, like happy birthday, best wishes, whatever. And then it's like love, uh, or see you soon or whatever. And then it's like the person writing that. The card and then signs everybody else's name for them. I feel like that's kind of what Thermouthas does here is she's naming as many people as possible.

Um. But anyway, that was my, my little rant on that. But as it says, these women are talking about making their plans to travel and giving birth and everything, which is really cool. So, and then I think I, yeah, I'm going to speak on this second letter and I'm going to read it.

And this one was not written by her own hand. And it's just Thermouthas writing to Apollinaris. In the 2nd to 3rd century AD, it's also written in Greek, found in the same location as the first one.

And it reads,

“I want you to know, don't be concerned about the taxes in grain. I found a farmer to take them, but who is supplying the seed? And concerning the reckoning for your property, your sister received six artibus bedsides seed. Write to Kalpanaeus about your house and For Tysius is saying, I'm not paying the rent.”

Oh, okay, so here we go. We have Tysius again.

“For she owes me money for the rent and she is reproaching your sister about the wall. There's a question mark after that, so we don't know. Copenius to Tysus so that he may find some appropriate opportunity to speak to her. Copenius greets you warmly. Valeria greets Zoius. Greet Serenos. Herius greets you. And Demetrius and all those who love you greet you. I pray for your health.”

And on the back of this papyrus it says, and if you think it proper, send me blank papyrus so that we may be able to write a letter. Hermes is bringing you the book. Something about Castor, about the something. Bex So the notes on this letter read, the hand is clear, legible, and graceful, with some letters separated and others that are lightly

connected. The fluency, rhythm, and layout betray an expert writer. The dress is in larger characters, occasionally provided with finials. There are many phonetic spellings in this letter. More interesting are an interrogative for relative, an active form of a deponent verb, and a subjunctive where an infinitive would have been expected. This letter covers a variety of business matters. In Apollinaris' absence, Thermouthas has taken care of the grain taxes through a tenant. The major issue about which she is concerned, however, is the rent on their house. Where a disagreement has arisen, Stasius' refusal to pay also appears in the previous letter. The location of this object is once again in Berlin, located alongside the first letter. And I wanted really to hone in on the ending of this letter. On the back of the letter when it says, and if you think it proper, send me blank a virus so that we may be able to write a letter. And I specifically want to point out how she starts in the second person. Singular of you. And then she's like, if you think it proper, send me blank papyrus. Going saying, okay, first person use of me so that we third person plural may be able to write a letter. Interesting, right? Because it appears that she's the only one writing these letters, but she's signing everybody else's name.

And when she says, if you think it proper, send me blank papyrus. Maybe that is an indication that papyrus was hard to come by or expensive or just not easily accessible to where they were living. So, that's interesting. And then this character, Tysus, is just not willing to pay anything, whether a tax and or rent. Um, I do wonder how old Tysus is. In the sense, in the context of these letters, but that's something we don't know. Um, and again, this, this letter, these, both of these letters show just the status of women. And this was written in, what, the 2nd to 3rd century AD. And women, what Thermouthas is saying is that I can handle this stuff but it's annoying that these people aren't paying and I want to keep you in the loop because I am in charge of things in your place while you are not here. And I know I didn't talk much about The queens of Egypt and how they got to be queens, but in one scenario, in a way that they could take over kingship as a queen, basically. Is that they would have stood in place for their, for the heir to the throne had the heir to the throne been too young. So the mother would have stepped in to rule. And I feel like This, the idea of that is also reflected in Thermouthas' letters as she's taking care of the deeds for Apollinaris while he's away.

But she's being very transparent. She's like, this is what's going on. And I find it interesting that in the address or the greeting, rather, she just says, To her brother greetings, not many greetings because she's not saying multiple people are writing this letter, but then at the end, she, she lists out all of these other people once again, um, Hupanius greets you warmly, Valeria greets Soyuz, greet Serenos, Herius greets you, and Demetrius, and all those who love you greet you. I pray for your health. So I wonder if Serenos is with Apollinaris at this time and she's saying send greetings to them or to him. Um, I don't understand the point of saying Valeria greets Zeus. Um... That's Z-O-I-S. Not sure what that is about, but I think it's interesting that, and maybe it's another person that

Apollinaris is with and Valeria greets him and who knows. Him and Valeria might be friends, they might be more than friends. Who knows? Um, so it's interesting that she starts with, I am greeting you. And then she says, all of these people who love you greet you. So in the farewell, she actually says... That these people greet you. So she doesn't write a traditional farewell. All she says is, I pray for your health. And even on the back, there's, there isn't a farewell message preserved. So I find that really interesting. And she send me blank papyrus so that we may be able to write you a letter and maybe it's because she wants most of everybody else in the family to write Appa Lennar's personal letters. Maybe she's an older sibling to everybody, you know, taking on that role of making sure everybody's up to date, staying in the loop. But it says that this one is not written by Her hand or is probably written by a scribe just because the different handwritings on the two letters. So again, I wanted to end on. Thermalysis letters, because I find them, I find them interesting. And again, it reinforced, and the, whoa, so many thoughts in my head right now. Um, the first letter. Is one of the ones that talks about birth, which I haven't seen in the other letters and I could have fully dismissed it, but I think it really, I think it's really interesting and how birth was a big deal. At least in the family, at least in this particular family, since she says it is necessary, we are praying to come to you, we are hoping to travel to you. So you can see this newborn child. And I also would argue that birth is also a sense of hope. You know, the note says one is hope and that they would be able to Travel, but I think it's the hope that, you know, there's this new life being brought into their world.

And the second one. Like I said, I think it's really cool that Thermouthas is stepping in place of Apollinaris in his absence to take care of things, but she's not necessarily... Taking control, more so just reporting back to him, um, especially when it comes to Tysus, this character not paying rent, uh, and not paying taxes. So. Yeah, because she says you are not collecting the rent from the woman who is living in your house. And she just wants to essentially arrange a meeting so they can figure out that money issue. And I guess it's because it's his, Apollinaris' house, I'm assuming she doesn't have the right to take the money, but maybe she does. I don't know, maybe she's just being nice. Those are the last two letters that I will give voice to for this portion of the podcast. It has been quite fun. I've loved being able to talk about these letters. And really just dive into it and make my enthusiasm known about ancient Egypt. Um, and to make a podcast that's more accessible to people. It being on a website that you don't have to subscribe to and that you don't have to listen to commercials. Because I don't know about you, but when I listen to podcasts, I skip through the commercials and half the time I skip too far. But alas... That is the end of the ancient Egyptian women's letters. Until next time on the Nile Chronicles.