

The dot, the stroke and the slash. Abbreviating words in Latin documents before Middle Ages

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

Il y a grand mérite à déchiffrer **les documents latins d'Égypte** : ce sont les plus difficiles qui soient proposés au métier de papyrologue.

C. **Préaux**, 'H. A. Sanders, A Latin Marriage Contract ...' (rev.), *Chronique d'Égypte* 30 (1940) : 297–8.



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Why me, why this, why now

❑ The **preliminary** results of an **ongoing** inquiry in **abbreviations on Latin documents**

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- ❑ ‘So many roads’ still to tread



How to present my data?

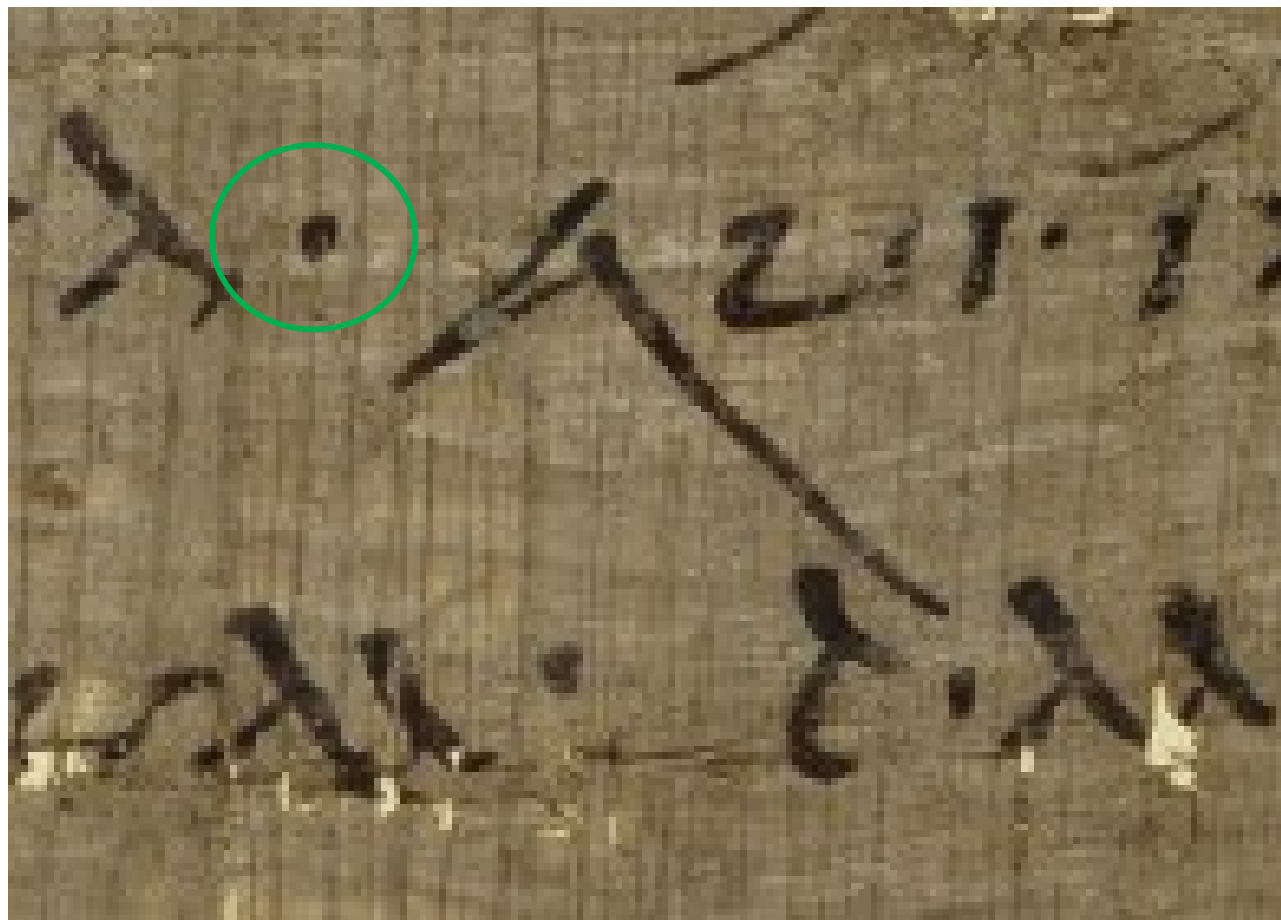
- **Typologies**
- A chronological prospect
- **Every sign** in its shape and history

1. The signs: a list

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1. The **dot** *Caesare**m** · **q**ui*
 *Caes**s**(arem) · qui*

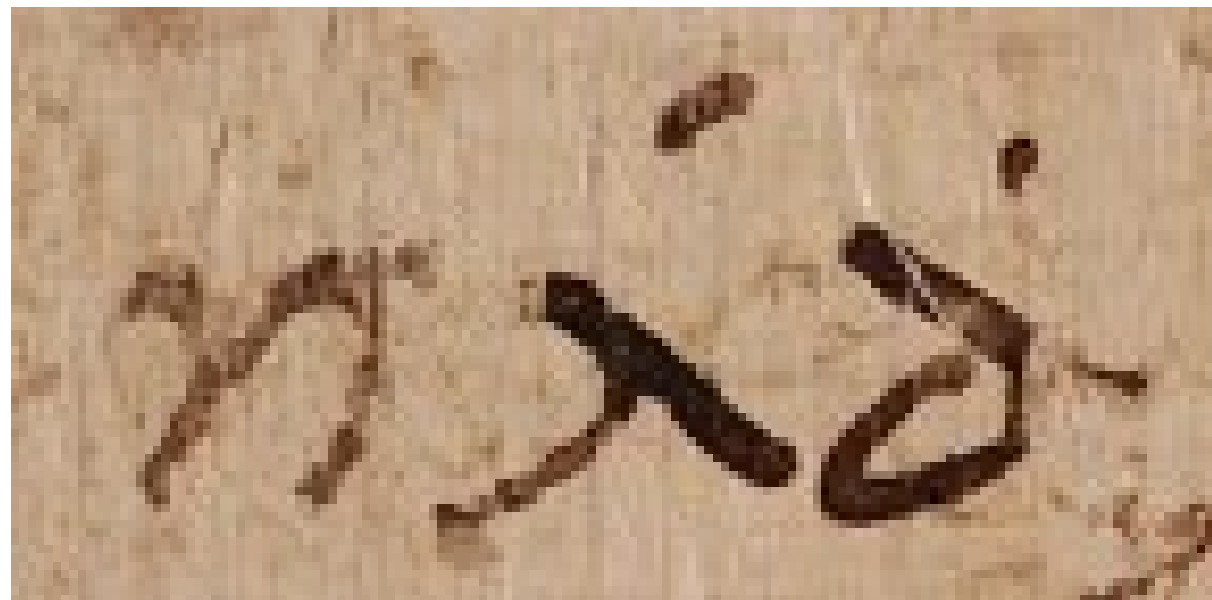
→ **medial** dot, *interpunctum*
 ≠ *distinctio*



1. The signs: a list

1. The dot
2. The **high dot** ≠ άνω στιγμή

n(ota) a(rmo) d(extro)



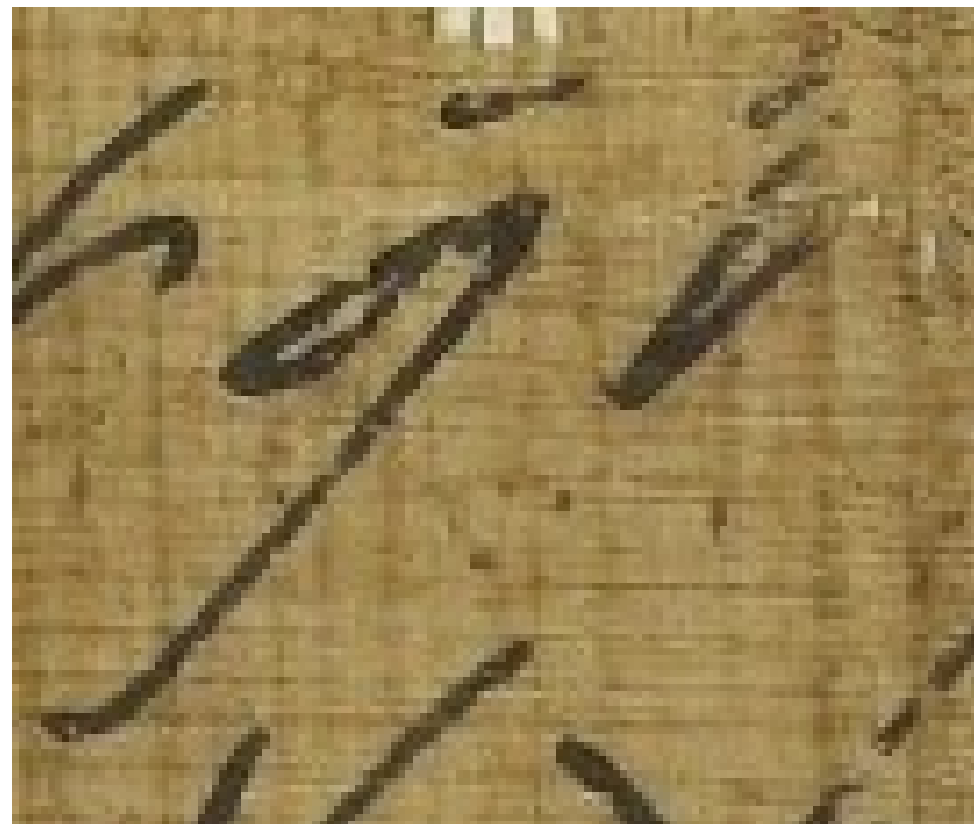
1. The signs: a list

1. The dot
2. The high dot
3. The (horizontal) bar

titulus

≠ XXVIII = 28 or 28000

$\bar{q}(ui) \bar{e}(t)$



1. The signs: a list

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2. The high dot
3. The (horizontal) bar
4. The (short, oblique) bar

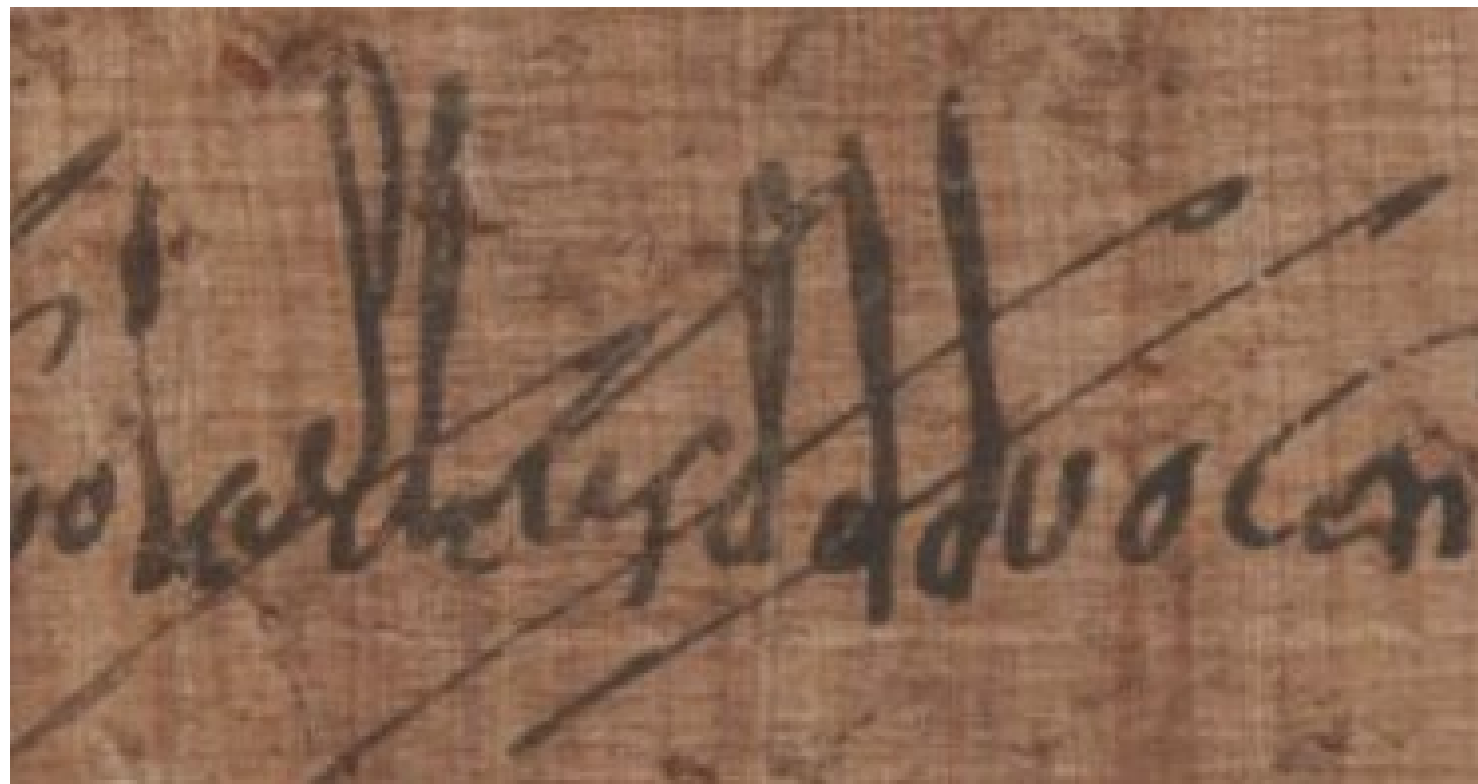
n̄n'(umerorum)



1. The signs: a list

1. The dot
2. The high dot
3. The (horizontal) bar
4. The (short, oblique) bar
5. The slash
(also after complete words)

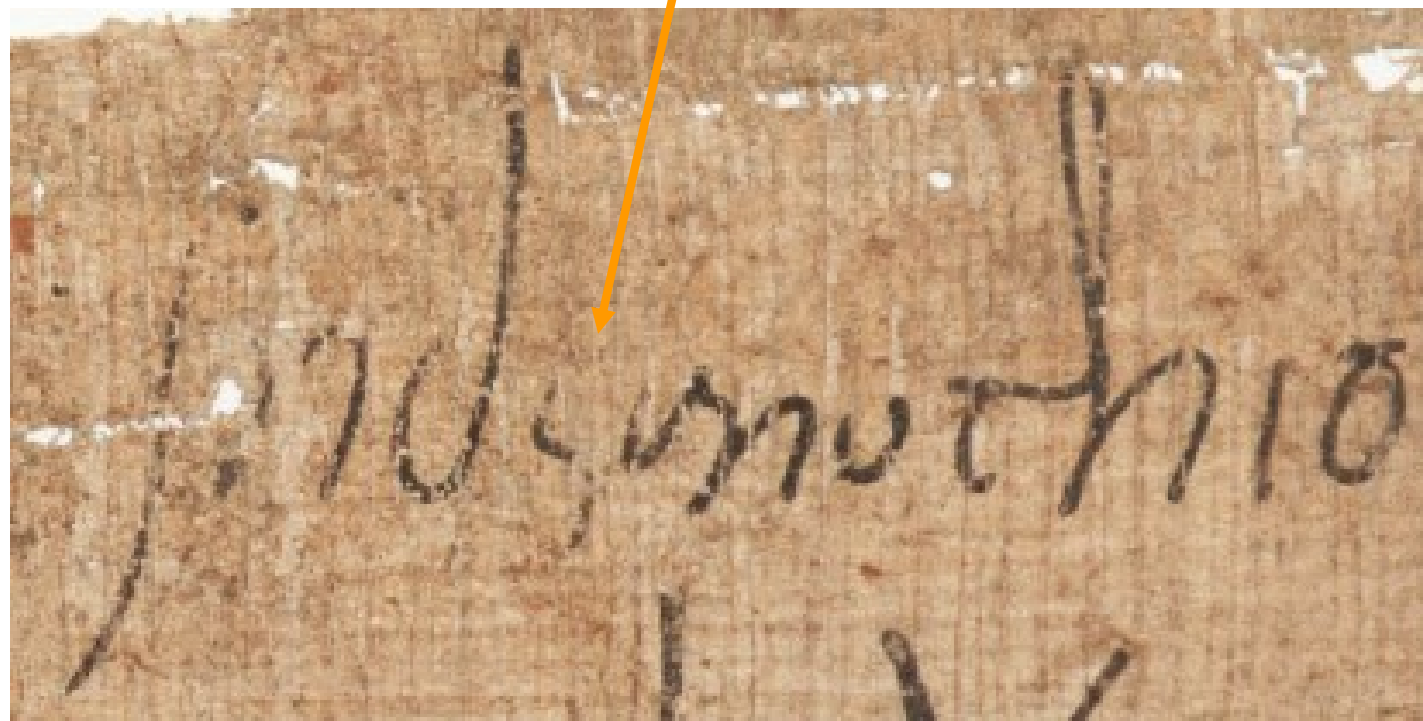
Ka// (endas) eas// (em) duo



1. The signs: a list

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3. The (horizontal) bar
4. The (short, oblique) bar
5. The slash
6. The flourish

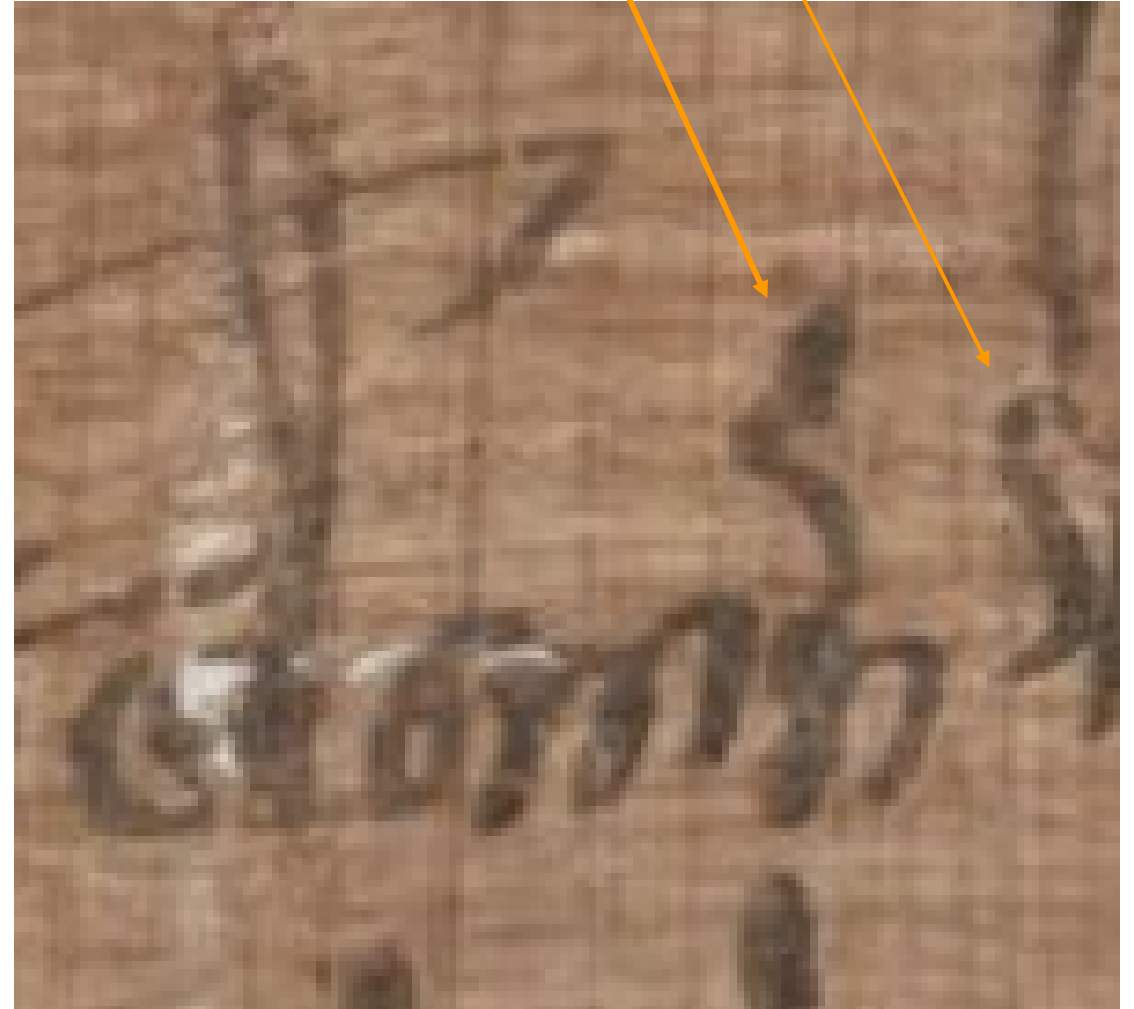
ind(ucto) Anuthio



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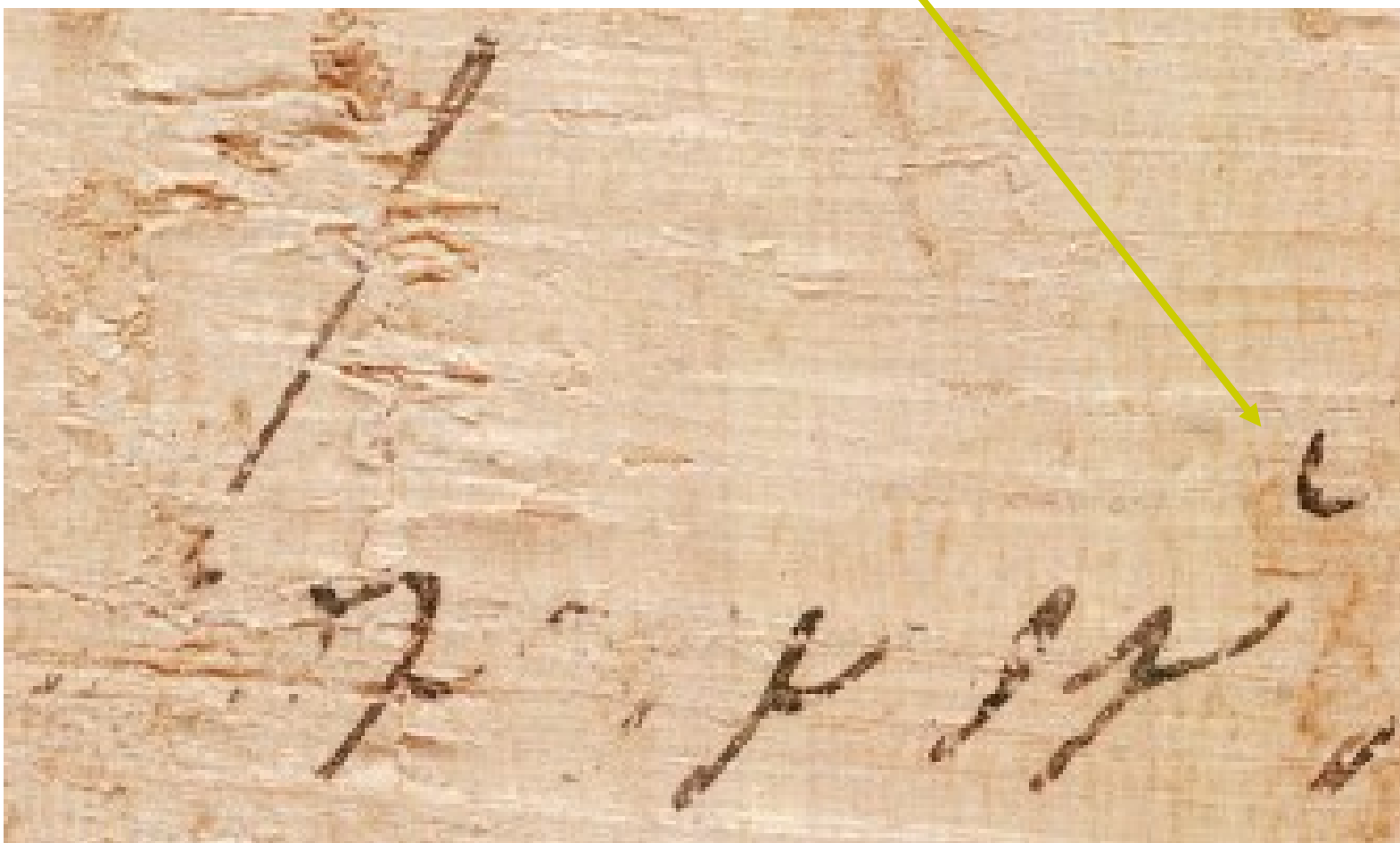
dom(ini) n(ostri) Honorii

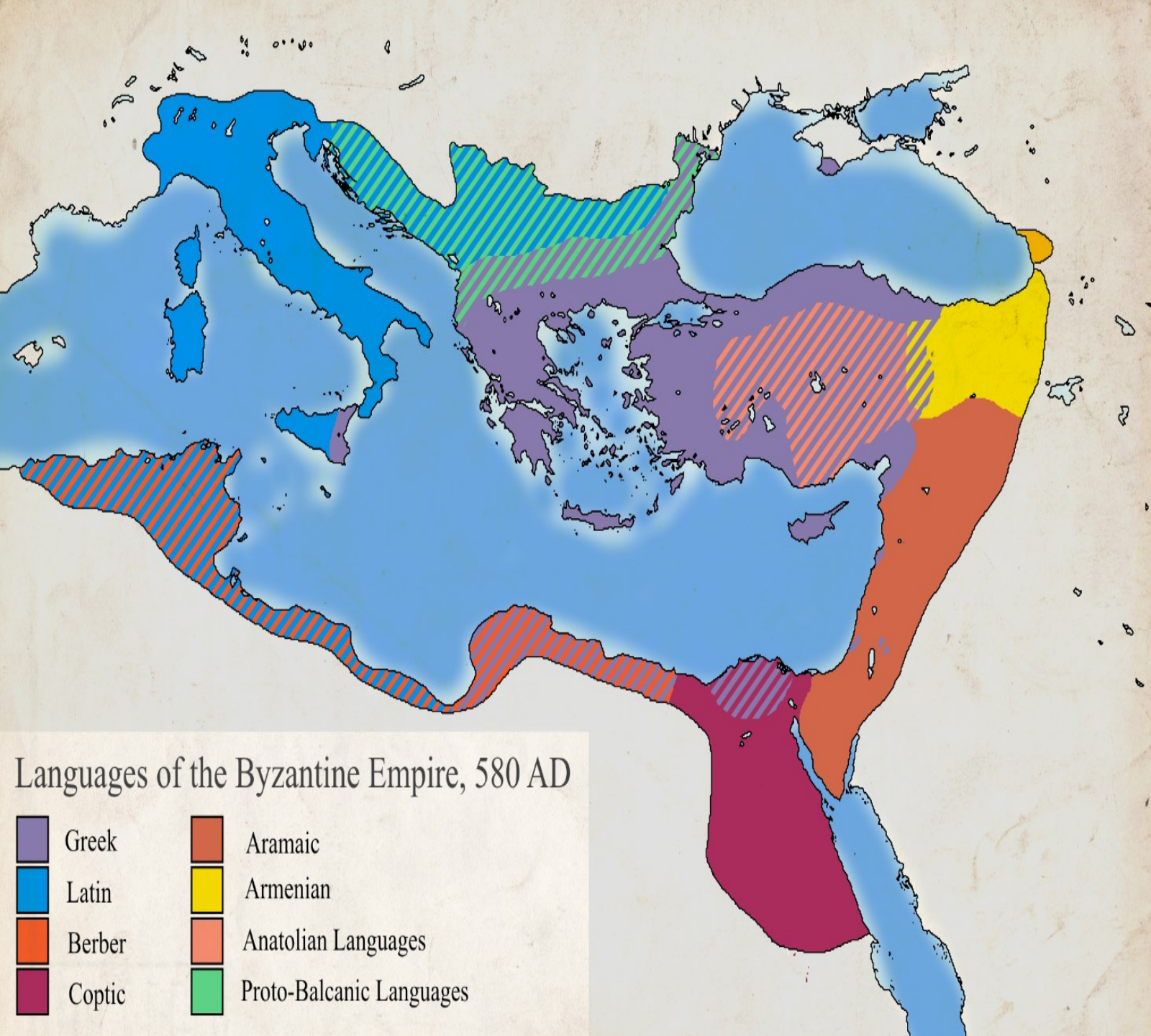


1. The signs: a list

domini n(ostri)^c

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3. The (horizontal) bar
4. The (short, oblique) bar
5. The slash
6. The flourish
7. Circular strokes (?)





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- A **chronological** prospect
- **Every sign** in its shape and history

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❑ From I BC to I AD: the reign of the *interpunctum*, or medial dot

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❑ From 1 BC to 1 AD: the reign of the *interpunctum*, or **medial dot**

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- From **mid-I AD**, abbreviations start being **unmarked**; from now on one can find texts very diversely abbreviated, often **devoid of signs**

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❑ The **extinction event** triggered by Diocletian (**IV-VI AD**): the takeover of **slash** and **flourish** (and some relics of dots and bars, no further than the IV)

1. The medial dot, or *interpunctum*

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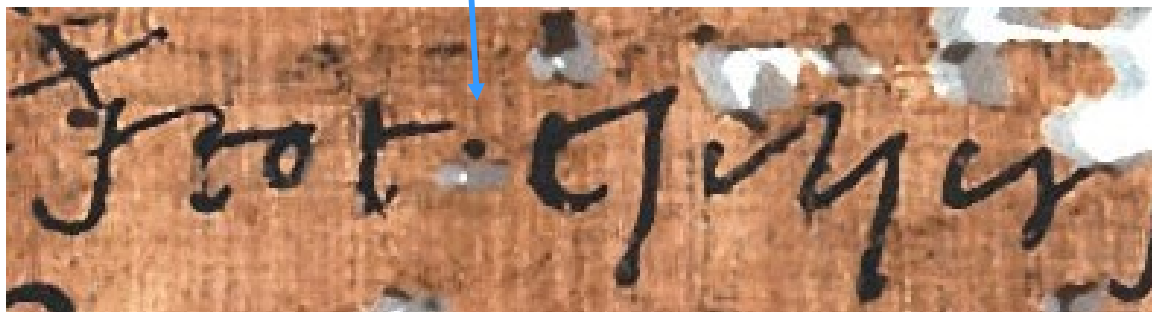
- *Interpungere*, a properly Latin tradition
- Apparently, a great idea for *divisio verborum* – so great that they **dropped** it in the wink of an eye (during 1 AD)
- *Interpunctio*, not *distinctio* (which pertains to the **speech**)

1. The medial dot, or *interpunctum*

- Papyri, tablet, *ostraka* from Egypt from I BC to mid-I AD are consistently provided with interpuncts

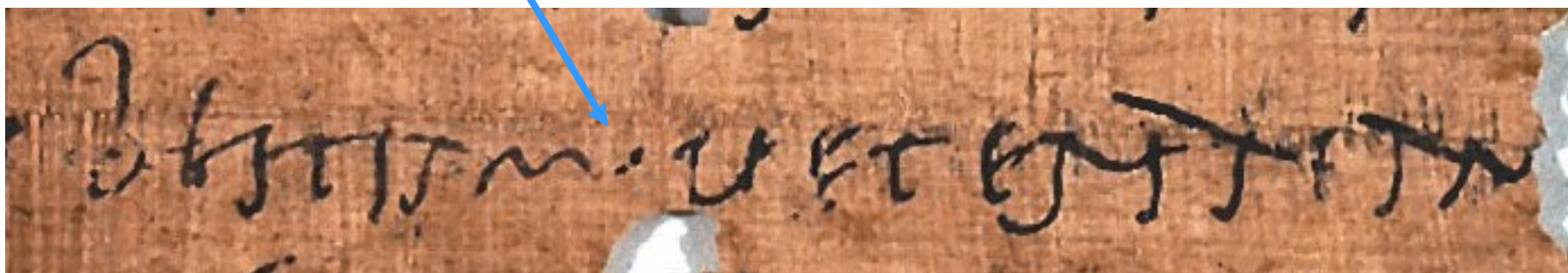
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- Papyri, tablet, *ostraka* from Egypt from I BC to mid-I AD are **consistently** provided with interpuncts
- Both between complete words, and after abbreviated ones



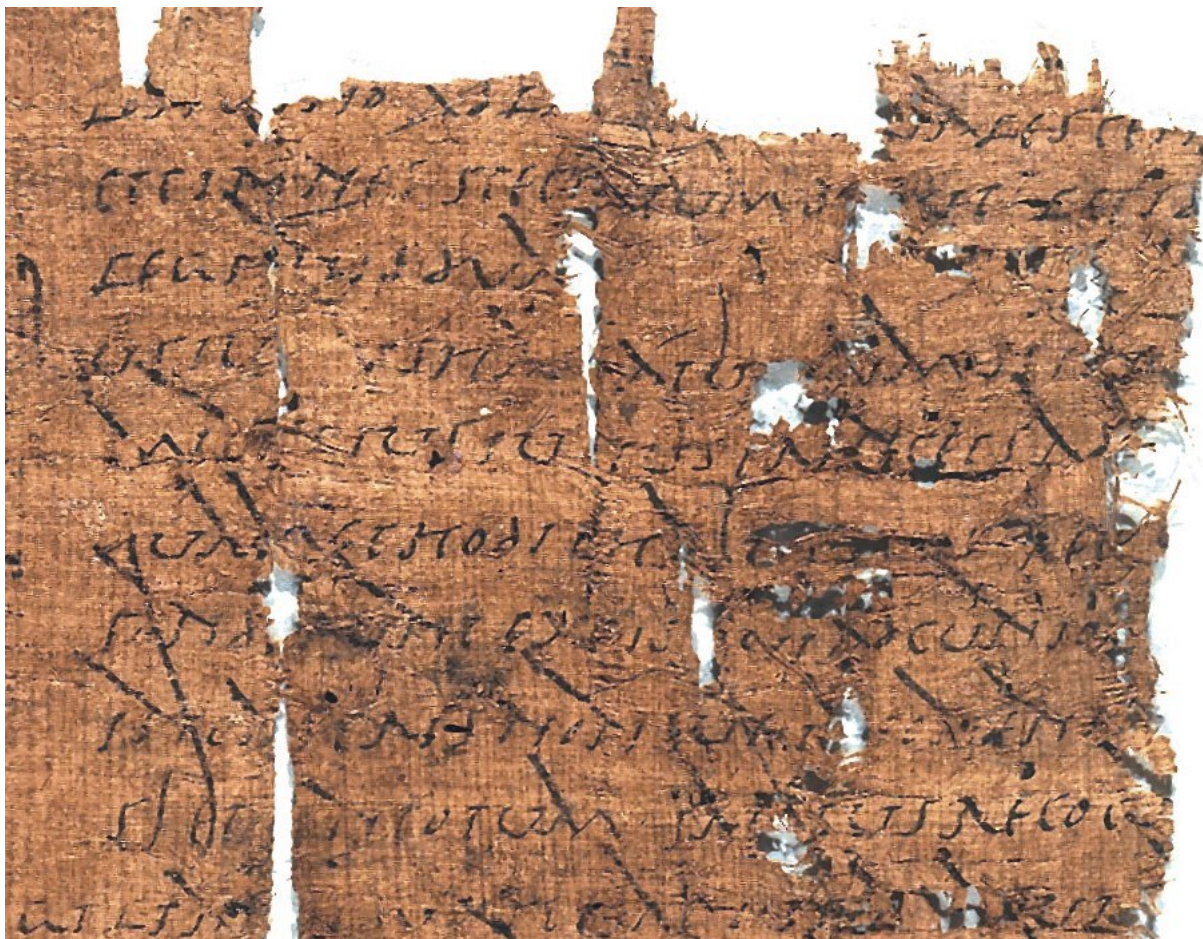
spop(ondit) · C. Iulius

bestiam · ueterinam



1. The medial dot, or *interpunctum*

- Papyri, tablet, *ostraka* from Egypt from I BC to mid-I AD are **consistently** provided with interpuncts
- After AD **60**, we begin to see less and less of the medial dot
- Some documents are entirely **devoid** of it: *PSI XIII 1307*, e.g.



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□ ... *u(irim) · fortem · co(n)s(ulem) · Scipionem · qui ...*

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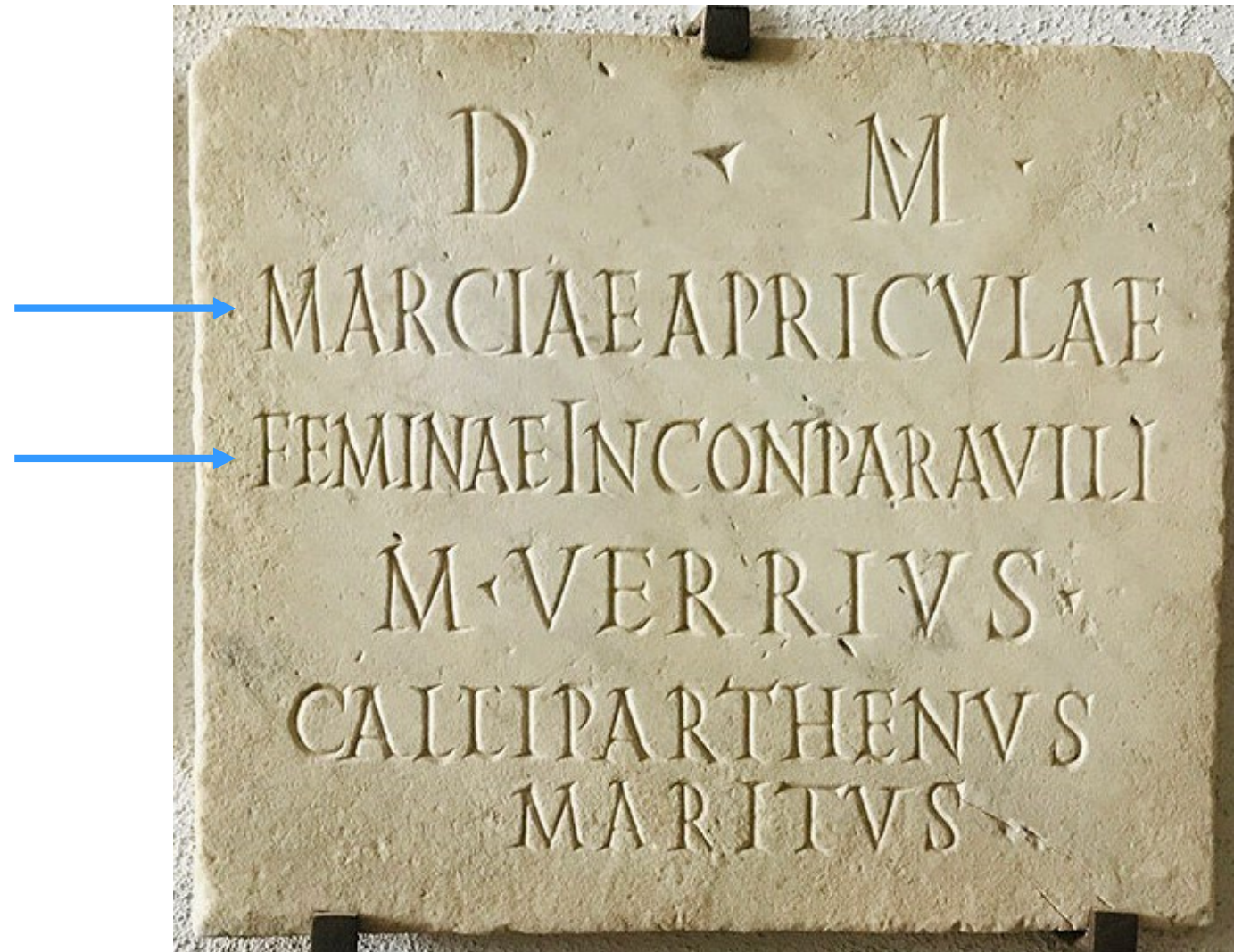
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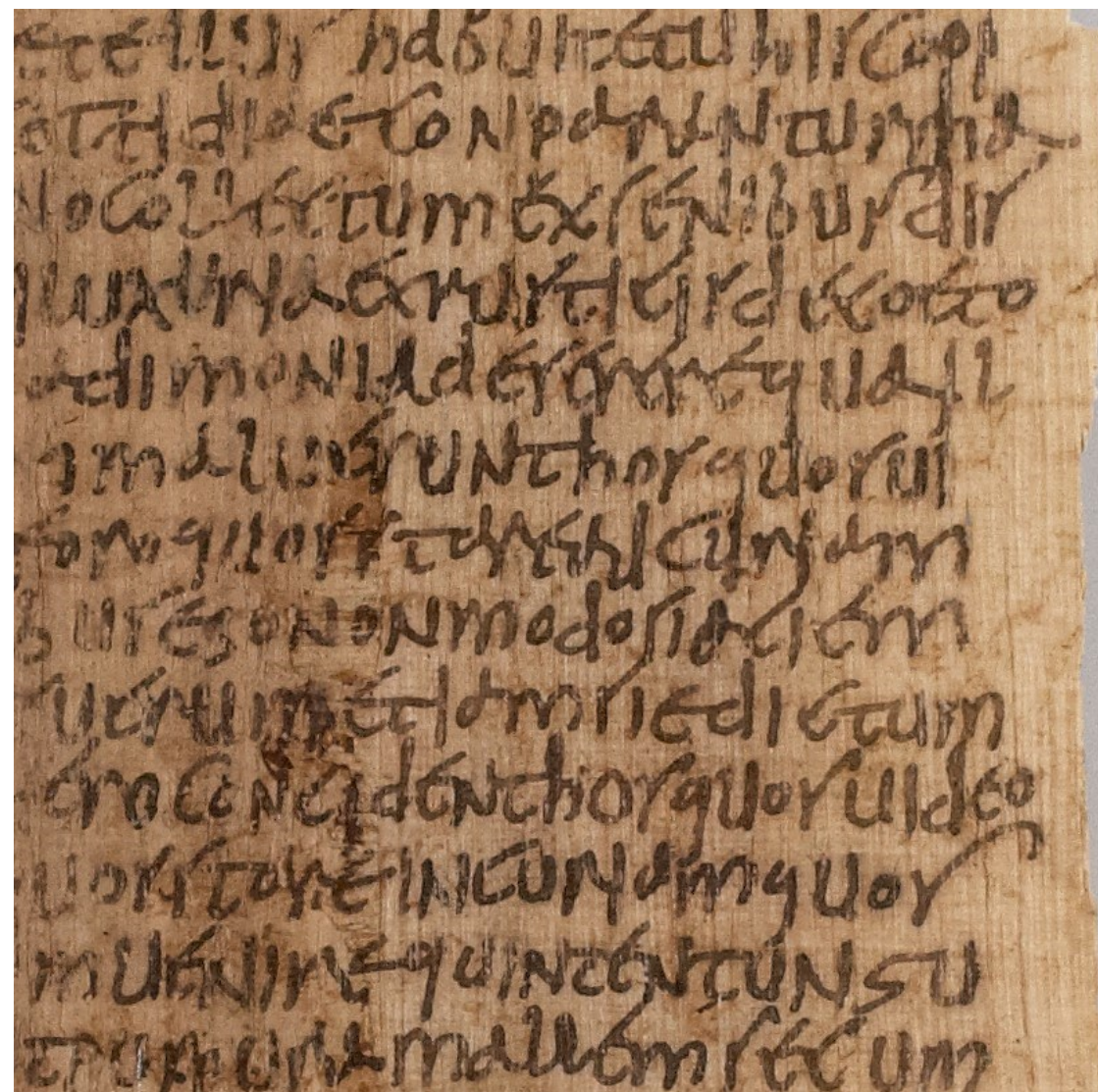
(Cuma, *porta Mediana*, II AD)



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(P.Duke inv. 798 + P.Monts.Roca inv.
129-149: Egypt, IV AD)



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- Why?
- The Greek influence

QVINT. *inst.* 7, 9, 6 *sic apud Graecos contendunt* Λέων et Πανταλέων, *cum scriptura dubia est*, bona *omnia Leonti* an bona *Pantaleonti* relictæ sint.

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- ‘Let’s keep them only when we need them’
- Military **lists** in columnar format, documents referring to **internal proceedings** of single **military bureaus**
- Receipts, official letters, contracts – where they were **useful**, or felt as a necessary (inherited?) feature: scribal education still dictated by the **West**?

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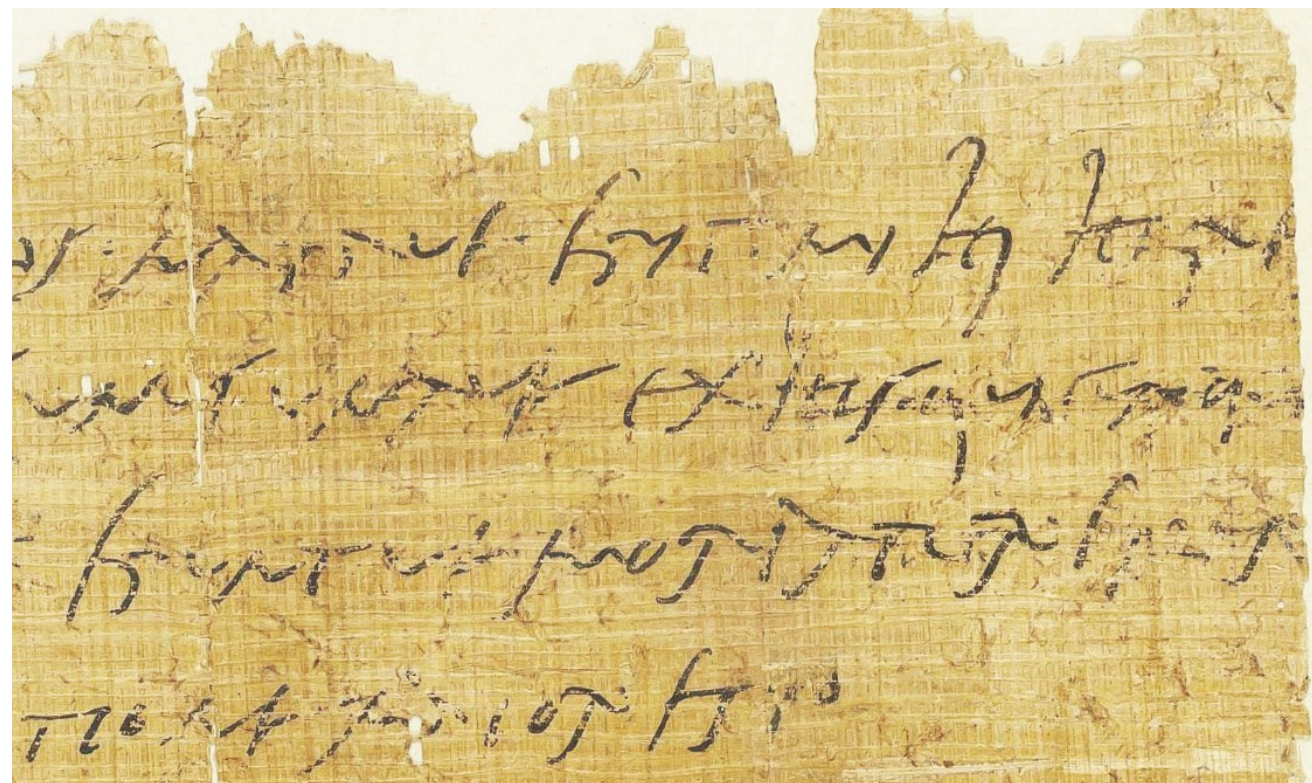
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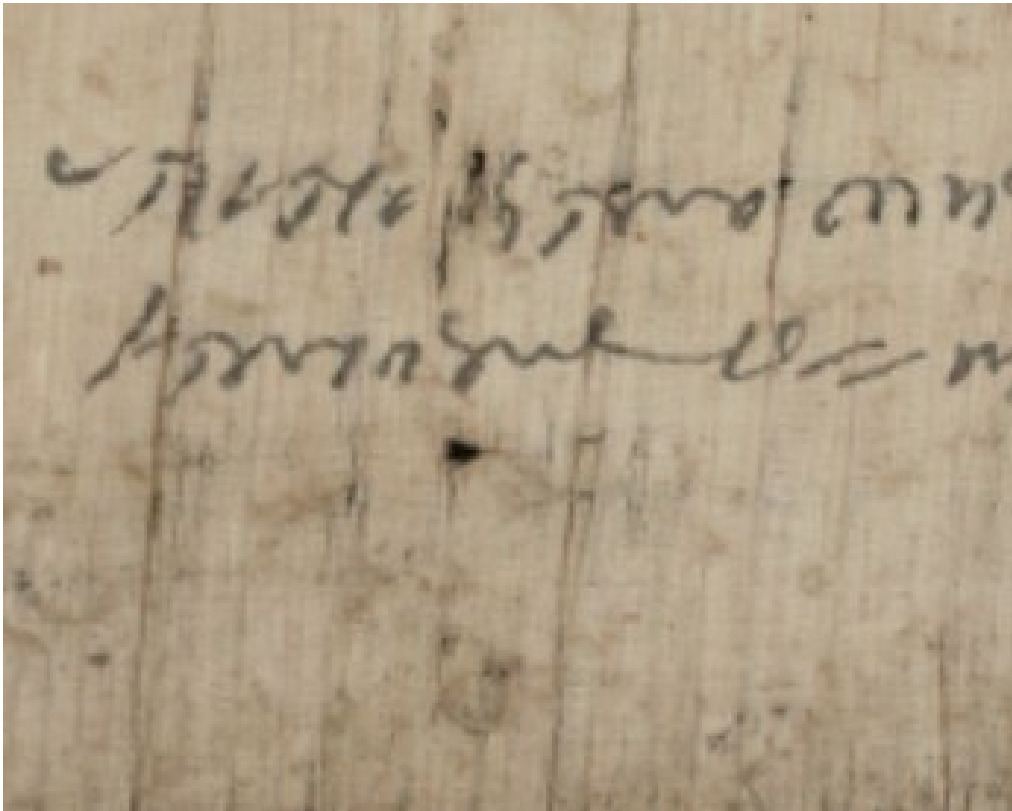
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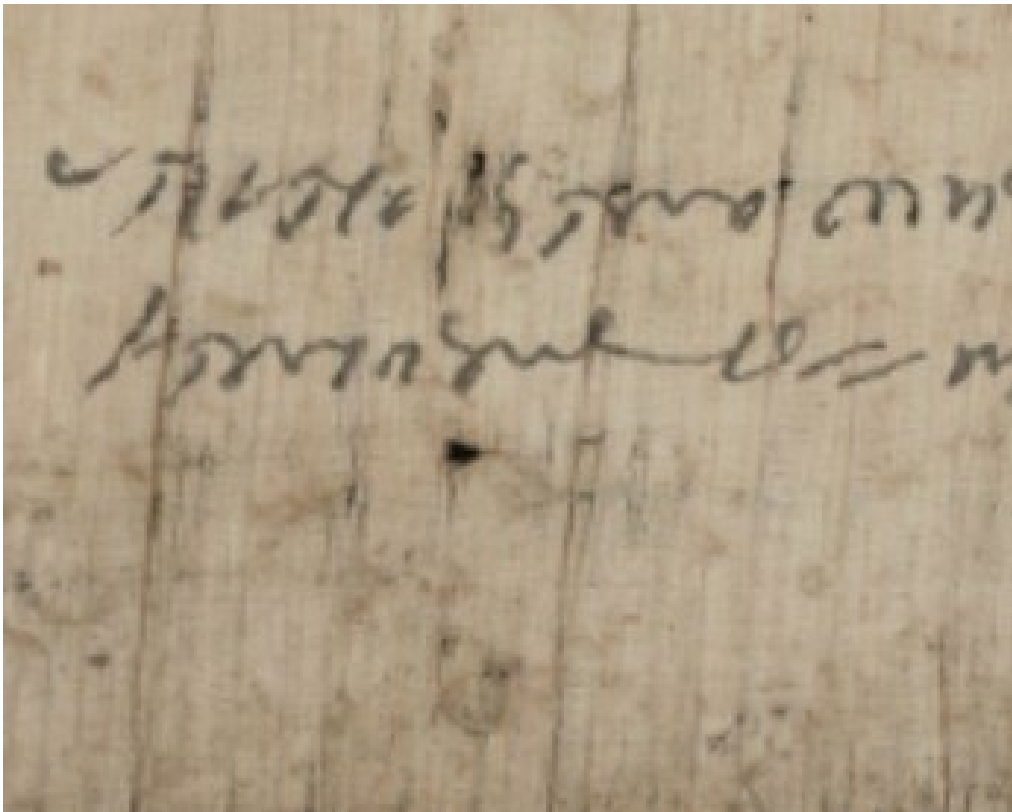
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‘LOW’ TEXTS: P.OXY. XII 1466 (AD 245) –
A REQUEST FOR A *TUTOR*

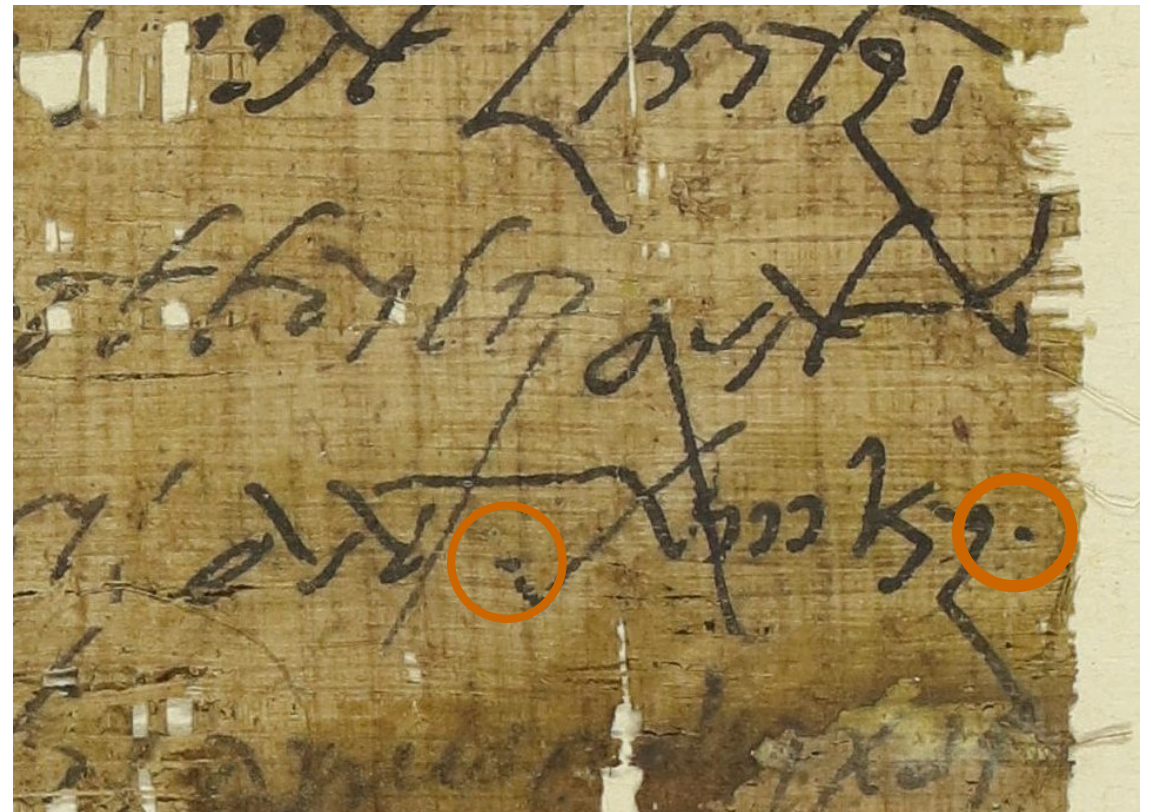


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‘LOW’ TEXTS: P.OXY. XII 1466 (AD 245) –
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‘HIGH’ TEXTS: SBI 1010 (AD 249) – A REQUEST
FOR *AGNITIO BONORUM POSSESSIONIS*





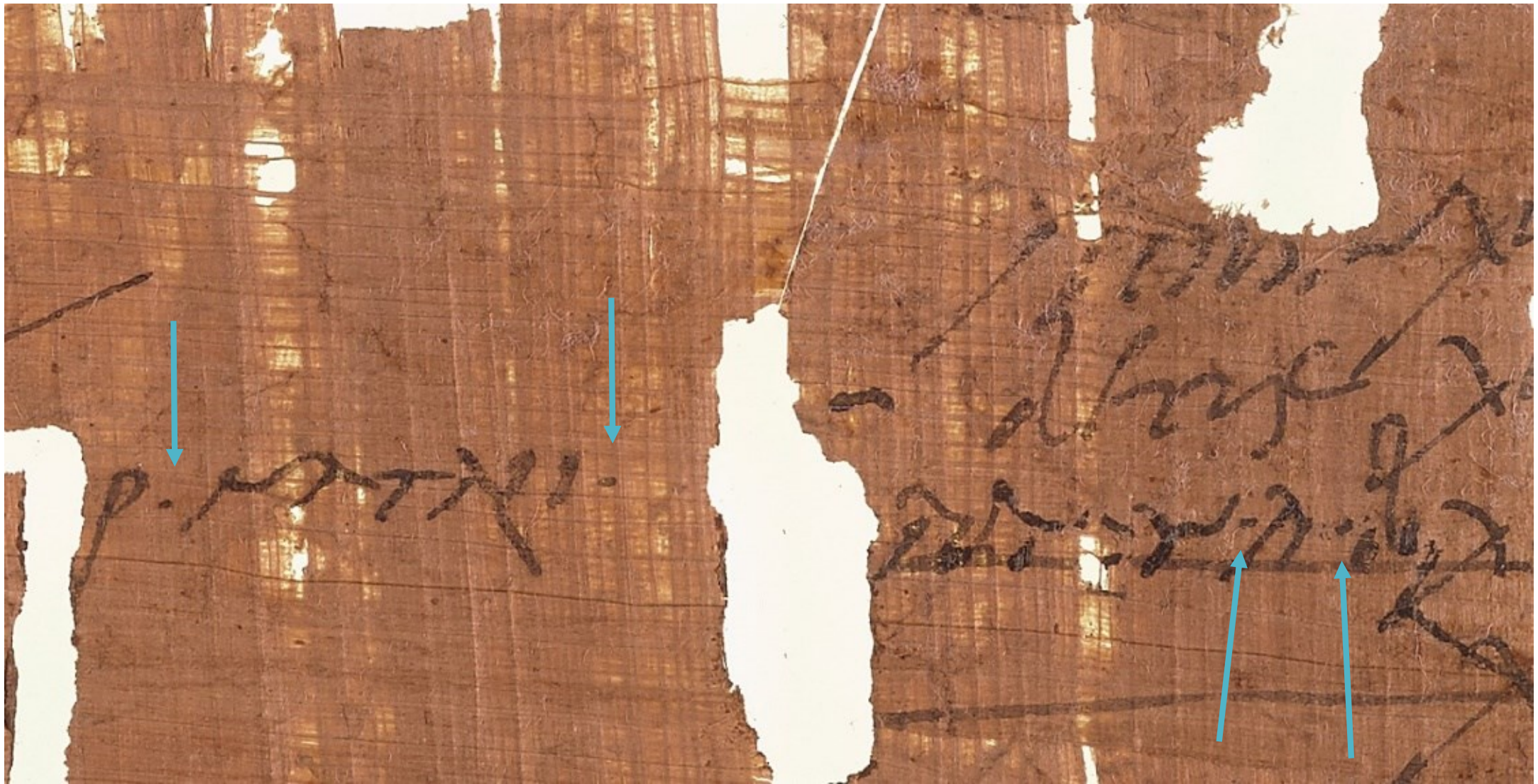
P.Oxy. XLI
2950 – late
III AD –
dedication
to Diocletian
and
Maximian

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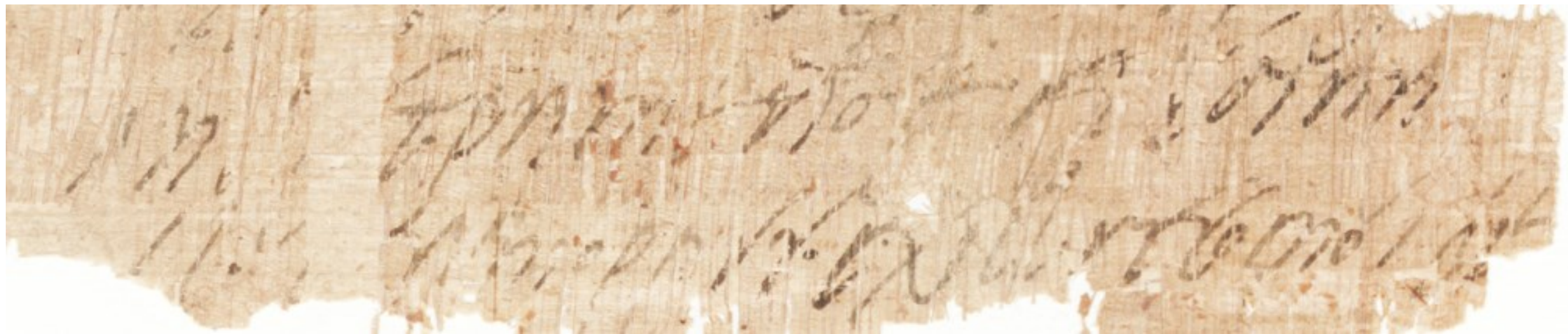
- It never really disappears until the end of the IV AD
- The scribes can retrieve them when they need abbreviation markers: see e.g. the **marginal annotations** in *P.Dura* 100 (AD 219)



- *Appad(ana)·*, *ad sacra<s> himag(ines)·*, *auir·*, *coh(ortis)· l· ascol·*, *disposit·*, *m·*, *mal·*, *m· amb·*, *Max(imo)·*, *p(ro)·*, *sig(nifer)·*, *singul(aris)·*, etc. – and often after full names

P.Vindob. inv. L 78 verso – AD 342 – Latin official document

- |⁴ -ante **et** · **primario** uet(eranorum) et ea iunn(iorum) .[
|⁵ **[i]ll(ustris)** · Vetrano pp(raesentibus) **s(upra)s(cryptis)** · ex **ll(itteris)** · recognoui de[



2. The high dot

- A rare sign with a **short lifespan** and a narrow distribution

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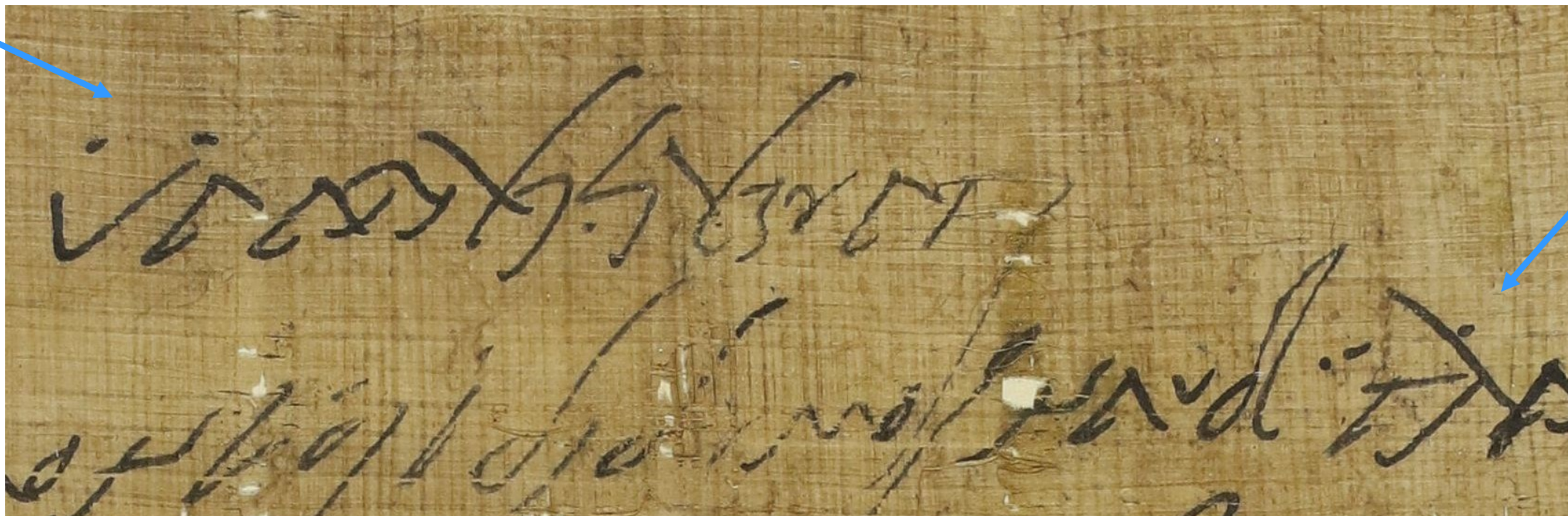
- A rare sign with a **short lifespan** and a narrow distribution
- One can summarize its appearances in a **single slide**

- *SB I 1010 (AD 249): u(iro) p(erfectissimo), t(utore) a(uctore)*
- *P.Dura 95 (AD 250–1): n(umerus) p(urus)*
- *P.Dura 97 (AD 251): n(ota) f(emore) a(rmo) d(estro), s(ine) n(ota)*
- *ChLA IX 404 (AD 277–82): p(rae)p(ositi)*
- *ChLA X 436 (III AD): diametr-, epimetr-*
- *P.Oxy. XLI 2952 (AD 311–4): u(ir) p(erfectissimus) a(gens) u(ices)*
- *P.Sakaon 33, 34 (AD 318–21): Arsinoit(um) in secret(ario)*
- *P.Oxy. LXIII 4381 (AD 375)*
- *P.Vindob. inv. L 76 (IV–V AD): opt(ione), leg(ionis)*
- *P.Vindob. inv. L 21 (AD 415): Aug(usto)*

2. The high dot

- A rare sign with a **short lifespan** and a narrow distribution
- **Not** incidentally, its first apparition is in a beautifully written manuscript: SB I 1010 (AD 249)

1.1 *u*[̇](iro) *p*[̇](erfectissimo), 1. 2 *t*[̇](utore) *a*[̇](uctore)



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 - *P.Oxy.* LXIII 4381 (AD **375**)
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- *Agnitiones bonorum* (SB I 1010, *P.Thomas* 20), military and fiscal accounts
- After Diocletian, again a military document and **court proceedings**
- Never after AD 415
- Never found **alone**

2. The high dot

SB I 1010

- *u(iro), p(erfectissimo), t(utore)*
a(uctore), M
- *praef(ecto)·, inpub(ere)·,*
heredib(us)·, dat(um)· | kal(endas)·
- *q̄(ui) ē(t)*
- *b'(onorum) p'(ossessionem)*
- *co(n)ss(ulibus)*

P.Vindob. inv. L 76

- *uet(eris), uu(iris) cc(larissimis),*
Fl(auius), AA(ugustus)
- *leg(ionis), opt(ione)*
- *Gem'(inae), d'd'(ominis)*
- *Kal(endas)/*
- *n̄n̄(ostris), conss(ular-)̄*

2. The **high dot**: what are we **dealing** with?

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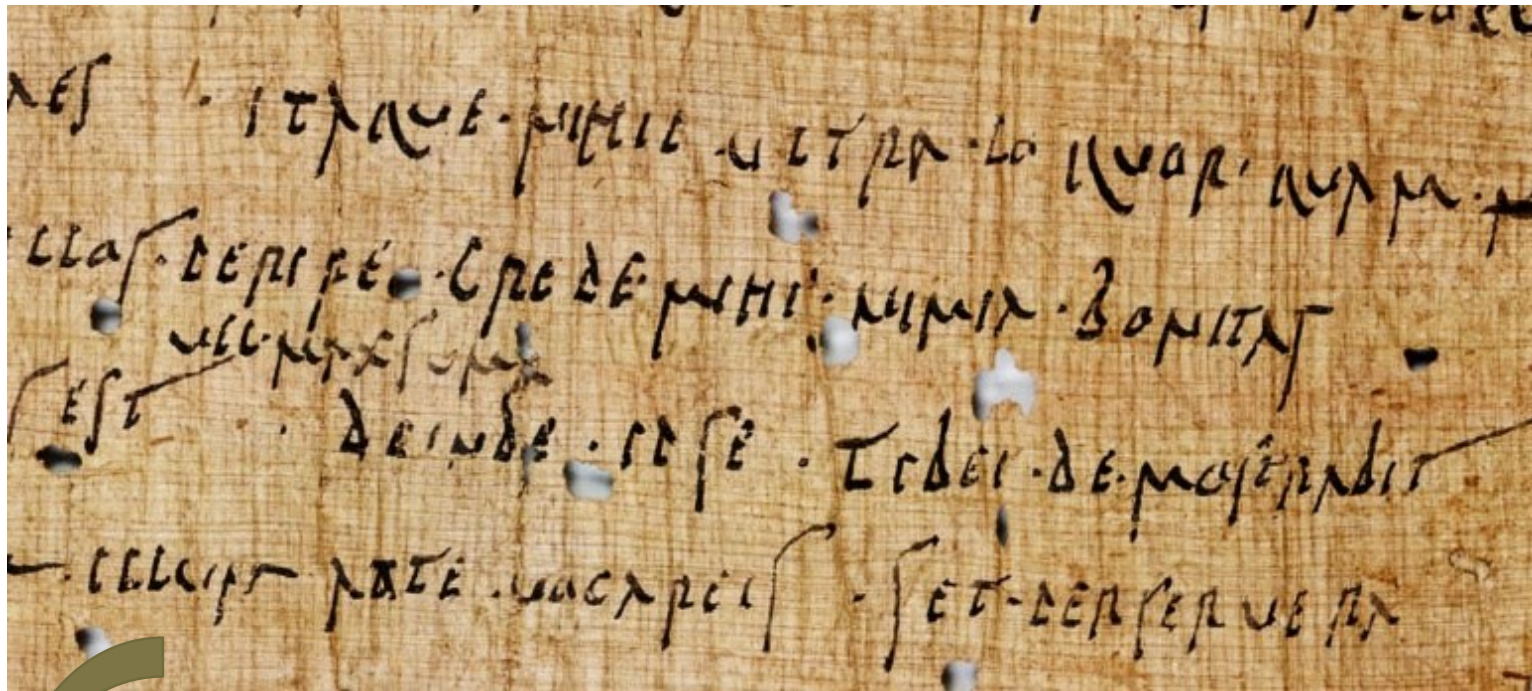
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- Perhaps one of its graphical variations (Casamassima, Staraz)?

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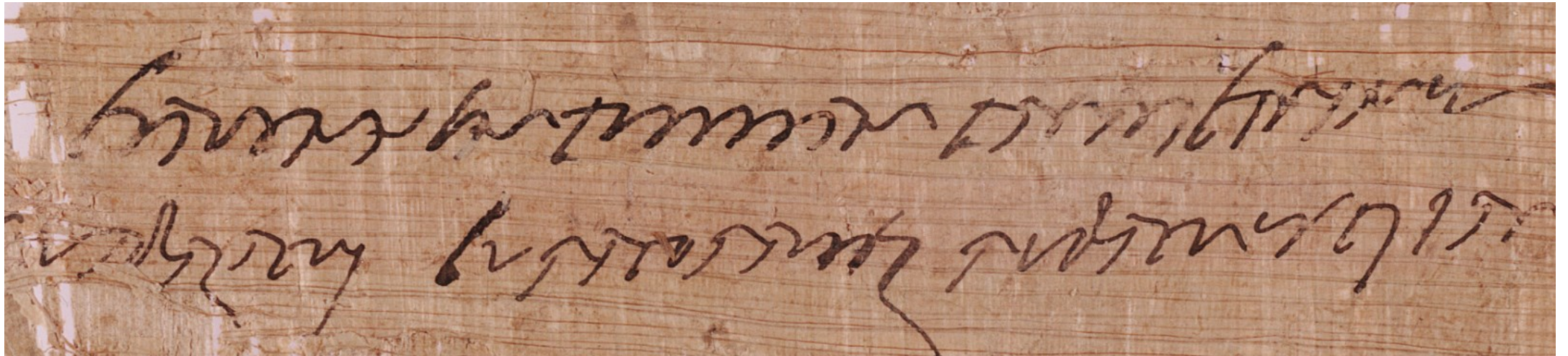
- It is not a displaced or mistaken version of the medial dot
- One finds it in Egypt and in Dura-Europos: **it is not a local fact**
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- It was born in **provincial chanceries** and was learnt and imitated by trainee scribes



P.Oxy. XLIV 3208 (late I BC)



P.Dura 82 (AD 223-33)

2. The **high dot**: what are we **dealing** with?

- It is not a displaced or mistaken version of the medial dot
- One finds it in Egypt and in Dura-Europos: **it is not a local fact**
- Was it easier for the scribes to put an abbreviating dot **after** they had drafted a sequence of letters in ligature?
- Perhaps one of its **graphical variations** (Casamassima, Staraz)?
- It was born in **provincial chanceries** and was learnt and imitated by trainee scribes
- Perhaps a **high dot** was easier to insert in a connected sequence, **without spaces between the letters**, than a medial dot?

3. The horizontal bar

- Its main usage is on **stone**: it marks figures (XXVIII) or multiplies for 1000 (XXVIII = 28.000)

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- Its main usage is on stone: it marks figures (XXVIII) or multiplies for 1000 (XXVIII = 28.000)
- It can also multiply for 100.000, if **duly augmented** (V. Fontanella): see e.g. P.Genova inv. 1156 *recto* (IV-V AD)

$$k(e)n(tenaria) \overline{XXV} = 2.500.000 \text{ kentenaria}$$



3. The horizontal bar

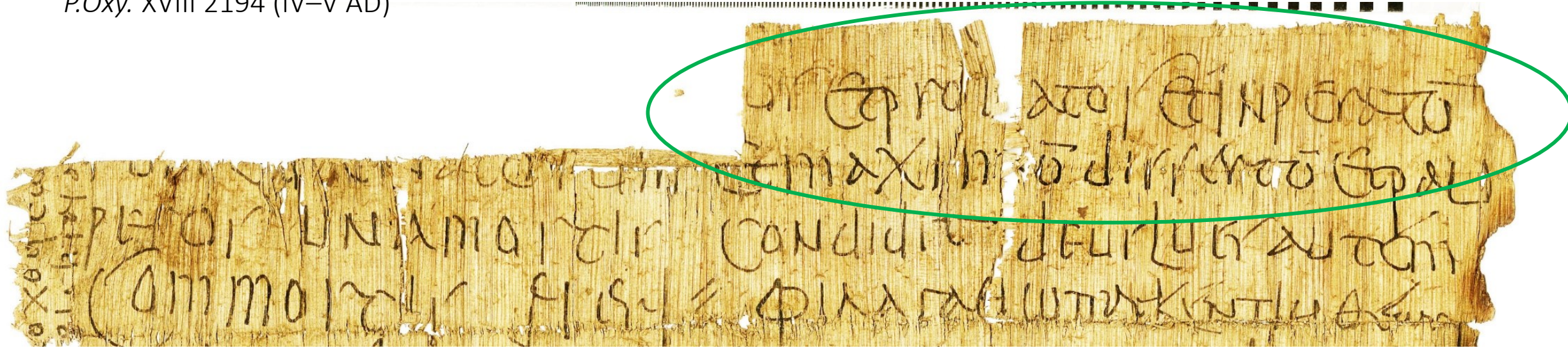
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]os et probatos et inperatō-

|³-rum et senatorum et maximō dissertō et pau-

|⁴-peros una mortis condidit Deus, lues autem

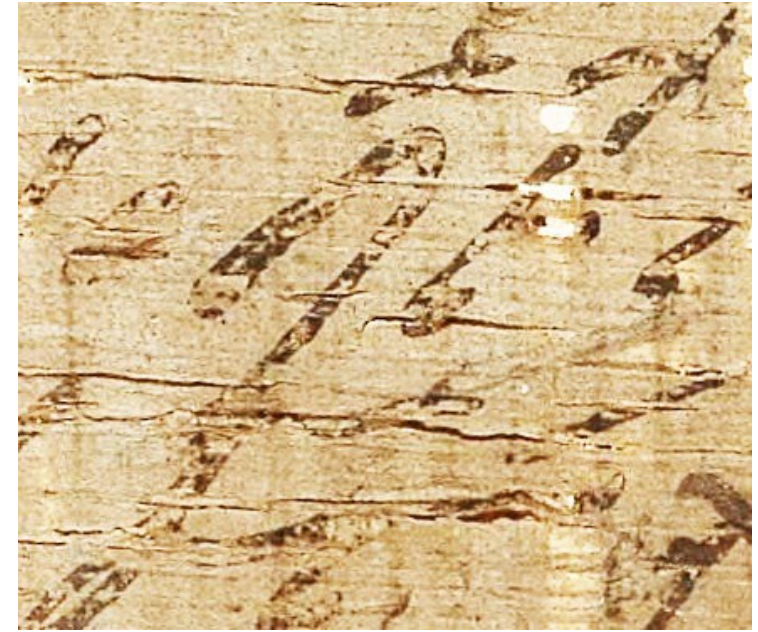
|⁵ com mortis fieri. Φιλαγάθῳ Πασκεντίῳ Θεῶν κτλ.

3. The horizontal bar

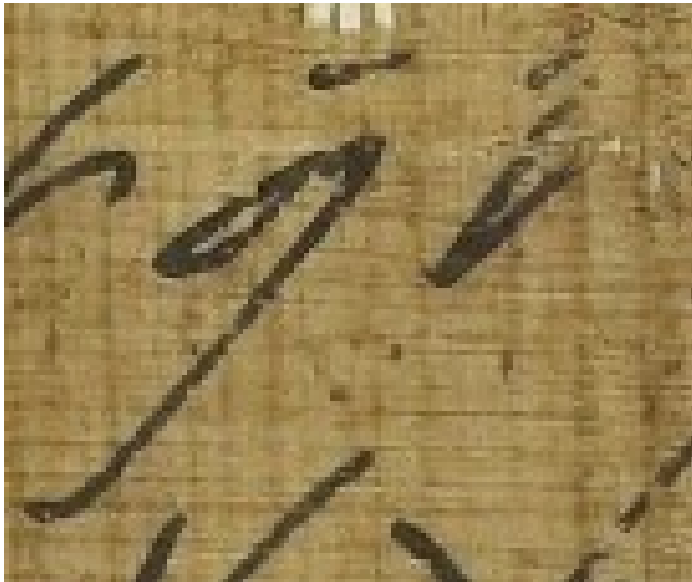
- Much rare when employed to mark abbreviations: **II–III AD**, no further
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- Where did it come from and why?

3. The horizontal bar

P.Thomas 20 (AD 269–70)
q(ui) ē(t)



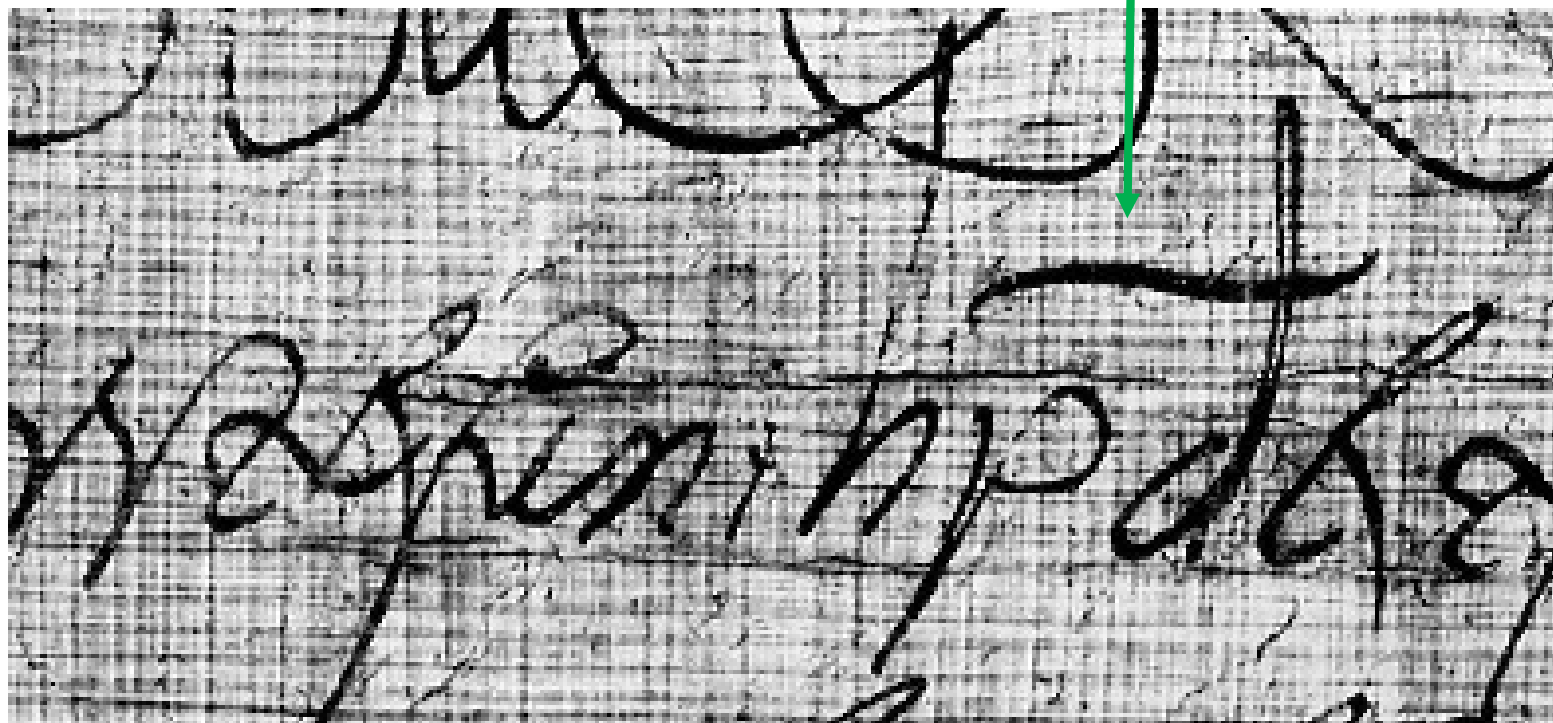
SB I 1010 (AD 249)



- Where did it come from and why?
- **Not** incidentally, one finds them in two requests of *agnitiones bonorum possessionis*, drafted in high chanceries

P.Ital. I 8 (Ravenna, AD 564)

... Stephani *h*(onesti) *p*(ueri) de it ...



4. The short oblique bar

- Again: II–III **AD** and a bit of the IV

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P.Lond. inv. 2851 (AD **105**)

P.Heid. inv. P. Lat. 7 (AD 115–6)

ChLA X 420 (AD 127/8–71)

P.Berol. inv. 7124 (AD 131)

P.Heid. inv. P. Lat. 12 (AD 138)

SB XII 11043 (AD 152)

P.Hamb. I 72 (II AD)

P.Vindob. inv. L 74 (II–III AD)

P.Berol. inv. 25053 (AD 212)

P.Brook. 24 (AD 214 or 215)

P.Oslo III 122 (AD 238–42)

P.Mich. III 164 (AD 242–4)

P.Oxy. LXXXIII 5363 (AD 244)

SB I 1010 (AD 249)

P.Thomas 20 (AD 269–70)

P.Berol. inv. 14099 (III AD)

P.Dura 56 (AD 208 c.)

P.Dura 60 (AD 208 c.)

P.Dura 74 (AD 211–51)

P.Dura 66 (AD 216)

P.Dura 55A (AD 218–20)

P.Dura 100 (AD 219)

P.Dura 64 (AD 221)

P.Dura 54 (AD 222–35)

P.Dura 92 (AD 222–35)

P.Dura 89 (AD 239)

P.Dura 121 (after AD 239–41)

P.Dura 95 (AD 250–1)

P.Dura 105 (AD 251–6)

P.Sakaon 34 (AD 321)

P.Lips. I 44 (AD 324–37)

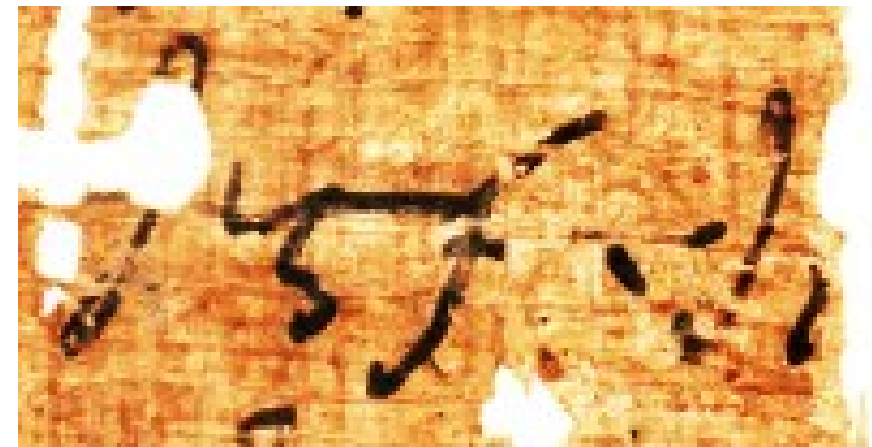
P.Mich. VII 460 (IV AD)

P.Vindob. inv. L 76 (IV–V AD)

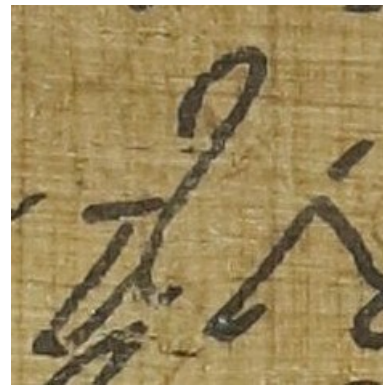
P.Oxy. XVI 1879 (c. AD **434**)

4. The short oblique bar

- Again: II–III AD and a bit of the IV
- This time, **specific typologies** – and a **geographically** determined distribution
- **Military papyri** – but for three exceptions: *fr'*(umentaria) in P.Vindob. inv. L 74 *recto* (II–III AD), *b'*(onorum) *p'*(ossessionem) in SB I 1010 and P.Thomas 20



iug(era) fr'(umentaria) II



b'(onorum) p'(ossessionem)

4. The short oblique bar

- Again: II–III AD and a bit of the IV
- This time, **specific typologies** – and a **geographically** determined distribution
- Among the abbreviated words, those beginning with **n** are the favourites

b(onorum)
p(ossessionem)

b(ouem) m(arem),
f(eminam)

dec(urio)

dd(omini) nn(ostri) (X 8)

Fl(aurio)

Fort(is)

fr(umentaria)

legg(atis)

mil(iti)

n(on)

n(umerus) p(urus) (X 5)

Palmyr(enorum)

poster(ius)

p(rae)p(osit(i)

prid(ianum)

rat(io) stip(endii)

sesquiplicar(ii)

s(upra)s(criptus)

u(iro) p(erfectissimo)

P.Dura 55A (AD 218–20)

4. The short oblique bar

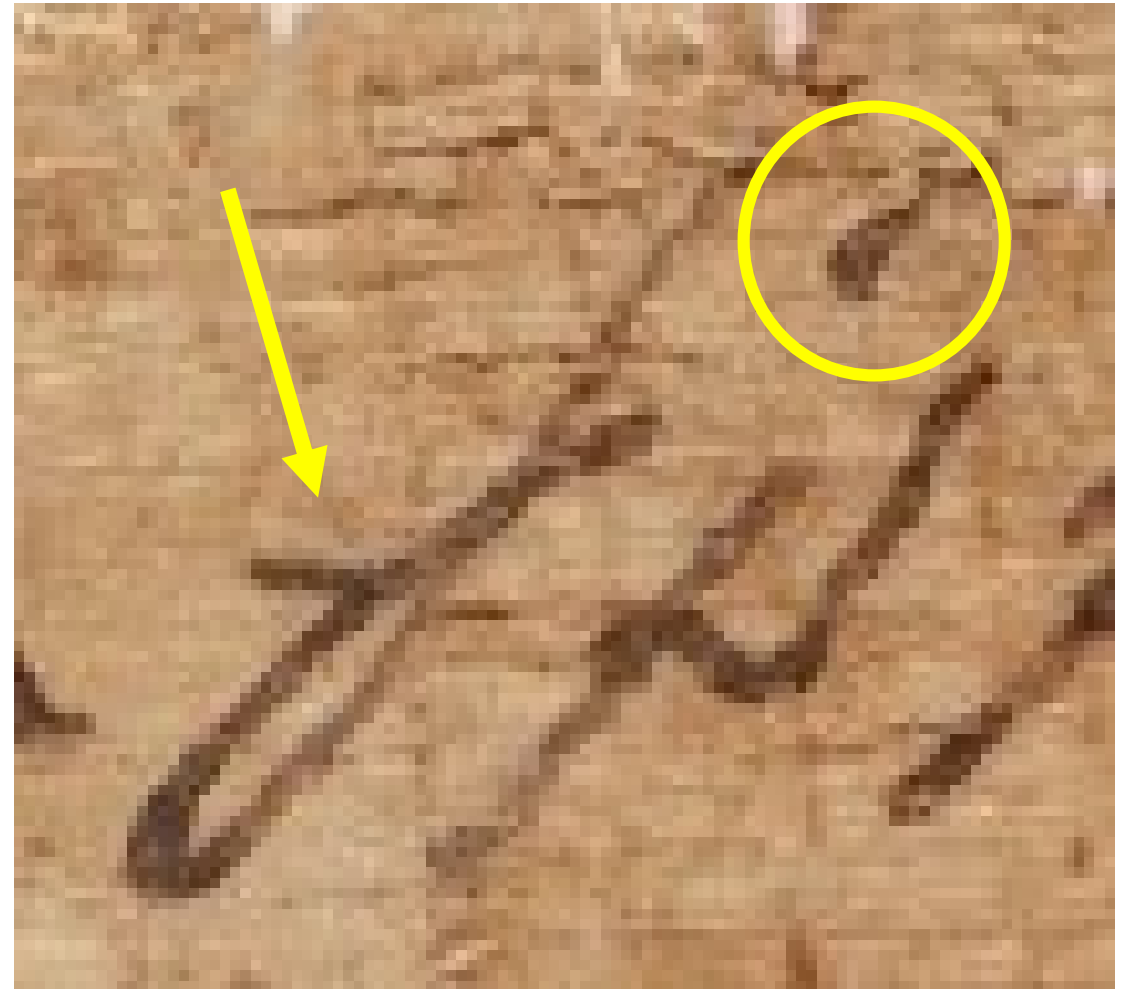
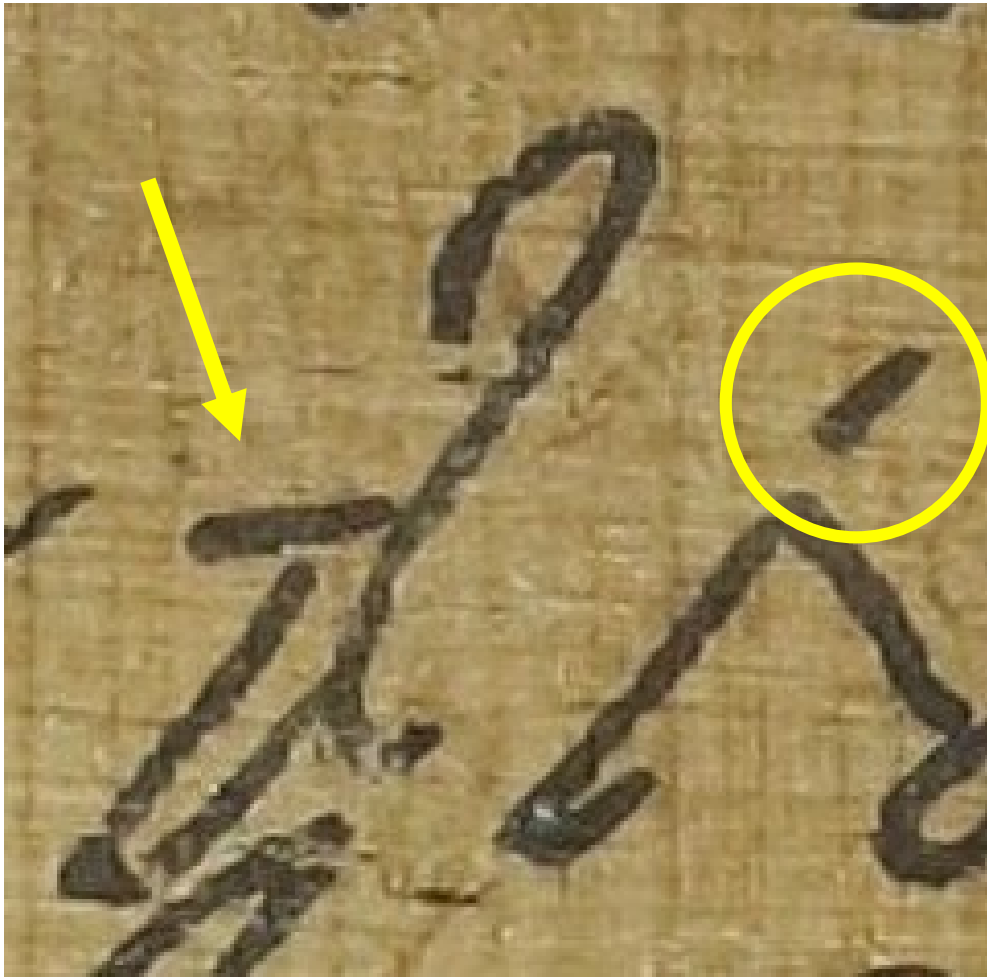
- Again: II–III AD and a bit of the IV
- This time, **specific typologies** – and a **geographically** determined distribution
- Among the abbreviated words, those beginning with *n* are the favourites
- **Durene** evidence amounts to roughly half of the total – and *n'* appears also in letters from **high commandoes**



P.Dura 64 letter A (AD 221)



P.Dura 60 letter B (AD 208 c.)



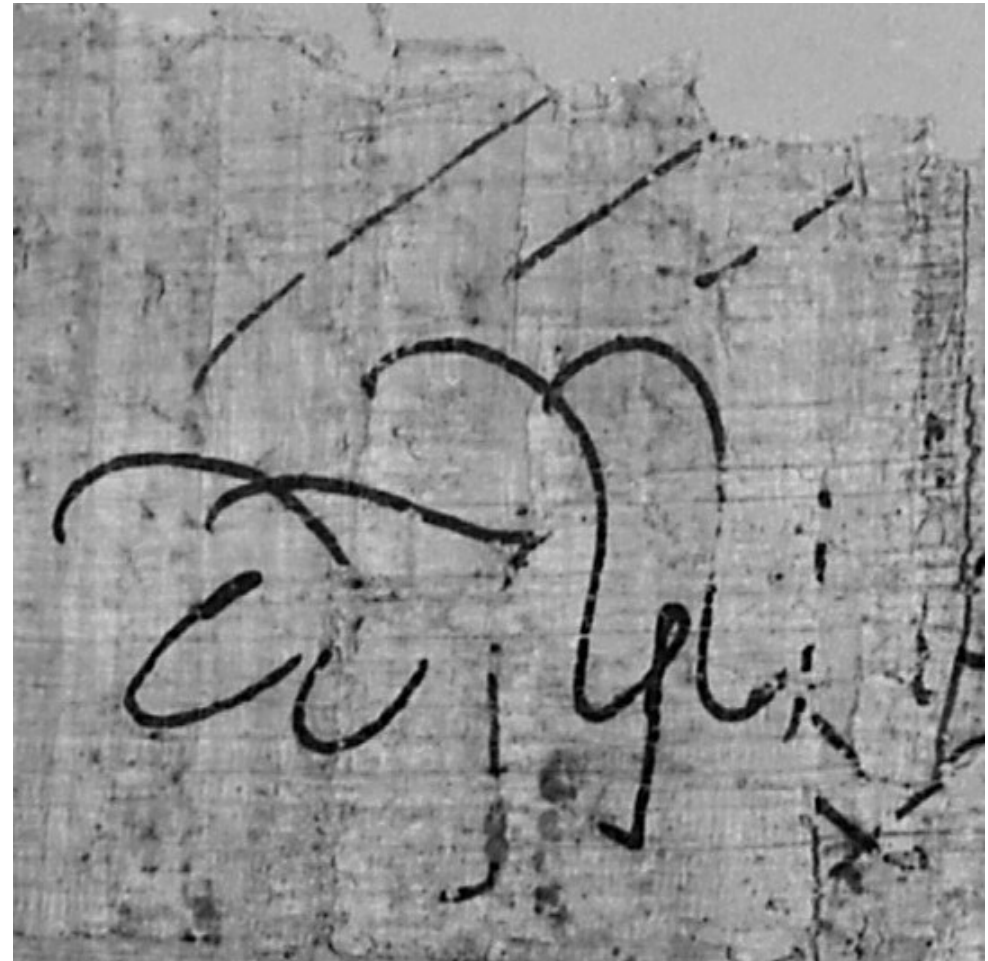
b(onorum) *p*(ossessionem) in *SB I 1010* (249)

vs. *d*(omino) *n*(ostro) in *P.Dura 55A* (218 – 20)

4. The short oblique bar

P.Sakaon 34, l. 1 *D'd'*(ominis) *n'n*(ostris) ... (AD 321)

- Again: II–III AD and a bit of the IV
- This time, **specific typologies** – and a **geographically** determined distribution
- Among the abbreviated words, those beginning with *n* are the favourites
- *d'*(ominus) *n'*(oster) and derivatives still pop by in the IV AD. The sign dwindles to **nothing**



5. The slash

- The great celebrity of Late Antiquity

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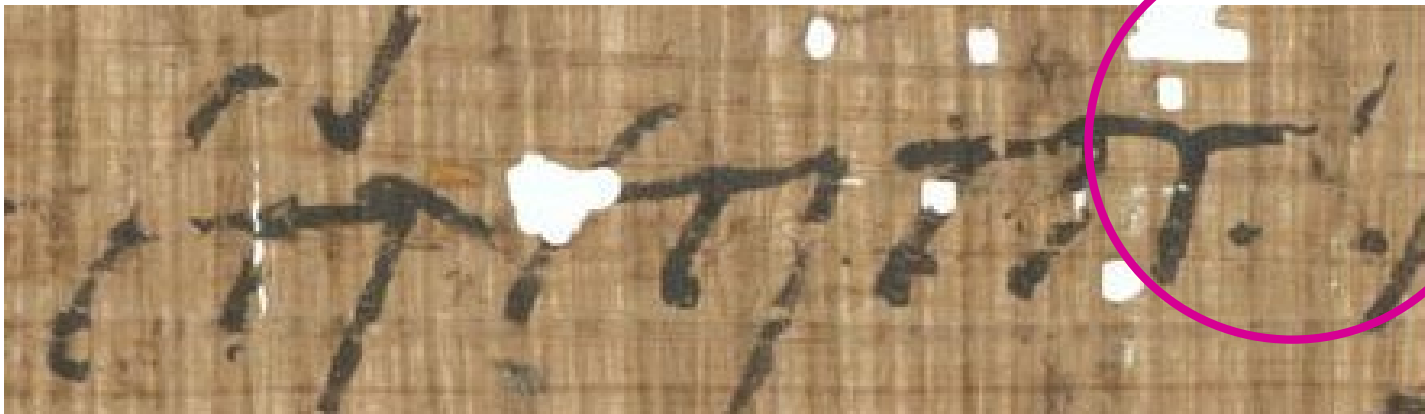
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 - P.Cairo Cat. inv. 10745, P.Princ. inv. Bell II 64, *ChLA* X 436 (II – III AD): *d(enarii)*
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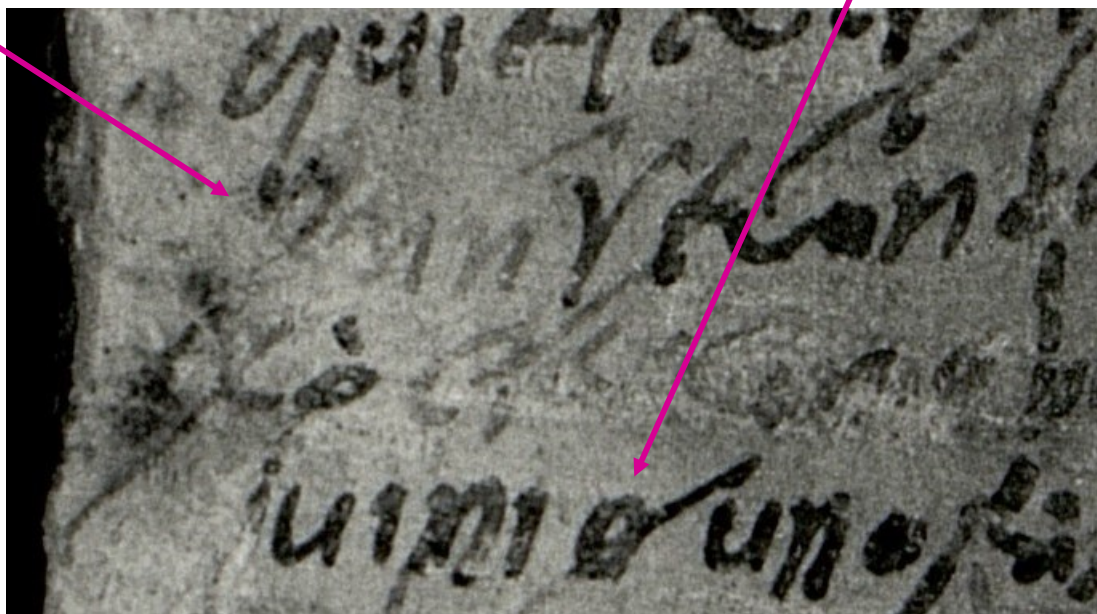


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ann(o) secundo

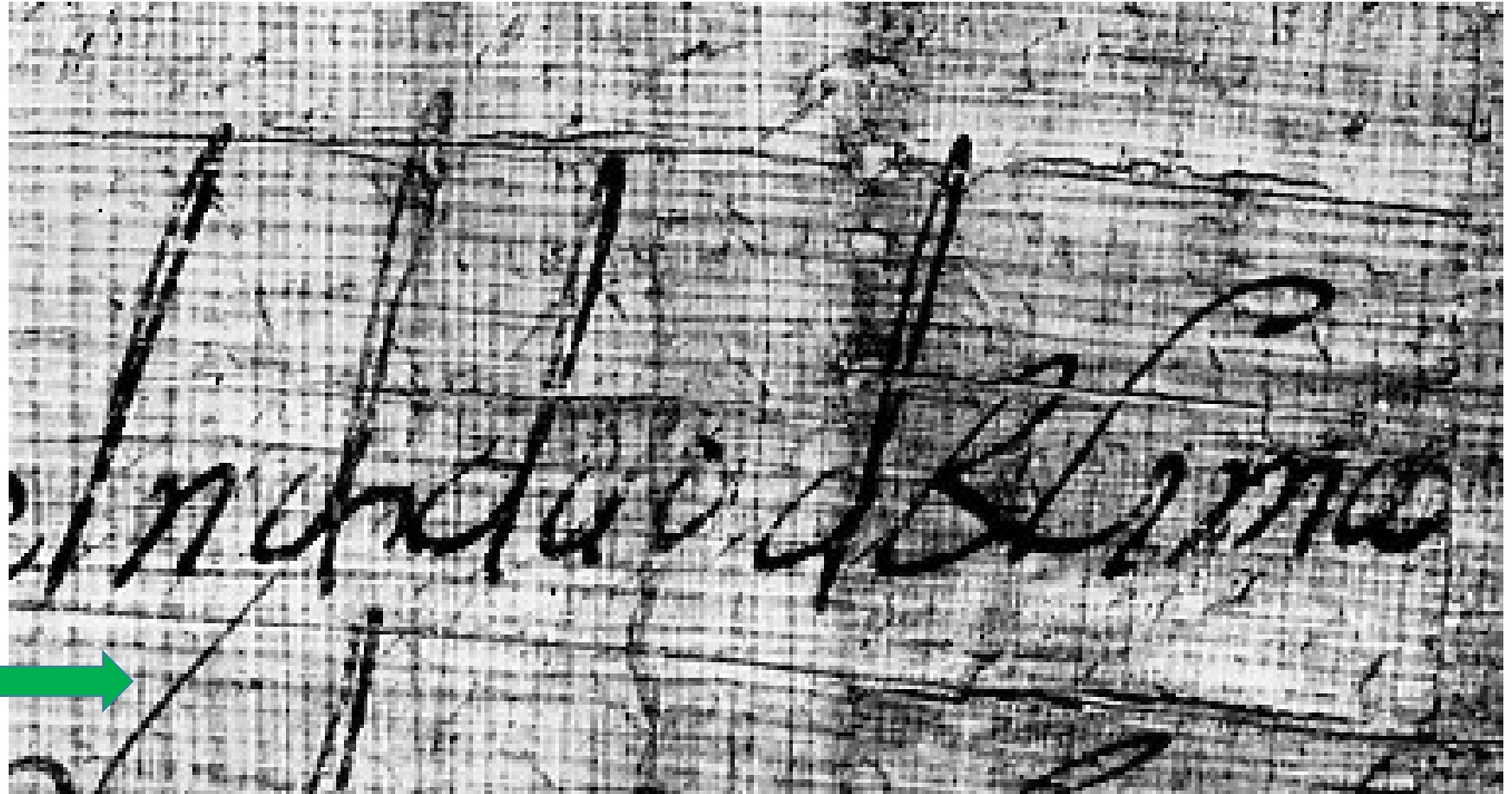
uini o(rci) uno



O.Capsa inv. s.n. (AD 437–532)

P.Ital. I 8 (Ravenna, AD 564)

ind(ictione) duodecima

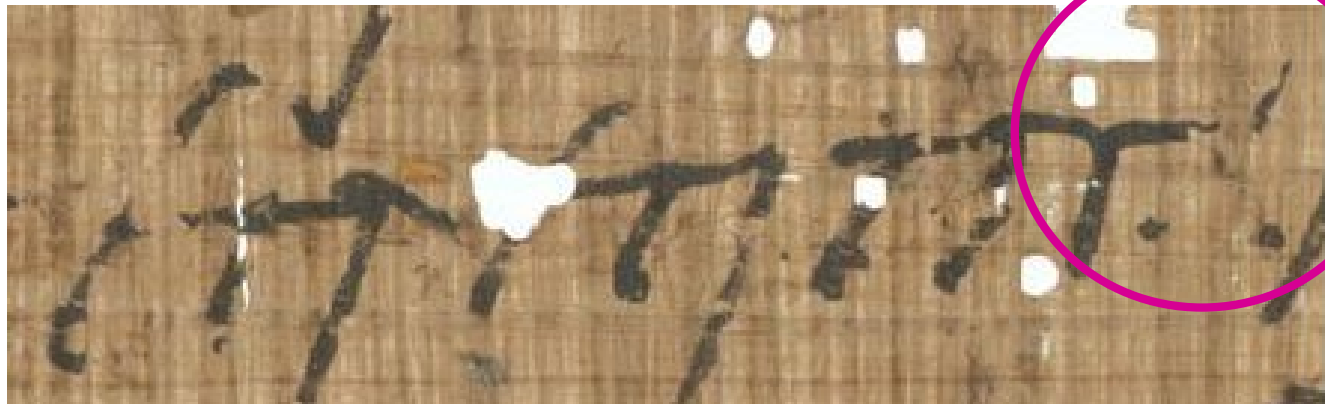


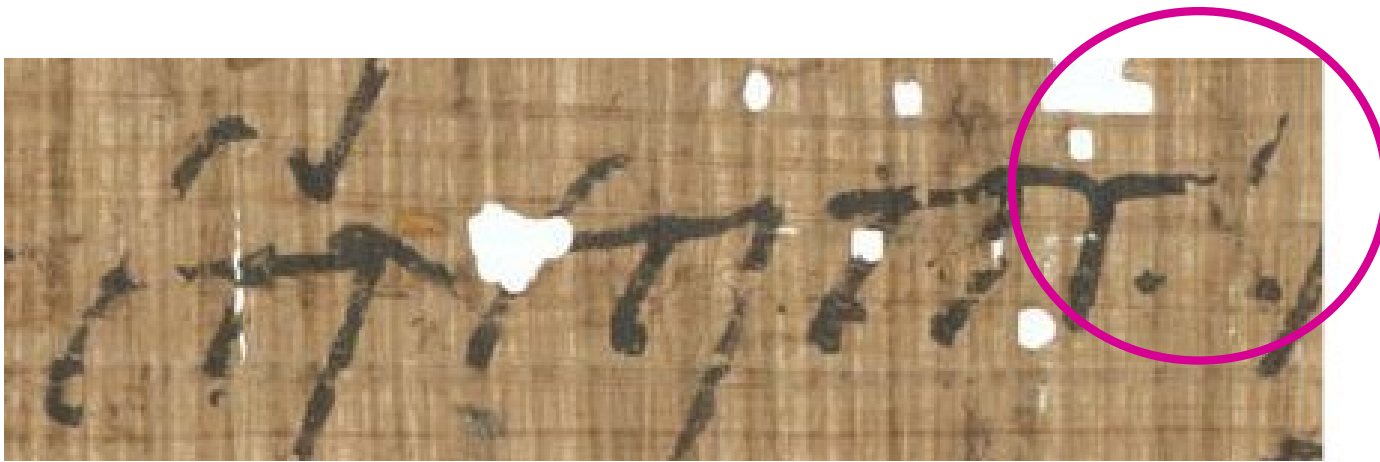
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- Its **sudden appearance** and **rapid dominance** suggest that it was introduced by the **higher echelons**

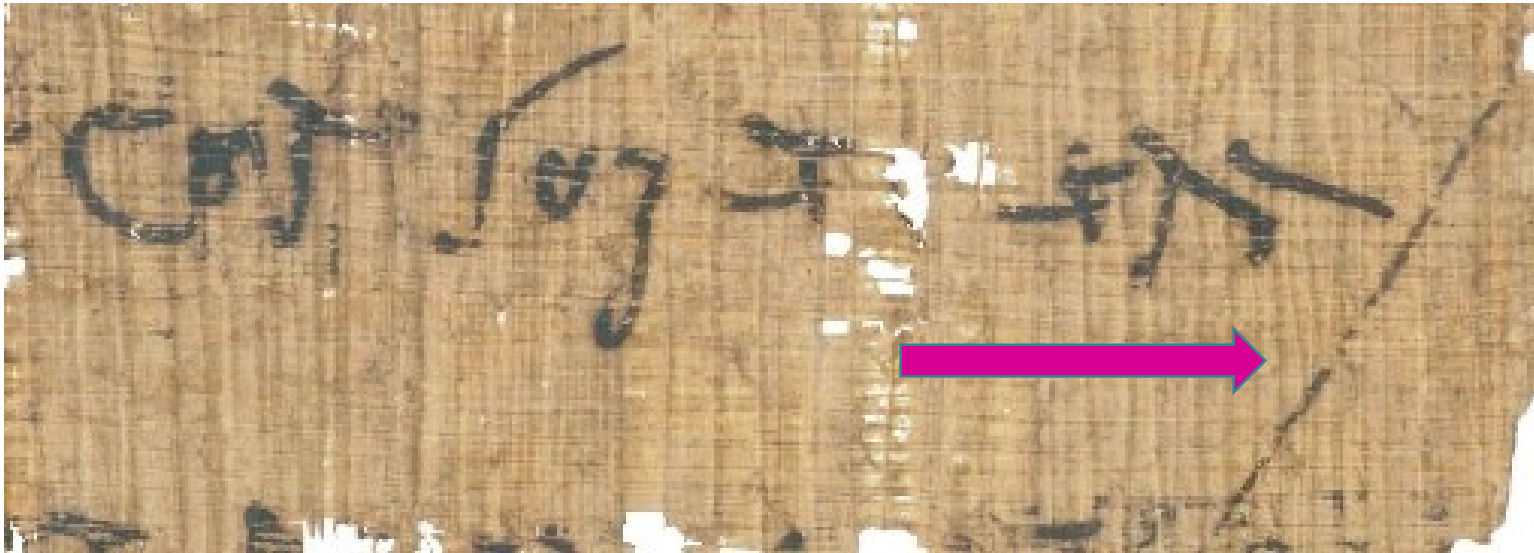
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- The **other signs** did not disappear at once, but dwindled into nothing, surviving often in the **less formally elaborated documents** (e.g. P.Vindob. inv. L 76, military register for the *annona*)





P.Berol. inv. 8334 (AD 84–6), ll. 7–8 ... *futurum [ae]qualem* *consortium*. [.....] *aturum* ...



The slash functions
here as a **punctuation
device**



P.Berol. inv. 14095 (I–II AD), l. 9 ... *in ordinem*. Qu [- - -]

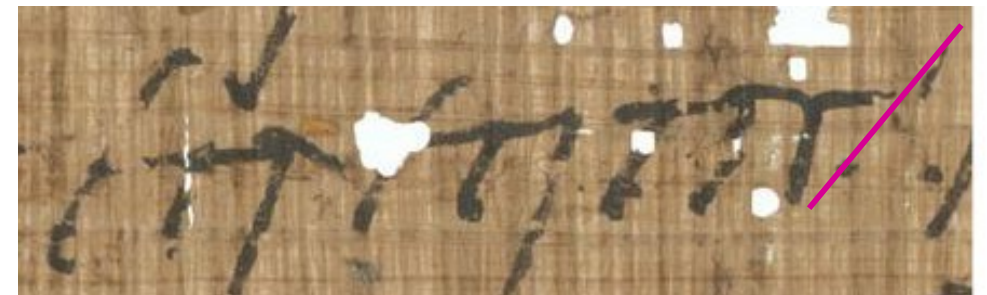


SB XX 14606 (AD
425–30), col. I l. 1
[- - -] *t /*



Documents **beautifully** written,
and/or coming from **high**
milieus

VS. a **testament**, where perhaps
the sign is mistakenly employed?



5. The origin of the slash: a speculation

- Its sudden appearance and rapid dominance suggest that it was introduced by the higher echelons
- Can we suspect the slash to have been the standard in Imperial chancery before the IV AD, and then ordained in all minor chanceries around the Empire?
- It must have existed before the IV, but crept only seldom in provincial documents if the scribe knew it or copied it from the antigraph
- Its function might have been that of separating periods – as the dot-like *distinctio* – as well as marking abbreviations; then almost universally used to abbreviate

6. The flourish

- The co-protagonist of Late Antique documents together with the slash: it's **everywhere**

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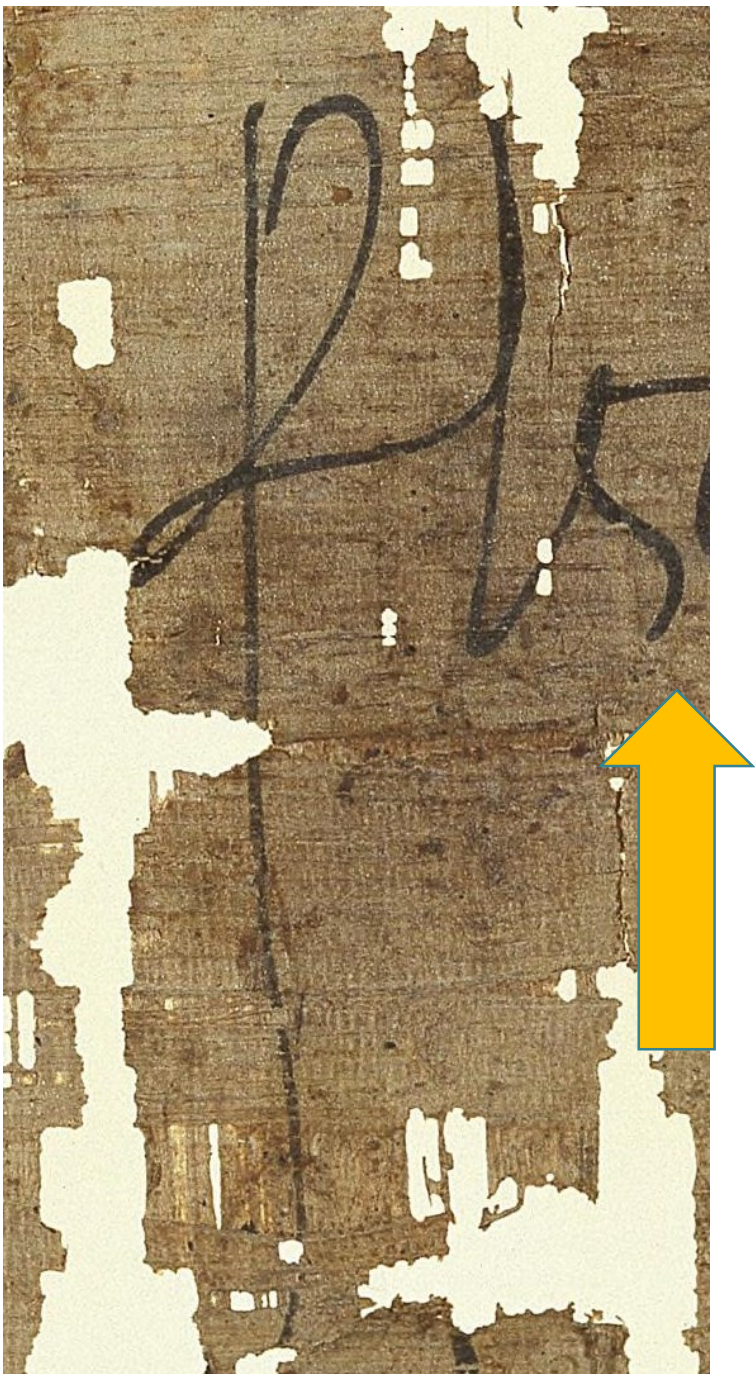
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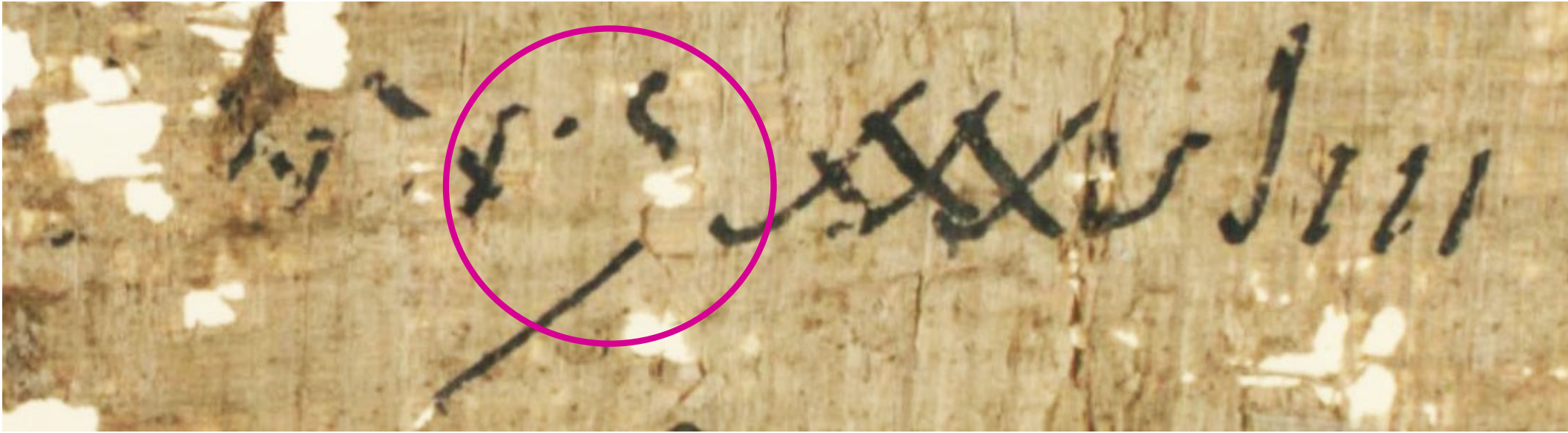
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- The usage is apparently restricted to **records of court proceedings** (which are, anyway, a huge bulk of evidence...)
- It almost automatically shortens **Fl(auius)**



*P.Mich. VII 442 (II AD) l. 2 ... **ann**(orum)·**ς** XXXVIII ...*

ann(orum) (circiter) ?

6. The leftovers

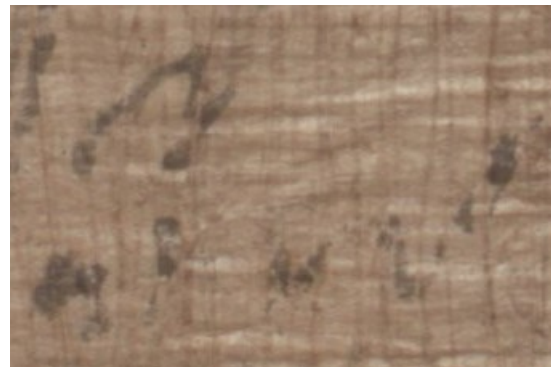
- Mainly **circular or semi-circular strokes**, open to the bottom and to the left

6. The leftovers

- Mainly **circular or semi-circular strokes**, open to the bottom and to the left
 - The letter **n** is a favourite, once again
- *P.Mich.* II 449, *ChLA* X 436 (II AD): *m(odius)*
 - *P.Dura* 100 (AD 219): *m-*
 - *P.Dura* 88 (AD 230–40): *n(ostri)*
 - *P.Dura* 95 (AD 250–41): *N(onas)*
 - *P.Vindob.* inv. L 76 (IV–V AD): *nn(ostris), conss(ularis)*



Very **un-official** document with
low production standards





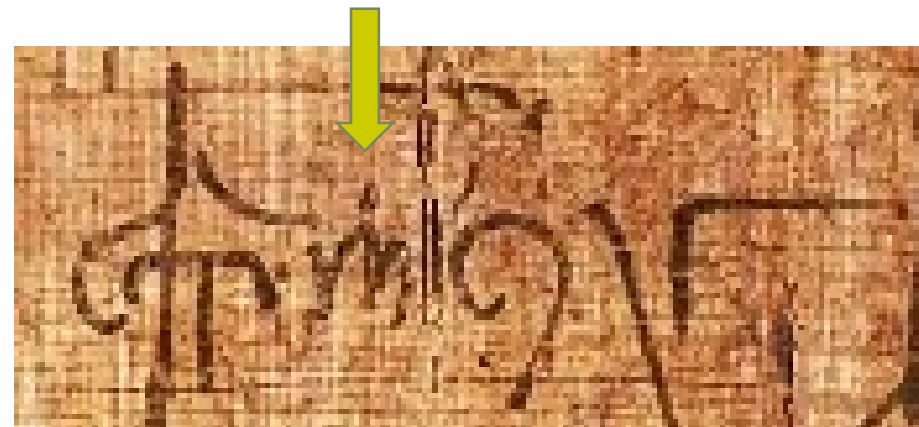
*P.Dura 100: ad m- (???) –
certainly not ad mo(dios)*



mo(dius): m^o



*P.Dura 100: ad m- (???) –
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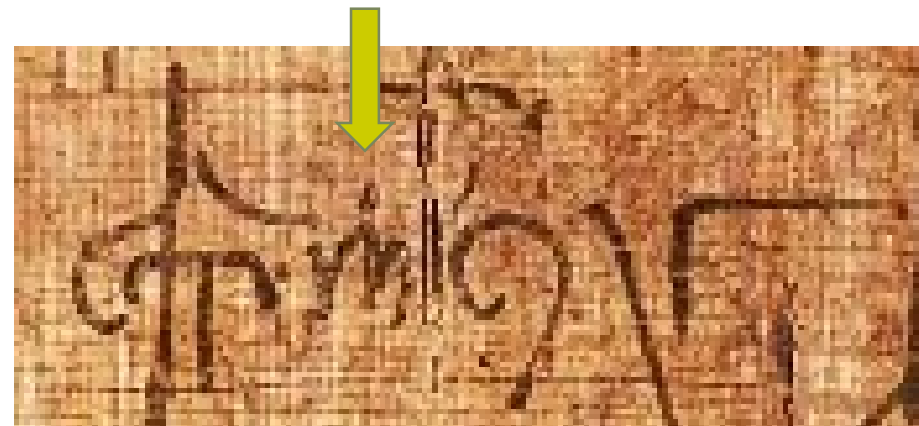
σίτου **m°**(dii) σλγ
P.Lond. V 1663 (AD 549)



mo(dius): m°



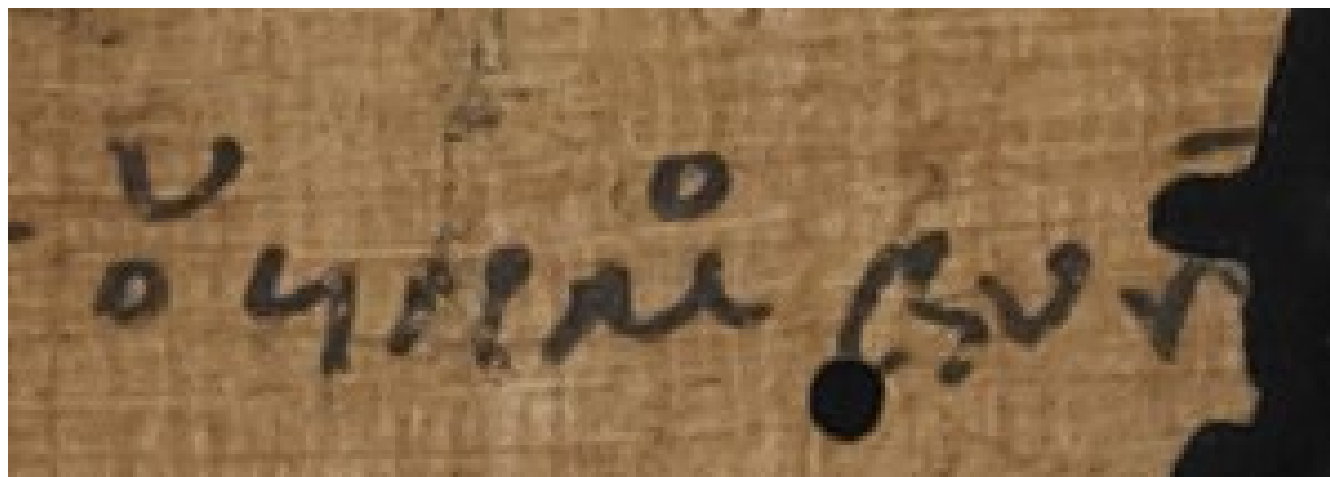
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σίτου *m*^o(*dii*) σλγ
P.Lond. V 1663 (AD 549)



οὔ(τως) ἦν μ^o(νον) ἐν ἐτ(έρωι)



Further points

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- ❑ Can we make a clear **distinction** between documents **heavily abbreviated, scantily abbreviated, or not abbreviated at all**? Do we have a **degree of shortening** which matches the degree of elaboration of the document?

The stuff of bureaus

❑ Lists, morning and daily reports, accounts, family-, status- and inheritance-related documents: **heavily abbreviated**

➤ **Personal letters**, or at any rate official letters meant for the perusal of an **individual: very few abbreviations**, or none at all

The stuff of **bureaus**

P.OXY. XLIV 3208 (I BC-I AD)

|¹ Suneros Chio suo **plur(imam) sal(utem).**
S(i) u(ales) b(ene est). Theo adduxsit ad me
Ochapim |² regium mensularium
Oxsyrychitem qui quidem mecum est
locutus |³ de inprobitate Epaphraes. Itaque
nihil ultra loquor quam **[[no]]** |⁴ ne patiarus te
propter illos perire. Crede mihi, nimia
bonitas |⁵ pernicies homin[i]bus est `vel
maxsuma'. Deinde ipse tibi demonstrabit |⁶
qu[i]t rei sit cum illum ad te vocareis. Set
perse{r}vera: |⁷ qui de tam pusilla summa
tam magnum lucrum facit |⁸ dominum
occidere volt. Deinde ego clamare debeo,
si quod video |⁹ devom atque hominum
[[fidem si tu ista non cuibis.]] |¹⁰ Tuum erit
vindicare ne alio libeat facere.

ChLA XLII 1212 (AD 113–17)

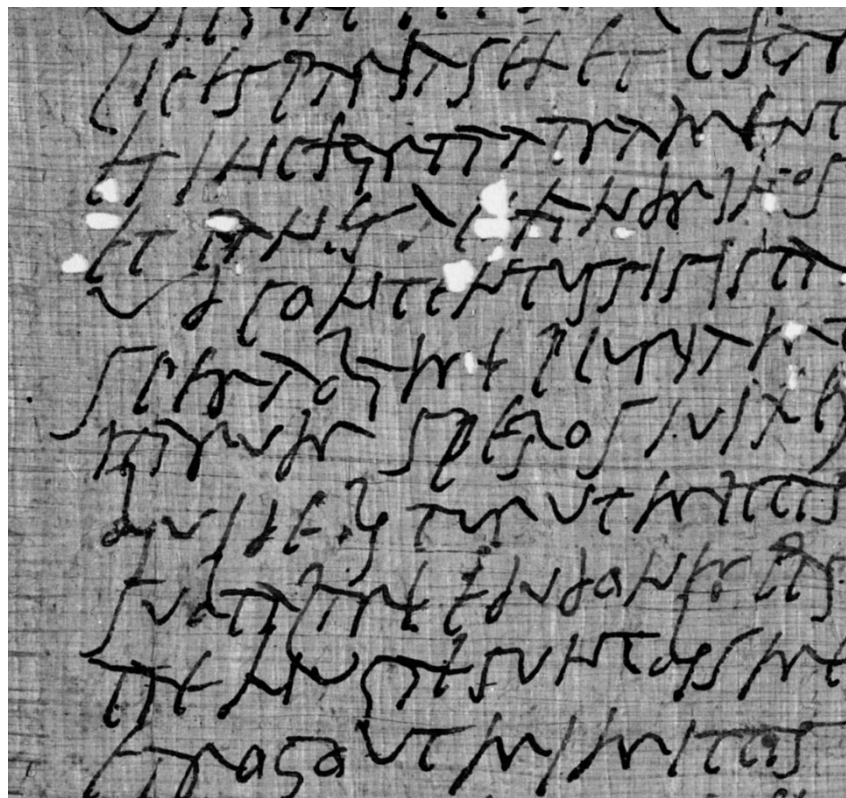
|¹ M. Rutilio Lup[o] **praef(ecto)**
Aegypti |² ab C. Valerio S[a]turninio
tirone.

|³ Rogo domine [dig]num me |⁴ iudices
ut pr[o]be]s militem |⁵ in cohorte u[t
po]ssim bene-|⁶-ficio tuo sub sig[ni]s
Imp(eratoris) |⁷ domini **n(ostri)**
mili[ta]re genioque |⁸ tuo gratias
ag[am]

¹ [Fl(auius) Cons]tātinus Theofanes **com(es)** et uir **inl(ustris) com(es) deuu(otissimorum) domm(esticorum)** et rei **mil(itaris) Th[e]b(aici) lim(itis) 'Fl(auius)'** Ver'te siue Theodoti[o]
² **u(iro) d(euotissimo) trib(uno)** Hermupoli **deg(enti)**.
³ [Cum] opdulero sacra iussione domini nostri Anastasii piissimi ac triumphatoris semper Augusti ⁴ [e qua n]umeris supplementi causa i[u]niores robustis corporibus adsociarentur, Heracleon filium Constantinii ⁵ [ortum e] ciuitati Hermupolitana 'in' uexillatione prudentiae tuae pro tempore credita edictio mea militare prae[cip]it, ⁶ [eiusq]ue nomen si ex gen<t>e oritur militari et neque curialis nec praesid<i>alis est nec inuecill[o c]orpore n[ec] ⁷ [inualid]us nec censibus adscriptos matriculis eiusdem numeri inseri facito, annonas ei ex die Iduum ⁸ [. . .] m Sabiniano et Theodoro uiris clarissimis consulibus ministrari curaturus cum ceteris ⁹ [contuberna]libus suis muniis militaribus o[p]eram nauaturo ita tamem si octauum decimum annum ¹⁰ [compleui]sse dinoscitur.

P.Ryl. IV 609 (AD **505**): *epistula probatoria*

The stuff of bureaus



- **Personal letters**, or at any rate official letters meant for the perusal of an individual: **very few abbreviations**, or none at all
- **Tiberianus and Terentianus**, whose writing ability is adequate, but not outstanding, **avoid abbreviations, abbreviating signs, and ligatures**, contenting themselves to stick to the serviceable old Roman cursive they have learnt (*P.Mich.* VII 467–VIII 472)

Further points

- ❑ Can we make a clear **distinction** between documents **heavily abbreviated, scantily abbreviated, or not abbreviated at all**? Do we have a **degree of shortening** which matches the degree of elaboration of the document?
- ❑ What are the words scribes like to abbreviate **more than others**?

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- ❑ The *praenomina*, *dominus noster*, *consules*, *Kalendae*, *Idus*, *Nonae*, *cohors*, *legio*, *milites*, *decurio*, *centurio*, *Imperator*, *dixit*, *numerus purus*, *bene uale*, *salutem*, the names *Iulius*, *Aurelius*, *Flavius*
- ❑ *Asses*, *drachmae*, *stipendia*, *rationes*, *Aegyptus*, *Alexandria*, *Oxyrhynchus*, *castra*
- ❑ *Traiana Fortis*, *Cyrenaica*
- ❑ *Dolo malo*, *stipulatus*, *spopondit*, *quae infra scripta sunt*, *supra scriptus*, *testamentum fecit*, *bonorum possessionem*

Further points

- ❑ 'Sigle', 'troncamenti', 'compendi' (Giovè Marchioli)
- ❑ Scribes abbreviate almost constantly from the mid-I AD onwards – before that they did it less – those **words which no one**, with his best will, **can be mistaken about**
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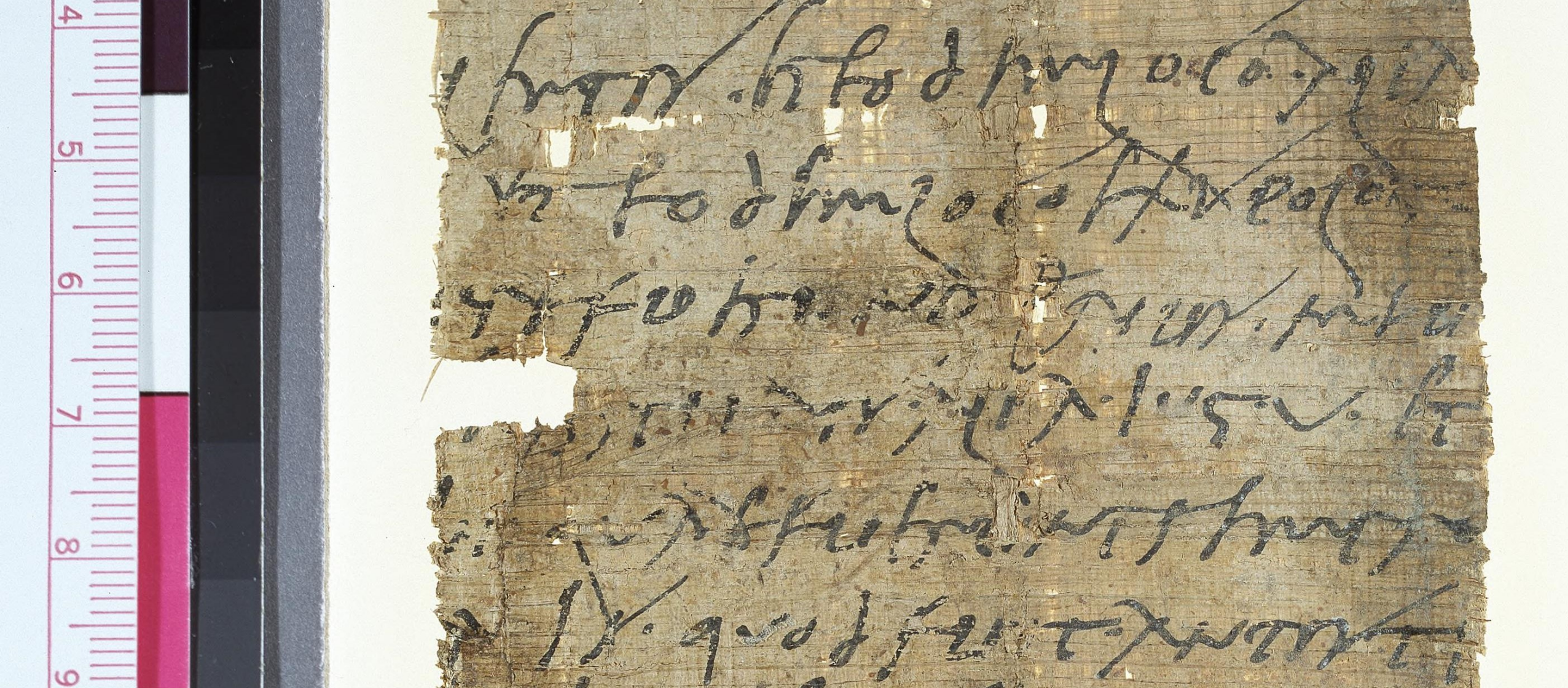
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- ❑ There is, overall, **little evidence** for abbreviations: some are attested only once so far, and often not understood

Further points

- ❑ Can we make a clear **distinction** between documents **heavily abbreviated, scantily abbreviated, or not abbreviated at all**? Do we have a **degree of shortening** which matches the degree of elaboration of the document?
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- ❑ ‘Ach Luise, laß ... das ist ein **zu** weites Feld’ (Fontane, *Effi Briest*, chap. 36)



THANK YOU! – giulio.iovine2@unibo.it

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