PSALMS AS MAGIC?
P.VINDOBO. G 39205 REVISITED

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Several years ago my colleague Michael Ernst and I published a sheet of parchment from the Vienna Papyrus Collection containing Ps 43:21-24.27 and Ps 44:1-2 in LXX version (P.Vindob. G 39205 = P.Bingen 16).1 The main importance of this fragment is the fact that it has preserved signs of a double life: one as part of a parchment codex of very good quality, the other as a single sheet with a different purpose apart from the codex and later.

1. A Fragment of a Codex Containing Psalms LXX

About the origin of the codex (where it was produced, housed and finally found) nothing is known. The quality of the material is excellent, and this makes it difficult to distinguish hair side from flesh side, the latter representing the recto. The right margin is preserved completely; about 1-2 mm of it are folded backwards. Of the upper margin 3.5 cm from the left are preserved completely; the rest is incomplete, which is also true of the lower and left margins. On the right and upper margins there are several holes that might stem from producing the parchment2 or from some secondary drying.3

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2 Cf. D. MacDonald in an email to the author (11 February 1999): “Parchment was, of course, expensive and only a few pages could be made from an entire hide, so there was always the attempt to get as many pages as possible out of a hide. Perhaps to get this page they simply had to incorporate some marginal material. The problem here is that the holes are on two sides of the page, while hides were prepared first and then pages cut from them. Perhaps in this case the hide was trimmed to a smaller rectangular piece, perhaps the finest belly section, before processing, and the holes represent the upper right corner of that rectangular section from which pages were subsequently cut. If the hide had shrunken more than expected in processing, it might be necessary to incorporate edge areas with holes that would usually be trimmed away.” But, such a procedure – to my knowledge – is
Based on a reconstruction of the missing text between the front and the back side of the fragment, the original size of the codex must have been about 14 x 13 cm, which means that it was a type X codex, according to E. G. Turner’s typology. On the verso the pagination number 124 (PKΔ with supralinear stroke) is preserved, which is another hint as to the estimated original size, as a reconstruction of the space needed for the text of Ps 1-43 LXX leads to a number of about 120-130 pages. Therefore, it is very probable that P.Vindob. G 39205 was originally part of a one-column codex starting with the book of Psalms in the Septuagint version. Whether Psalms was followed by another book of the LXX is uncertain. The text was written with brown ink, but many letters have faded and are only legible with the help of ultraviolet light. Preserved are Ps 43:21-24 on the front, and the last verse of Ps 43 and the first two verses of Ps 44 on the back side (which is equivalent to Ps 44:21-24.27 and 45:1-2 of the Hebrew Bible). The preserved text is arranged in stichs and reads:

Recto

\[\text{handwritten text}\]

not attested elsewhere; cf., e.g., several articles in P. Rück, ed. *Pergament: Geschichte, Struktur, Restaurierung, Herstellung* (Historische Hilfswissenschaften 2; Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1991); see also the bibliography pp. 421-428.

1 Again D. MacDonald in an email to the author (11 February 1999): “Wet parchment allowed to dry by itself often curls and wrinkles. The holes could represent an attempt to keep the wet parchment page from curling and wrinkling by stretching it on a frame and securing it to the frame with stitching.” I. A. Sparks in an email to the author (February 10, 1999) makes a similar point.
