

How to Understand What Passes All Understanding: Using the Documentary Papyri to

Understand εἰρήνη in Paul

Michael Dormandy, Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. OX44 9EX

Email: michael.dormandy@rcc.ac.uk

**Abstract:** In popular culture, the Pauline texts referring to “peace” are illustrated by serene and tranquil scenes. I shall argue that to Paul’s first readers, “peace” evoked rather different images – military victories, arrests of criminals and the unloading of corn. I argue this because of how εἰρήνη is normally used in documentary papyri, that is personal letters, administrative documents and other non-literary written material. I explain my method and then present the papyrological evidence, including references to the various “peace-officials”. I argue that εἰρήνη meant something like “good order”. I use this insight to exegete Romans 5.1 and Philippians 4.7.

**Keywords:** peace, Romans, Philippians, Paul, documentary papyri

Paul eloquently writes that the ‘peace of God passes all understanding’ (Phil 4.7). In this paper, I attempt to deepen our understanding of εἰρήνη, peace, in two Pauline texts, Rom 5.1 and Phil 4.7, by exploring how the word is used in documentary papyri. By ‘documentary papyri’, I mean text-bearing artefacts, excluding inscriptions or coins, which cannot be considered literary. They include everyday notes, letters, lists and administrative documents. They are significant for exegesis because, as E. A. Judge puts it, ‘[documentary] papyri offer us the most direct access we have to the experience of ordinary people in antiquity’.<sup>1</sup> They

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help us understand what words mean in the New Testament, because the New Testament writers are unlikely to have entirely left behind the everyday meanings of words, however much certain words may also have had particular theological meanings. This is not to say that documentary texts are the only, or even the most important, context for reading the New Testament. However, they cannot be neglected, if exegesis aims, at least partly, at recovering the meaning of a text in the historical context in which it was first written.

This use of documentary texts is not new. One of its earliest proponents was Adolf Deissmann, who used a variety of documentary texts to argue that early Christianity was a popular movement, dominated by the socio-economic ‘lower classes’.<sup>2</sup> Later, James Moulton and George Milligan produced an exegetical dictionary based on the documentary papyri.<sup>3</sup> The series, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, similarly collects documentary

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including thoughtful comments on this paper. Having stared for weeks at the Greek word “Irene”, I dedicate this paper with love to Irene Nordskog. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own and aim to be literal rather than elegant. All transcriptions of papyri have been checked against the *Berichtigungsliste* (*Berichtigungsliste der Griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*, a regularly updated series of Brill volumes, collating reports of corrections to papyri editions).

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Judge, ‘Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and of St Paul’, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* (ed. David M. Scholer; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Kindle edition (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient Near East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (1927; repr. n.p.: Kessinger, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930).

texts that the editors believe will be useful for exegesis.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, work has begun on a commentary series using this approach, the *Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament* (PKNT).

Some of these works include discussion of εἰρήνη. Moulton and Milligan have a brief entry on the word, in which they draw attention to its use in a political context.<sup>5</sup> In the already published volumes of the PKNT, the writers argue that εἰρήνη is Paul's challenge to the aggressive and dominating *pax* offered by the Roman Empire. As Arzt-Grabner puts it, commenting on Phlm 3:

Amidst the *pax Romana* and *pax Augusta*, Paul develops the idea of εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, which, together with χάρις, he places programmatically at the beginning of his letters.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Christina Kreinecker writes, commenting on 2 Thess 1.2:

The term, εἰρήνη, like the *pax Romana* or *pax Augusta*, was understood in Roman times first as a complex political programme, which also had military, economic, legal, cultural and religious dimensions. εἰρήνη in the papyri reflects this breadth.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (ed. Greg H. R. Horsley and Stephen Llewellyn; North Ryde: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981-).

<sup>5</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, 185-6.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon* (PKNT 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 171.

<sup>7</sup> Christina Kreinecker with Günther Schwab, *2. Thessaloniker* (PKNT 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010) 105-06.

Kreinecker draws here on the work of Klaus Wengst, who explored the *pax Romana* as a concept of enormous cultural significance. He argues that the concept included the violent suppression of conquered peoples, the forced maintenance of Roman dominance within the Empire, the economic exploitation of the conquered and the propagation of Emperor worship. On Wengst's reading, Paul offers an alternative peace, which is not based on violence, sin and death and which reaches its fulfilment in eschatology, rather than history.<sup>8</sup>

A number of New Testament scholars have considered the meaning and theology of εἰρήνη, without particular reference to the papyri. The contributors to that classic of New Testament theological lexicography, Kittel's *ThWNT* review evidence from classical Greek, Rabbinic Hebrew and Biblical sources and conclude that 'εἰρήνη in its widest sense [means] the normal state of all things...this "healthy" [*heil* – quotation marks original] normal state, which accords with God's will, is not limited to the soul or to the person, but fundamentally spreads over the complete state of the world'.<sup>9</sup> This accords with the Hebrew שלום, which is almost always translated as εἰρήνη in the OG.<sup>10</sup> In the Jewish Scriptures, this Hebrew word refers less to a subjective feeling and more to the state God will create, when he eschatologically establishes his good rule over creation (e.g. Ps 147.14; Isa 54.13 and Mic 5.4<sup>11</sup>). Willard Swartley, in his monograph on peace in the NT, agrees that the concept of שלום is important for the writers of the NT, but that reconciliation, both with God and with others, is also a

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<sup>8</sup> Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> *ThWNT*<sup>1</sup>, 2:398-416 (410-11). My translation.

<sup>10</sup> *ThWNT*<sup>1</sup>, 2:405.

<sup>11</sup> References to MT.

significant aspect of NT εἰρήνη.<sup>12</sup> The understanding of εἰρήνη as reconciliation is prominent not least in German scholarship, notably Klaus Haacker, who understands εἰρήνη as good relations between God and people, leading to good relations between people particularly within the church, and Egon Brandenburger, who argues that εἰρήνη as a general good state of affairs is less important for Paul than the ending of enmity between man and God.<sup>13</sup> Michel Desjardins also argues that the highest form of peace for the writers of the NT was ‘good relations between humans and God, which leads to eternal life’, though peace in this sense is not the main theme of his own research.<sup>14</sup>

Joseph Grassi, on the other hand, working on εἰρήνη in Luke, emphasises the inner, experiential aspects of peace (though of course he would grant that this should lead to reconciled and harmonised relationships).<sup>15</sup> Also drawing on Luke-Acts, Pieter de Villiers has

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<sup>12</sup> Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Haacker, ‘Der Römerbrief als Friedensmemorandum (Otto Michael zum 85. Geburtstag)’, *NTS* 36 (1990) 25-41, doi: 10.1017/S0028688500010845; Egon Brandenburger, *Frieden im Neuen Testament: Grundlinien urchristlichen Friedensverständis* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1973). It is surely not coincidental that reconciliation features so prominently in the German scholarship, since the division and reunification of Germany have significantly affected post-war German culture. Haacker’s article was originally a lecture delivered in East Germany in 1988, published in *NTS* in 1990, an apt context to work on reconciliation.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Desjardins, *Peace, Violence and the New Testament* (BibSem 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Grassi, *Peace on Earth: Roots and Practices from Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004).

a balanced approach: peace is salvific, emotional and social.<sup>16</sup> Jouette Bassler presents a similarly nuanced approach: she argues that ‘peace’ in English (and likewise ‘paix’, ‘Frieden’ etc) is a thick concept and that some aspects of it are better expressed by Greek terms like ἄνεσις and ἡσυχία than εἰρήνη.<sup>17</sup>

This paper is a more thorough investigation than any other into the references to εἰρήνη in the documentary papyri. My conclusions support the idea that Paul’s εἰρήνη subverts the Roman *pax*, but I explore further nuances of the objective and public aspects of the word.

## **Method**

I used the Papyrological Navigator<sup>18</sup> to search the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP) for the εἰρήν- root, in all morphological inflections and spelling variations. The Papyrological Navigator also provided information from the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS) and the Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens (HGV), on whatever artefacts were found by searching the DDbDP. I ignored papyri dating to before 300 BCE or after 400 CE. This might seem a broad

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<sup>16</sup> Pieter G. R. de Villiers, ‘Peace in Luke and Acts: A Perspective on Biblical Spirituality’, *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19/1 (2008) 110-34. doi: 10.1080/10226486.2008.11745790.

<sup>17</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, ‘Peace in All Ways. Theology in the Thessalonian Letters: A Response to R. Jewett, E. Krentz, and E. Richard’, *Pauline Theology. Volume 1: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 71-85.

<sup>18</sup> Available at [www.papyri.info](http://www.papyri.info)

range: after all a document from 300 BCE or 400 CE is removed from Paul by several centuries, more than enough time for a word to change its meaning. However, any cut-off point for the search would be artificial, since languages change gradually. It is therefore better to search over a broader range, but to avoid basing my conclusions too heavily on artefacts from near the ends of the range, than to search over a narrow range. I followed the dates given by HGV, but none of my conclusions rest on a particular controversial question of dating. Arzt-Grabner argues, with examples, that there is little evidence that documentary papyri vary much with region, so papyri from any region can be helpful comparanda to the New Testament.<sup>19</sup>

I ignored papyri where the letter string turned up co-incidentally, in a word that had nothing to do with the εἰρήν- root. I also did not consider papyri where the εἰρήν- root was added only by the reconstruction of the editor or when the papyrus was so lacunose that it was impossible to reconstruct the context of the εἰρήν- root. I further ignored the many instances where the root turned up in a proper name, normally a personal name, Εἰρήνη or Εἰρηναῖος, but including six instances Εἰρηνοφυλάκιος, the name of a φυλή (civic division).<sup>20</sup> These various kinds of irrelevant result accounted for the vast majority of the search finds.

I do not discuss the use of the εἰρήν- root in documents that are obviously Christian in origin. This is because Paul created the thought-world of early Christianity far more than he was a product of it. Christian documents use language and concepts in ways significantly influenced

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<sup>19</sup> Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 50-6.

<sup>20</sup> P.Oxy. LXII 4335,1; BGU III 919,6; BGU XIII 2243,4; P.Berl.Leigh. I 14,12; SB V 8010,9-10; SB XII 11168,2.

by Paul and therefore they are weak evidence for how language was used at the point Paul composed his letters.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the ‘letters of peace’ were a type of Christian document that often turned up in the search. They are a Christian variation on the well-known ancient genre, ‘letters of recommendation’, which urged the recipients to welcome and support the carrier. Letters of recommendation by Christians typically, though not always, used the word εἰρήνη.<sup>22</sup> A good example is found in P.Alex. 29,5-8: [τ]ὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶ[ν] Δ[ίφ]ιλον ἐρχόμενον π[ρ]ὸς σε προσδ[έξ]αι ἐν [ε]ἰρήνῃ, ‘to welcome in peace our brother, Diphilos, when he comes to you’. Although these Christian documents are not directly relevant to this project, they testify to the importance of the word εἰρήνη, because the early Christians used it widely in a common recommendation formula.

The search initially turned up over seven hundred results. Once the various types of irrelevant find had been removed, there remained a little over a hundred finds, which I shall now discuss.

### **The ‘Peace-Officials’**

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<sup>21</sup> For this argument, see Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, 45-46.

<sup>22</sup> For detailed discussion, see Timothy M. Teeter, ‘Letters of Recommendation or Letters of Peace’, *Akten des 21. internationalen Papyrologenkongresses Berlin, 13.-19. 8. 1995* (ed. Bärbel Kramer, Wolfgang Luppe, Herwig Maehler and Günther Poethke; Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1997) 954-60. For a discussion of the Christian letters that do and do not contain the word εἰρήνη, see Stephen R. Llewellyn, ‘Christian Letters of Recommendation’, *NewDocs 8* (ed. Stephen R. Llewellyn; Grand Rapids/North Ryde: Eerdmans/Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1998) 169-72.



Over ninety of the relevant search-finds are papyri referring to ‘peace-officials’. This is my term to cover a range of public officials, whose titles included the εἰρήν- root. These included εἰρηνοφύλακες, εἰρηνάρχαι, ἐπιστάται εἰρήνης, and simply οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς εἰρήνης. It is debatable how these various roles related to each other.<sup>23</sup>

These officials are relevant to this project, because it seems that important aspects of their job were described by the word εἰρήνη. This is likely because, although they had such a wide variety of titles, all featured εἰρήνη. In P.Oxy. VII 1033, officials with a different official title even describe themselves as τῶν εἰρηλικῶν τὴν φροντίδα ἀναδεδοι}ημένοι ‘men entrusted with giving thought to the things of peace’. Even though they are not officially εἰρήνη-officials, they see themselves as doing εἰρήνη-work, which suggests that εἰρήνη could refer to a particular sphere of professional activity, which presumably mapped on to the tasks done by the various kinds of εἰρήνη-official.

The εἰρήνη-offices developed only decades later than Paul, which suggests that the use of the word in the office-title may well reflect its use in Paul’s time. Naphtali Lewis’ earliest example of an εἰρήνη-official is P.Brem. 14,11, from 115 CE.<sup>24</sup> I could find no earlier examples, but I found three others from the early second century CE (P.Brem. 26,5-6; P.Brem.

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<sup>23</sup> See A. Nelson, ‘Petition to the Peacekeepers’, *Papyri Greek and Egyptian, Edited by Various Hands in Honour of Eric Gardner Turner, on Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (London: Egypt Exploration Society 1981) 173.

<sup>24</sup> Naphtali Lewis, *The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt* (Papyrologica Florentina 28; Florence: Edizioni Gonelli, 1997<sup>2</sup>) 23. The date is Lewis’; HGV dates to 113-20 CE.

37,19 and P.Giss. 84,16). The fact that there is a cluster of references from this time suggests that the offices were relatively well established at this point, but on the other hand, the fact that there are no references to them earlier suggests that it cannot have been much earlier when they first arose. This suggests that they first appeared at the beginning second century, less than half a century after the traditional date for Paul's death.

The peace-officials seem to have had diverse duties. A primary one was law-enforcement. A number of documents survive which are arrest summonses, in which peace-officials are requested to bring potential felons to other officials.<sup>25</sup> In my search, these are: BGU XVII 2701, P.Mich.Mchl. 6, P.Oxy. I 64 and 80 and P.Oxy. XLII 3035. Similarly, BGU XV 2459 mentions a peace-official involved in dealing with a burglary. In P.Oxy. L 3575, they are called upon when a felon has stolen land by moving boundaries. P.Turner 41 records one being called to deal with a slave who stole his master's property and fled. However, their duties extended beyond law-enforcement: they also involved safe movement of donkeys (BGU VII 1568), canal repair (P.Brem. 14), bureaucratic matters regarding financial transactions (P.Oxy. LXIII 4369), business related to corn disputes (P.Bodl. I 19) and corn unloading (P.Oxy. XXXI 2568).

It seems that those charged with maintaining the εἰρήνη were responsible for the smooth and ordered running of society in every aspect. They made sure that the world worked without

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of this type of document, see Christina M. Kreinecker, ' "We ask you to send..." A Remark on Summonses and Petitions for Summonses', *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie. Genève, 16–21 août 2010, Recherches et Rencontres. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Genève* 30 (ed. Paul Schubert; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012) 407–15.

problems so that the daily rhythms of commerce and agriculture could continue without disturbance by felony or accident.

### **Other Instances of the εἰρήν- root**

Once the various categories of irrelevant search-finds and the papyri referring to peace-officials are removed, fourteen instances of the εἰρήν-root remain.

#### 1. UPZ I 20 (TM 3411; 163 BCE; Letter to Rulers)

This is a complex papyrus, but the passage of present relevance is relatively straightforward

(1.1-7):

[βασιλεῖ Πτολεμαίωι κ]αὶ βασιλίσσηι Κλεοπάτραι θεοῖς Φιλομήτορσι

χαίρειν

[Θαυῆς καὶ Ταοῦς δ]ίδυμαι αἱ λειτουργοῦσαι ἐν τῷ ἐν Μέμφει μεγάλωι

[Σαραπιείωι. τῶ]ν μεγίστων θεῶν Ἴσιος καὶ Σαράπιος κατὰ τὸ καλῶς

[ἔχον ἐπὶ τὴν νῦν οὔ]σαν εἰρήνην τὰ πράγματα ἀγριοχότων εἰς τὸ τὸν

[- ca.12 -] τοῖς ἀδικουμένοις μεμερισμένον δύνασθαι τοὺς 5

[- ca.10 - τυγ]χάνειν τῶν δικαίων, παντάπασι δὲ καὶ τὰ τοῖς

[- ca.13 -]ε γίνεσθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν εὐγνωμοσύνην, βασιλεῦ

To king Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra, to the mother-loving gods, greetings.

The twins, Thaus and Taous, the ones serving, in Memphis the great Serapis. With the great gods, Isis and Serapis so directing affairs, according to the welfare of the present peace, that the share for the unrighteous might [decrease] and the righteous might obtain. Everyone stands beneath your good plans, O king.

The rulers, Ptolemy and Cleopatra, are placed on the same level as ‘the mother-loving gods’. The god and goddess, Serapis and Isis, direct affairs for the well-being of the present state of peace. There is thus a connection between gods, rulers and peace. This papyrus is important evidence that this connection existed long before the Romans conquered Egypt. Although it was a key aspect of the Emperor-cult that the divine Emperor brings the *pax Romana*, this document shows that the Romans did not invent the idea of peace as a divine gift, bestowed through human rulers. This in turns means that the idea of divine peace given through Christ, found in the New Testament, may be a reaction against more than Roman Imperial ideology. This papyrus is also interesting for how it connects τὸ καλῶς ἔχον (roughly ‘the welfare’) to τὴν νῦν οὖσαν εἰρήνην (‘the present peace’): the present peace is something that can be faring well or badly. The twin writers of this papyrus do not say ‘the city is peaceful’, but rather ‘the peace in the city fares well’. Peace is almost a reified object, to which subjective judgements (like καλῶς) apply, rather than a subjective quality itself.

## 2. BGU IV 1192 (TM 4526; after 55 BCE; Document Relating to Corn Distribution)

[γ]ράφοντος τῶν δηλ[ο]υμένων ἐκφορίων κατ’ ἔτος  
ἐξ ὁμολόγου σπόρου προσαγομένων καὶ τῶν πυρῶν  
ἐπὶ Πανίσκου τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος εἰσηγμένων

προσῆκον εἶναι καὶ τὸν . . . Πίνδαρον ἀπητηκέ[ν]αι καὶ  
 πάντας τῶν Ἀράβων κατεσταλμένων καὶ πάντων 5  
 ἐν τῇ μεγίστη[ι] εἰρήνῃ γεγονότων, τιθεμένων δὲ  
 καὶ ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἐν τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Ἡλιοδώρου ἀπαιτηθη[σο]  
 μένοις ἕνεκα τοῦ ὀφείλειν μεταπαρ[ει]ληφότα τὰ τ[ῆς]  
 στρατηγίας συνχρη[σάμε]νον ταῖς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γεγονυῖαις  
 προσαγωγαῖς [ . . . . . ] . φ . . . τῶν [μ]έν β[αι]νόν[των] 10  
 τὴν ἀπα[ίτησιν . . ] σπ . ατεν . . .

Of the scribe, concerning the produce shown for the year and the grain bought forward,  
 according to the harvest agreement and the wheat brought in under the authority of  
 Paniskus.

It was appropriately done as Pindar and everyone demanded.

When the Arabs were summoned and everything was done in great peace, we established  
 the things demanded by Heliodorus, because he was owed the things received from the  
 state. Shares were allotted in the things brought forward by him.<sup>26</sup>

The Arabs were law enforcement personnel.<sup>27</sup> The *Sitz im Leben* of this papyrus apparently  
 involves movement of corn, in response to demands, with law enforcement officers involved.  
 It seems that ἐν τῇ μεγίστη εἰρήνῃ has a sense of ‘in complete good order’.

<sup>26</sup> Transcription and translation omit the additions by the second hand.

<sup>27</sup> John Bauschatz, *Law and Enforcement in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

### 3. P.Oxy. XLII 3057 (TM 25080; first-second century CE; Personal Letter)

Before analysing this artefact, it is necessary to address the debate on whether or not it was written by a Christian (because if it was, it is irrelevant, by the reasoning on p. 7). Peter Parsons, in the *editio princeps*, initially raised the possibility of a Christian origin, though he admitted that ‘[t]his hypothesis crumbles easily’.<sup>28</sup> Later, however, Parsons became more open to Christian authorship and, in recent years, Orsolina Montevicchi and Ilaria Ramelli have revived the idea.<sup>29</sup> However, most scholars have been more sceptical, either arguing that, although certain features of the letter may be consistent with a Christian origin, they do not require it,<sup>30</sup> or even arguing that there is positive evidence against a Christian origin.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> P. J. Parsons, ‘3057. Letter of Ammonius’, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri XLII* (ed. P. J. Parsons; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1974) 143-6, at 146.

<sup>29</sup> P. J. Parsons, ‘The Earliest Christian Letter’, *Miscellanea Papyrologica* (ed. Rosario Pintaudi; Florence: Gonelli, 1980) 289; Ilaria Ramelli, ‘Una delle più antiche lettere cristiane extracanoniche?’, *Aegyptus* 80/1/1 (2000) 169-85; Orsolina Montevicchi, ‘ΤΗΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗΝ ΚΕΧΙΑΣΜΕΝΗΝ’, *Aegyptus* 80/1/1 (2000) 187-94.

<sup>30</sup> G. R. Stanton, ‘The Proposed Earliest Christian Letter on Papyrus and the Origin of the Term Philallelia’, *ZPE* 54 (1984) 49-63; Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 98; Stephen R. Llewellyn, ‘Ammonios to Apollonios (P.Oxy. XLII 3057): The Earliest Christian Letter on Papyrus?’, (*NewDocs* 6; ed. Stephen R. Llewellyn with R. A. Kearsley; North Ryde: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1992) 168-77.

<sup>31</sup> Judge, ‘Rank’; Lincoln H. Blumell, “Is P.Oxy. XLII 3057 the Earliest Christian Letter?”, *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach* (ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas; TENTS 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 97-113.

I follow Lincoln Blumell in maintaining that the author of the papyrus was probably not Christian. Importantly, Blumell argues that the burden of proof is on those arguing *for* a Christian origin, because at this early stage, in the first two centuries CE, Christians were rare in Oxyrhynchus, so the prior probability of any letter being written by one is low. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that that the author probably was not Christian, simply by defeating the arguments that he was.

The letter refers to itself as κεχιασμένην, ‘chi’d’ (1.3) and one of the instances of chi early in the letter has a supralinear stroke, which may be a primitive or cryptic *nomen sacrum*. However, as Blumell points out, there is no evidence of any other *nomina sacra* of this form, so this is pure speculation. It is more likely that the supralinear stroke is because the writer changed his mind about abbreviating χάρειν after writing the stroke. It is also more likely that ‘chi’d’ means that the papyrus had been marked with a pen in a χ-shape, so that the recipient would know if it had been opened before it arrived. It is also argued that ὁμόνοια and φιλαλληλία (1.15-16) are Christian concepts, but, as Blumell points out, while they are hardly un-Christian sentiments, they are not actually used much in Christian literature for several centuries after this papyrus and one can hardly claim that only Christians pursued such ideals. In particular, G. R. Stanton identifies a number of references to φιλαλληλία in mathematical writings and in Stoic and Epicurean texts.<sup>32</sup> Judge even argues that the sentiments expressed in the letter are decidedly unchristian, because they appear to support a culture of contractual and reciprocal gift-giving. Even though the early Christian attitude to reciprocal gift-giving may be more nuanced than Judge acknowledged, this very ambiguity

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<sup>32</sup> Stanton, ‘Earliest’, 54-63.

warns us against the danger of assuming that the text is Christian, simply because it seems to resonate with what we consider to be Christian ideals.<sup>33</sup> Finally, in the address on the back, the writer describes the recipient as an ἐπισκέπ. This may be an abbreviation for the Christian office of ἐπίσκοπος, but such an abbreviation is otherwise unattested. There is therefore no positive reason to think that the artefact was written by a Christian.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, it is implausible that a Christian exhortation to unity would make no reference to Christ or Christian belief, liturgy or practice. The letter has a similar theme, tone and purpose to Paul's letter to the Philippians, but a striking difference is that Paul exhorts the Philippians to unity and mutual co-operation by repeated reference to the example of Jesus. Stephen Llewellyn suggests that the lack of explicitly Christian content is because the writer needed to conceal his faith, which is consistent with the careful emphasis on how the letter has been 'chi'd' to ensure it is not opened in advance.<sup>35</sup> However, this obviously undermines interpreting other aspects of the letter as Christian: if the writer is so keen to conceal his Christianity that he refuses to mention Christ, he would hardly have mentioned a Christian ἐπίσκοπος.

Having demonstrated that this document is probably not Christian, we must now analyse its use of the εἰρήν- root. It contains this phrase (1.18-20): ἡ γὰρ πεῖρα ἐπάγεται με

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<sup>33</sup> Judge, 'Rank'. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Paul and Greco-Roman gift-giving, see influentially John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Blumell, 'Earliest'.

<sup>35</sup> Llewellyn, 'Ammonios', 172-3.



προτρέψασθαι ὑμᾶς εἰρηνεύειν καὶ μὴ διδόναι ἀφορμὰς ἑτέροις καθ' ὑμῶν, 'for my trial compels me to urge you to practise peace and not to give opportunities to those against you'. Here the εἰρήν- root has a social meaning. It refers to members of a community living in harmony with each other and so not giving an opportunity to those who want to undermine them by division. The papyrus also contains this phrase (1.27-28): οὐχ ἔθος ἐχούσης ἡρεμεῖν διὰ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα, 'not having a habit to be undisturbed, because of all the [disturbing] things that are happening'. The author uses the verb ἡρεμέω, to mean 'to be tranquil, to be free from anxiety, to be undisturbed'. He does not use the εἰρήν- root for this idea, though he knew it. The εἰρήν- root means more being in a good relationship with ones neighbours.

#### 4. P.Lond. VI 1912 (TM 16850; 41 CE; Imperial Letter)

This papyrus is an open letter from the Emperor Claudius to the citizens of Alexandria, in which he responds to their request to dedicate a golden statue in his honour, called Κλαυδιανὴ Εἰρήνη Σεβαστή, 'Peace Claudiana Augusta' (1.35). Michael Rostovsteff argues that the Alexandrians understood the εἰρήνη in question to be their victory over the Jewish rebels at the time of Claudius' accession: the Alexandrians want the statue to remind the Jewish rebels of their defeat by Imperial loyalists.<sup>36</sup> If this is the case, the statue once again associates peace with the Emperor and in particular with his power to defeat his enemies. Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, however, argue that in fact, 'the statue...was a statue of [the goddess] Pax and nothing more, intended to proclaim Claudius' principles, according to which the new

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<sup>36</sup> M. Rostovtzeff, 'Pax Augusta Claudiana', *JEA* 12/1-2 (1926) 24-9.

reign would be a reign of peace'.<sup>37</sup> Whichever is right, the papyrus is clear evidence of a statue which associates peace with the powerful rule of the Emperor.

5. P.Oxy. XLII 3022 (TM 16422; 98 CE; Imperial Letter)

After the accession of the Emperor Trajan, the people of Alexandria wrote to him asking him to confirm their privileges and this papyrus is a rough copy of his reply. It is quite fragmentary, but there is an important and clear sentence (l.10-16):

...παρεθέμην	10
ὕμᾱς πρῶτον μὲν ἑμαυτῶ, εἶτα καὶ τῶ	
φίλῳ μου καὶ ἐπάρχῳ Πομπείῳ Πλάντα,	
ἵνα μετὰ πάσης φροντίδος προνοῆ	
ὕμῶν τῆς εὐσταθοῦς εἰρήνης καὶ τῆς	
εὐθηνίας καὶ τῶν κοινῶν καὶ καθ' ἕκασ	15
[τον δι]καίων... <sup>38</sup>	

I present to you first myself and then my friend, the Eparch, Pompey Planta, so that he may plan with all thought for your well-established peace and prosperity and the legal rights of the masses and for each individual

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<sup>37</sup> Victor A. Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (3 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1957-64) 45-6, at 46.

<sup>38</sup> The dots at the start and end of this quote are ellipses, not indicating three uncertain letters.

Ειρήνη here appears to have a broad and general meaning, but clearly refers to something a ruler can give to his or her people, something akin to social and political well-being and flourishing. Peace is a product of good government and it applies to all of society more than it does to individuals.

6. SB XXIV 15915 (TM 79239; 164 CE; Petition to the Emperor)

This contains the phrase (1.3-6):

...παρακαλοῦ

μεν εἰρήν[η]ς οὔσης βαθυτάτης καὶ π[ά]ντ[ω]ν ἀνθρώπων

εὐσεβῶς διακόντων ἐν τοῖς εὐτυχεστάτο[ι]ς τῶν κυρίων

5

ἡμῶν Αὐτοκρατόρων καιροῖς...<sup>39</sup>

we appeal to you, since the peace is very deep and with all men serving piously in the most joyful times of our lords, the Emperors...

Presumably what εἰρήν[η]ς οὔσης βαθυτάτης means is that the peace is firmly and deeply established in society. It is another example of εἰρήνη as a social and political phenomenon that obtains in societies under good rulers.

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<sup>39</sup> Dots are an ellipsis.

7. P.Petaus 53 (TM 8755; 184-185 CE; List of Office-Holders Relating to Corn)

Ἀπολλωνίῳ στρα(τηγῶ) Ἄρσι(νοίτου) Ἡρακλ(είδου) μερίδ(ος)  
παρὰ Πεταῦτος κωμογρα(μματέως) Πτολ(εμαίδος) [Ἵ]ρμου  
καὶ ἄλλων κωμῶν.

αἰτούμενος ὑπὸ σοῦ ὀνόματα εἰ[ς] τὸ

παραφυλάξαι τὰ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγρῶν

5

ἀναφερόμενα γενήματα καὶ ἐπα[ν]αγ

κάζειν εἰς τὰς ἄλλω παραφέρεσθαι

καὶ ἐπιτηρ[ε]ῖν αὐτὰ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀλώνων ὄντα

ἕως ἂν τὰ ὀφιλόμενα τῷ ταμείῳ

μετρηθῆ, καὶ πρόνοιαν ποιεῖσθαι τοῦ

10

κρι[θ]ο[λ]ογηθῆναι τὸν πυρόν, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς

λικ[μ]ήσεως καὶ τῆς ἰσπράξεως τοῦ πυροῦ,

καὶ ἐπισφρακίζειν τοὺς θησαυροὺς καὶ

ἐπίγειν τὰς ἐμβολὰς καὶ ἐπακολ[ο]υ-

θεῖν τῆ καταγωγῆ δείδωμει τοὺς

15

ὑπογ[ε]γ[ρα]μμένους) ὄντας εὐπόρους καὶ ἐπιτη[δεί]

ους ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτοῦς καὶ τῆς ἰρήνης

πρόνοιαν ποιεῖσθαι...<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> l.1-17; dots are an ellipsis.

To Apollonius, strategos of the Arsinoite nome in the Heraclide region,

From Petaus, the village scribe of Ptolemais Hormos and other villages,

Being asked by you, for the names for guarding the grain brought in from the fields, for ensuring its transport to threshing and to keep it at the threshing floor until the dues have been paid to the tax office, to take care that the corn is sorted and over its winnowing and bringing in, to make space in the store, to arrange the loading and to follow with it in the transport, I provide here the ones listed, who are ready and able for this matter and to give thought to the peace.

Petaus is sending Apollonius a requested list of people who will attend to various practical duties involving corn and who will take care of the εἰρήνη. An important question is how this ‘peace-work’ related to the other tasks. Does responsibility for the peace actually include, even consist of, all the other practical tasks listed or is it, as Ursula Hagedorn et al suggest, ‘an additional duty’?<sup>41</sup> The material I have already discussed regarding the peace-officials is slight evidence that responsibility for the peace meant guarding the corn, since the εἰρήνη-root was clearly sometimes connected to law enforcement. However, this is unlikely because another group is specifically tasked with ‘keeping’ the corn (ἐπιτηρεῖν, l.8), which presumably means guarding it. Whatever exactly was involved in taking responsibility for the εἰρήνη, εἰρήνη was clearly something conducive to and connected with all the hustle, bustle, activity and efficiency of successful corn processing. It is not necessarily quietness, but good and efficient order, where everything works as it should.

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<sup>41</sup> Ursula and Dieter Hagedorn and Leslie C. and Herbert C. Youtie, *Das Archiv des Petaus (P.Petaus)* (Papyrologica Coloniensia 4; Cologne: Westdeutscher, 1969) 220.

8. PSI IX 1036 (TM 17466; 192 CE; Land Agreement)

This includes these titles afforded to the Emperor, Commodus (1.25-29):

...(ἔτους) λγ Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος<sup>42</sup> 25

[Λουκ]ίου Αιλίου Αὐρηλίου Κ<ο>μόδου εὐσεβοῦς Σεβ<αστοῦ>

[Ἀρμ]ενιακ(οῦ) Μηδικ(οῦ) Παρθικοῦ Σαρματικοῦ Γερμ(ανικοῦ)

[μεγ]ίστου Βρετανικοῦ εἰρηνοποιοῦ τοῦ κόσ(μου)

[εὐτ]υχοῦς ἀνεικῆτου Ῥωμαίου Ἡρακλέους, Φαῶφι ιδ[.]

In the thirty-third year of Almighty Caesar, Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, the pious Augustus, the Armenian, Median, Parthian, Samaritan, German and the Great Briton, the peace-maker of the world, Heracles of blessed and unconquered Rome, Phaoph 14 [a date]

‘Peace-maker of the world’ is the grand climax of a list of titles that mention conquered nations. The same list is also found in SB XX 14390 (TM 23726) and SB XVI 12239 (TM 14564), but the latter is so lacunose that εἰρηνοποιοῦ τοῦ κόσμου has to be reconstructed by the editor, presumably on the basis of the other two papyri. This text, carried by several artefacts, shows that paradoxically Roman peace is based on war.<sup>43</sup> Peace involves Commodus establishing order and stability by defeating his enemies.

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<sup>42</sup> Dots are an ellipsis.

<sup>43</sup> Wengst, *Pax*, 11-9.

9. P.Bad. IV 89 (TM: 19338; 222-235 CE; Sacrificial Regulations)

The papyrus is essentially rules for sacrifices in the Imperial cult, worshipping Severus Alexander.<sup>44</sup> It contains the phrase *πᾶσιν εἰρήνη*, ‘peace to all’ (l.19). This isolated phrase has too little context to be very informative, but we can say that the Emperor-cult was associated with peace and that the divine Emperor could be viewed as a source of peace.

10. SB XIV 11938 (TM 15480; 246-49 CE; List of Irrigation Wells)

This artefact is technically not a papyrus at all, but a codex made of wooden tablets,<sup>45</sup> but I include it because it meets my definition of text-bearing artefacts, which are not literary texts, coins or inscriptions. It contains a list of *ὕδρευματα*, which Parsons suggests here means an artesian well or reservoir.<sup>46</sup> The writer includes various details of their location and features. Whilst not exactly a letter, the document begins as an ancient letter typically did, with an announcement of sender and recipient (in this case, various officials). Parsons notes that this is almost certainly a rough draft, because it is highly unlikely that the report of the survey would have been sent to the senior officials as a wooden codex, but rather copied onto papyrus.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For this reconstruction, see Friedrich Bilabel, *Griechische Papyri (Urkunden, Briefe, Schreiftafeln, Ostraka etc.) mit 2 Tafeln* (Veröffentlichungen aus dem badischen Papyrus-Sammlungen 4; Heidelberg: self-published by the authors, 1924) 189-91.

<sup>45</sup> For full description, see P. J. Parsons, ‘The Wells of Hibis’, *JEA* 57 (1971) 165-80.

<sup>46</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 173.

<sup>47</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 180.

At the very beginning of the document, before the list itself and before the sender and recipient, is the word εἰρήνη. Its meaning and purpose are unclear. It is unlikely to be a greeting, because, in ancient letters, greetings almost always come after the names of the writer and recipient. Moreover, the word is otherwise only used as a greeting in Jewish and Christian texts. Parsons notes that it is possible that a Christian community existed in the relevant time and place,<sup>48</sup> but, even if this water-official happened to be Jewish or Christian, it is unlikely that he would use religious argot in an official report. It is also unlikely to be an Egyptian greeting, since Parsons finds only one example of a greeting involving ‘peace’ in Egyptian documents<sup>49</sup> and the writer’s name, Aurelius Geminus, is not Egyptian.

Parsons suggests that the word is not a greeting, but a heading, and that, as such, it could be nominative or dative.<sup>50</sup> What then could such a heading mean? It would fit well with this paper’s thesis if the word expressed something like: ‘here is a peaceful, that is well-functioning and orderly, well-system’. However, Parsons suggests that in fact the well-system was not particularly well-functioning: about three-quarters of the wells rose ἐν ἀπείρω, in open, uncultivated ground, i.e. the wells were not being exploited for agriculture.<sup>51</sup> A clue to the meaning may lie in the fact that this is the author’s own draft, not the final copy sent to the recipients. εἰρήνη may well be some sort of blessing or invocation upon the project, written at the beginning. It would mean something like ‘peace be upon what I am about to do’

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<sup>48</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 179 n. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 179.

<sup>51</sup> Parsons, ‘Wells’, 180.



or (taking the word as dative) ‘may this project be done in peace’ or even ‘may this project contribute to peace’. This is obviously speculative, but it avoids the problems of other explanations. If this is the case, it is quite probable that the surveyor was Christian, given how frequently the word occurs in benedictions in the New Testament. He might well use religious argot in a draft written for his own use, before removing it in the final version. However, it is also possible that a non-Christian might use the word in this way. If the hypothesis of a blessing or invocation is correct, εἰρήνη could be either subjective or objective or even both: the writer wishes for the survey to be carried out in an objectively orderly manner and to enjoy a personal sense of calm while this happens. There is no mention or hint of co-workers in the survey, so the sense of harmonious relations between individuals is unlikely.

11. P.Stras. I 5 (TM 18663; 262 CE; Legal Judgement)

In the context of a legal speech, we find the phrase ἀνάξια [τ]ῆς ὑπὸ σοῦ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν πρυτανευομένης εἰρή[ν]ης ὁ πρεσβύτης παθῶν, ‘the elder, enduring the things unworthy of the peace reigning over us all because of you’ (1.8). Εἰρήνη refers to the state of a region or polis when it is well-governed.

12. P.Oxy. I 41 (TM 31338; early fourth century CE; Account of a Civic Assembly)

This is a record of a discussion in a city assembly, in which they address an official as εἰρήνη πόλεως, ‘peace of the city’ (1.27).<sup>52</sup> This papyrus demonstrates that peace is something rulers create and even embody.

### 13. SB V 7667 (TM 17994; 320 CE; Trading Receipt)

This is a receipt, in which money is received in exchange for some cumin that will soon be sent. The money is received ἐξ ἄλλη]λεγγύης τῆ εἰρήνη followed by the name of the sender, Amulus, in the genitive (1.3-4). E. P. Wegener translates ‘on mutual surety for the assurance [of Amulus]’.<sup>53</sup> The dative, τῆ εἰρήνη here means that the money is received *for* the peace of Amulus.<sup>54</sup> The thought appears to be that it will put Amulus at peace to know that his money has been received, because that means that the cumin is on its way. This is made more plausible by the fact that the papyrus gives the names of sureties from whom Amulus can require the value of the cumin if it is not delivered. This document therefore seems to use

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<sup>52</sup> Marianne Blume, ‘À propos de P.Oxy. I 41: Des acclamations en l’honneur d’un Prytane, confrontées aux témoignages épigraphiques du reste de l’Empire’, *Egitto e storia antica dall’Ellenismo all’età Araba: Bilancio di un confronto. Atti del colloquio internazionale Bologna 31.8-2.9.1987* (ed. Lucia Criscuolo and Giovanni Geraci; Bologna: Clueb, 1989) 271-90, at 274 n. 19.

<sup>53</sup> E. P. Wegener, ‘Four papyri of the Bodleian Library,’ *Mnemosyne* 3 (1936) 232-40, at 237, 238.

<sup>54</sup> This is a standard use of the dative case; what is unusual is that the noun in question is an abstract concept rather than a person. See Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1920) §1459, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0007>. When the dative in question is an abstract concept, as here, it can ‘work’ well to translate it as an expressing purpose.

ειρήνη with a subjective sense: it refers to Amulus' personal peace of mind because he is free from anxiety about his cumin.

14. P.Cair.Goodsp. 15 (TM 22648; 362-363 CE; Letter of Complaint)

The papyrus contains in the salutation this striking phrase (1.4-5): ἐν τοιαύτη  
πρ[υ]τα[ν]ευομένη εἰρήνη τοῦ δεσπότη [ἡ]μῶν βασιλέως Φλαουίου Ἰουλιανοῦ αἰωνίου  
Ἀ[γο]ύστου, 'while such peace of our Lord, king Flavius Julianus, the eternal Augustus,  
presides'. Peace is both associated with the Emperor and it is the subject of πρυτανεύομαι. It  
is a state of affairs in society, created by a ruler, and it is powerful enough to preside or  
prevail. This papyrus post-dates the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the  
Roman Empire and therefore it may have been indirectly influenced by Paul. It is therefore  
less relevant for interpreting him.

### **Summary of the Findings and Exegetical Implications**

Once the irrelevant search finds are excluded, we are left with nearly one hundred references to peace-officials and the fourteen papyri discussed above. Of those fourteen, nine associate

εἰρήνη with gods or rulers<sup>55</sup>, seven use it with implications of a stable and prospering state of affairs in society<sup>56</sup>, two with implications of good order and organisation<sup>57</sup>, only one with a sense of good relations between individuals<sup>58</sup> and only one or at most two with a subjective sense of ‘peace of mind’<sup>59</sup>.

It is clear then that in the non-Christian documentary papyri, εἰρήνη has shades of meaning rather different to its normal glosses in modern languages. Εἰρήνη is a public, political concept. It describes a well-ordered, well-governed, socially and commercially well-functioning society, in which everything happens as it should, or at least as rulers decree it should. It only rarely refers to smooth relations between individuals or to a mental state, the opposite of which is stress or anxiety. Thus, my findings support Bassler’s view that εἰρήνη is a more specific word than its regular modern glosses and Swartley’s, that it is a broad, holistic concept, akin to Hebrew *שלום*, whose opposite is not so much war, as evil.<sup>60</sup> These findings are evidence against the view of Haacker and Brandenbruger that εἰρήνη is very specifically about reconciliation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> UPZ I 20; P.Lond. VI 1912; P.Oxy. XLII 3022; SB XXIV 15915; PSI IX 1036 (and copies); P.Bad. IV 89; P.Stras. I 5; P.Oxy. I 41; P.Cair.Goodsp. 15.

<sup>56</sup> UPZ I 20; P.Lond. VI 1912; P.Oxy. XLII 3022; SB XXIV 15915; PSI IX 1036 (and copies); P.Stras. I 5; P.Cair.Goodsp. 15.

<sup>57</sup> BGU IV 1192; P.Petaus 53.

<sup>58</sup> P.Oxy. XLII 3057.

<sup>59</sup> SB V 7667. Possibly also SB XIV 11938.

<sup>60</sup> Bassler, ‘Peace’. Swartley, *Peace*.

<sup>61</sup> Haacker, ‘Römerbrief’; Brandenburger, *Frieden*.

Of course, the papyri have an inevitable bias towards the public and objective aspects of any concept, because they include many public, official texts. This means that the conclusions of this study are positive rather than negative: we have evidence for an objective reading of εἰρήνη in Paul, but no strong evidence against a subjective reading. In fact, εἰρήνη sometimes has a clearly subjective, moral or dispositional sense in Paul, for example, in Gal 5.22, the word appears in a list of nine personal qualities (the ‘fruit of the Spirit’), all the rest of which are moral or dispositional. Similarly, in Rom 15.13, it is paired with χαρά, joy. However, the papyri do suggest that, in Paul’s time, the objective and political meaning of εἰρήνη would have been more readily in the mind of Greek-speakers than moderns might assume.

Of course, the documentary papyri are not the only, nor even the most important, context for reading Paul. He must be read in at least his Jewish, Greek and Roman contexts and Greek documentary papyri are only partial evidence for some of those contexts. However, the papyri are a hitherto under-discussed and important source of evidence.

I shall now apply these insights to the exegesis of two particular passages.

### 1. Rom 5.1

Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου  
ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Textual critics debate whether the verb is ἔχομεν or ἔχωμεν. At risk of over-simplification, there is broad scholarly consensus that the external evidence favours the omega, but there are two major scholarly positions regarding the significance of the internal evidence. Some argue that the subjunctive suits the context in Paul's argument better and therefore we should read omega on both internal and external grounds.<sup>62</sup> Others argue that, because omicron and omega appear to have been pronounced the same and were frequently exchanged by scribes, it is difficult to be certain which was the spelling in the initial text and equally difficult to parse this spelling with certainty as indicative or subjunctive. This means that internal evidence becomes crucial. This second group of scholars argue that the context in Paul's argument implies that he meant to assert a certain fact, in the indicative, but that it is impossible to be certain how his amanuensis spelled it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 295 n. 17; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 553-5; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 344; W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902<sup>5</sup>) 120; Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994) 495 n. 66; Stanley E. Porter, 'The Argument of Romans 5: Can a Rhetorical Question Mark a Difference?', *JBL* 110/4 (1991) 655-77.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1971) 511; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 257; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988) 245; D. Hans Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (HNT 3/1; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr & Paul Siebeck, 1919<sup>2</sup>) 55; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957) 102. For the frequent exchanging of o and ω in the papyri, see Francis Thomas Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (2 vols.; Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità; Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino – La Goliardica, 1975) 275-7. Personal acknowledgement.

The evidence gathered in this paper supports interpreting the internal evidence in favour of the indicative. The subjunctive would arguably suggest that the passage is an exhortation: the readers are called to enjoy the sense of peace with God, to live at peace with God or to cultivate peace with God. The evidence of the papyri challenges this. Peace, as the papyri understand it, is not something we can create in ourselves, because it is only rarely subjective and internal. It is more often the objective state bestowed by gods or rulers, in Paul's case by his Θεός. Of course, as noted above, most of the documentary papyri are public documents and we would not expect them to refer often to a personal experience of peacefulness, whereas Romans 5 contains a number of references to personal dispositions and emotions (e.g. καυχώμεθα in the following verse). Therefore the evidence of the papyri certainly does not decide the issue. They are only one, relatively small piece of the puzzle. However, they have until now been a neglected piece, since I could nowhere find them cited in discussion of this verse.<sup>64</sup>

## 2. Phil 4.6–7

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ  
εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν. καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη  
τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ  
νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

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<sup>64</sup> See n. 53 and 54 for details of the works I consulted.

On the text-critical questions in this passage, I follow NA<sup>28</sup>, as printed above. It is beyond the scope of an article to discuss fully the various redaction-critical questions raised regarding Philippians and this issue does not significantly bear on the exegesis of εἰρήνη.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, our question is not much effected by Paul's location when he wrote either the whole letter or the part under consideration.<sup>66</sup> I do however assume a point agreed unanimously by all the commentaries cited above, that the Roman background is particularly important for understanding Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony and the Philippians could hardly have failed to see how Paul's εἰρήνη contrasted with the *pax Romana*. This is especially

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<sup>65</sup> For one original letter see Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians and Philemon* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897) xxxi; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 1; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, rev. Ralph P. Martin (WBC 43; Waco: Nelson, 2004) xxx-xxxiv; Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1997) 22-5; Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 10-18; Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 15-8; Ulrich B. Müller, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper* (THKNT 11/1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1993) 4-14. For arguments for various versions of a redactional hypothesis see John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33B; New Haven: Yale University, 2008) 3-13; Joachim Gnllka, *Der Philipperbrief* (HThKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1968) 6-10; Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1984) 334-6.

<sup>66</sup> The traditional location is Rome; for which see Vincent, *Philippians*, xxii; Fee, *Philippians*, 1; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 25-32; O'Brien, *Philippians*, 10-26 (cautiously); Witherington, *Philippians*, 9-11. For Ephesus, see Reumann, *Philippians*, 3; Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, xxxix-l (cautiously); Gnllka, *Philipperbrief*, 18-24; Müller, *Philipper*, 18-24.



clear, since Paul uses military language, φρουρήσει, to describe how the peace of God works, subtly highlighting the irony of the Roman military peace.<sup>67</sup>

Commentators understand εἰρήνη here in a variety of ways. Given the stress throughout Philippians on internal unity in the Christian community, Jean-François Collange suggests ‘[εἰρήνη] therefore above all means this: peace which should reign between the Philippians themselves on the one hand and between them and the apostle on the other’.<sup>68</sup> Marvin Vincent offers a more individual and dispositional understanding:

Not the objective peace *with* God, wrought by justification...nor the *favour* of God...nor peace with one another...since mutual peace cannot dissipate anxiety; but the inward peace of the soul which comes from God, and is grounded in God’s presence and promise<sup>69</sup>

Paul Holloway likewise glosses εἰρήνη as ‘a divine tranquility’ and Swartley suggests ‘power that protects from fear and anxiety to bring calm’.<sup>70</sup> Ben Witherington III also proposes ‘a sense of God’s peace, presence, wholeness [that] comes over the one praying, stilling and

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<sup>67</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, 249; Reumann, *Philippians*, 636-7; Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 184.

<sup>68</sup> Jean-François Collange, *L’épître de Saint Paul aux Philippiens* (CNT Xa ; Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1973) 126-7.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent, *Philippians*, 135.

<sup>70</sup> Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017) 183; Fee, *Philippians*, 402; Swartley, *Peace*, 419.

reassuring the heart about things and thus removing anxiety'.<sup>71</sup> The problem with this approach is that it is difficult to see how Paul could be so certain that prayer will cause anxiety to give way to such peace. Human experience is that this is not always the case.

The problem becomes easier however, if we read the passage, in the light of the papyri, as promising something more objective than lack of anxiety. Paul is in fact saying that God, by his εἰρήνη, will cause the world to work in a way such that the hearts and minds of his readers are kept in Christ. Paul is making a similar point to that of Rom 8.28–30. God does not give to praying people lives which are free from things that cause anxiety. Rather he causes them to live lives so ordered under his good governance, his εἰρήνη, that, despite troubles, they remain in Christ.<sup>72</sup>

It might be objected that τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν implies that the peace is subjective. However, this phrase is not the locus of the peace, but the object of the guarding: the peace of God is not an experience in the Philippians' hearts and minds, but a power to guard their hearts and minds. Moreover, the point is not to contrast hearts and minds with bodies. As N. T. Wright argues, Paul is not a mind-body dualist; rather his various terms like σῶμα and ψυχή all refer to the whole human person, but view that person from different

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<sup>71</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, 248.

<sup>72</sup> This broad approach is followed, without reference to the papyri, by Gnllka (*Philipperebrief*, 171), Müller (*Philipper*, 196) and *ThWNT* 2:412.

angles.<sup>73</sup> By saying that God's peace will guard τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν in Christ Jesus, Paul means that the Philippians, as thinking, feeling humans, may be beset by many causes for anxiety, but that they will be kept thinking and feeling as followers of Jesus by the εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, the good order of God. In a world of suffering and loss, it will often be hard to discern the good order of God, but that is why Paul says that God's peace is ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν: it is often beyond us to understand how this world could be operating under the good government of God. It is an argument in favour of my reading is that it is most consistent with ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν: unity in a church and a sense of calm in a person might both be difficult things to achieve, but neither surpasses understanding.

As in Romans 5, so in Philippians 4, the papyrological evidence is neither necessary nor sufficient to prove the more objective reading.<sup>74</sup> However, in both passages it is still a valuable and neglected voice at the exegetical table. This suggests that the objective reading might be helpful in understanding other Pauline passages mentioning εἰρήνη and that other words could profitably be investigated using the papyri.

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<sup>73</sup> N. T. Wright, 'Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All – Reflections on Paul's Anthropology in His Complex Context', *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul 1978-2013* (by N. T. Wright; London: SPCK, 2013), 455-73.

<sup>74</sup> See n. 63 for those who argue for an objective reading in Philippians without reference to them.