CHAPTER TWELVE

AN OBLIGATION FROM CONTRACT LAW IN PHILEMON 19* CHARACTERISTIC STYLE AND JURIDICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Problem

Since the works of Gustav Adolf Deissmann¹ and Albert Thumb² and the still ongoing discussion³ about the location of biblical texts in their contemporary language environment, that is the predominant form of the Greek Κοινή,⁴ nobody can help considering the contemporary language material in this or another form for the assessment of a passage in the New Testament. Above all the mass of papyri that have been dug out of the sands of Egypt and published for more than one hundred years now play a significant role in this context. They—and here, according to its academic discipline, the term ‘papyrus’ includes parchment, ostraca, or writing tablets, at least those with text written on them—allow invaluable insights into the affairs of everyday life in Greco-Roman Egypt, which then lead to further conclusions regarding

² See especially Deissmann, Bibelstudien; idem, Neue Bibelstudien; idem, Licht vom Osten.
⁴ Among others, see Thumb, Die griechische Sprache; idem, ‘Die sprachgeschichtliche Stellung’, 85–99.

other geographical areas. Especially the documentary papyri offer specific detailed information on the individual juridical and socio-cultural conditions of their time and, due to their everyday-life character, simultaneously preserve the then common form of Greek, which is the Koinē of the New Testament, with its various facets. Documents are composed less to fit rhetorical and stylistic criteria or for a special verbal effect; their generally common language was adjusted to the formal and juridical requirements depending on their contents.

This language material—and this does not refer exclusively to the evidence of the documentary papyri, but to every textual artifact we possess today and to everything that may serve as a socio-cultural background and help to improve our knowledge—allows us to draw conclusions for the benefit of the exegesis of the New Testament. This is something I have already tried to show in detail either as a clue or a background for text-critical decisions or for the illumination of the semantics of lexemes and, thus, the contextual embedding into a context. Accordingly, one or two results are to be expected from the systematic work on documentary papyri for commenting on the epistolary literature of the New Testament. Peter Arzt-Grabner at least shows the beginnings of the benefit of such an effort for the Letter to Philemon by compiling “ausgewählte Papyrustexte, die einige Rahmenbedingungen einer Sklavenflucht, wie sie auch als Hintergrund für Phlm anzunehmen ist, ein wenig beleuchten”10 ('selected papyrus

---


6 In that respect even the edition of Johann Jakob Wettstein (*H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ*) has to be considered, now together with the revised version Strecker/Schnelle, *Neuer Wettstein II*. For information on this new edition see Strecker, ‘Das Göttinger Projekt’, 245–52. See further Berger/Colpe, *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch*.

7 Cf. Kraus, ‘Παρὰ κυρίου, παρὰ κυρίῳ oder omit’, 265–73. The recently published volume of the *Editio critica maior* IV2.1.2 now has παρὰ κυρίῳ for 2 Peter in its main text in contrast to Nestle/Aland7 with παρὰ κυρίῳ, a preference I substantiated as the more probable alternative reading. The reasons for this alteration are not given, which corresponds to the policy and layout of the *Editio critica maior*.


10 Arzt, ‘Brauchbare Sklaven’, 44. Some of these texts can be found in *C.Pap.Hengstl*, which itself—as indicated by its volume title ‘Griechische Papyri aus Ägypten als Zeug-