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A teacher's dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)

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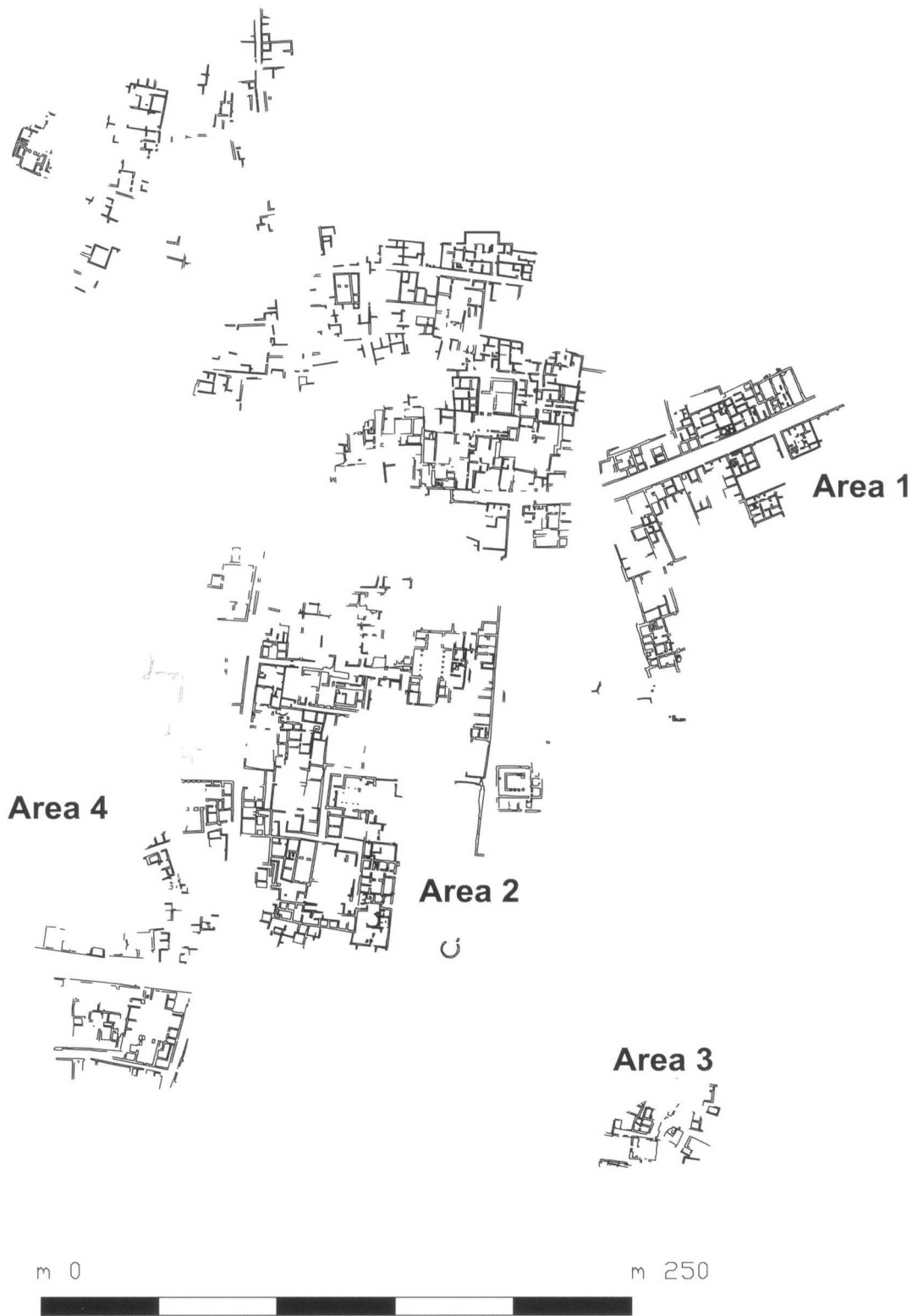


Fig. 1. Amheida, general plan of the central part of the site.

A teacher's dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)

Raffaella Cribiore, Paola Davoli, and David M. Ratzan

In February 2006 a team from Columbia University excavating a late-antique residence at Amheida (ancient Trimithis) in the Dakhleh Oasis discovered a poetic *dipinto* arrayed in 5 columns on a wall of a room situated just to the north of the residence proper. The dipinto offers a unique glimpse of late-antique rhetorical education within a precise physical and cultural setting. The present article offers a description of the archaeological context and a text, translation, and commentary on the dipinto.

A 4th-c. house at Trimithis: the archaeological context (P. Davoli)

The site of Amheida¹ is located in the W part of the Dakhleh Oasis, some 3 km south of the Islamic mud-brick town of El-Qasr. The full extent of the ancient remains is still to be determined, but the area under the control of the Supreme Council of Antiquities extends for c.2.5 km N-S by 1 km E-W. The team from Columbia University, directed by R. S. Bagnall, has focused its efforts on the central urban area and has been excavating three sectors (fig. 1).²

The archaeological evidence collected to date testifies to the presence of a settlement in this area at least from the Old Kingdom to the Late Roman period. The bulk of evidence for the earlier periods comes from the main hill (Area 4) where finds and potsherds of many different periods were found in complex stratigraphy, heavily disturbed in the Ottoman period. A temple dedicated to Thoth on the top of this hill once dominated the settlement; completely demolished, hundreds of scattered blocks testify to its long history.³ Fragments of reliefs belong to temples from three periods: the first of the Libyan period (23rd Dynasty), a second in the Late Period (26th and 27th Dynasties), and the last decorated mainly under Titus and Domitian.

The focus here is on part of a 4th-c. house found in Area 2.1, in which excavation began in 2004 and concluded in 2007.⁴ The house, located in a dense habitation area, is part of a block bounded on the E and W sides by narrow streets, onto which two entrances opened (fig. 2). Its plan was originally square (15.30 m on a side); an extension to the north then connected the house to a room (Room 15 [hereafter R15]) that was originally part of another building (figs. 3-4). The dipinto was found on the wall of this room (see fig. 7). The house was also connected to the north with a courtyard now labelled R9 and R10, as well as with another building used by the owner of the house as a work space. The house itself is composed of 13 rooms, of which one is a staircase, leading to the terraced roof, one is a corridor (R17+R16) leading to the added R15, and two (R7, R12) are entrance rooms. All but 4 of the rooms were covered by barrel-vaults: the main room (R1) had a dome, while R2, R6, and R15 had flat roofs of beams and reeds. The high level of humidity has caused the decay of all the organic materials.

The house belonged to a family of high social status, as the numerous ostraka,⁵ other objects, and the painted rooms indicate. The decoration of the house will be the subject of its own study,

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- 1 For the identification of Amheida with Trimithis, cf. R. S. Bagnall and G. R. Ruffini, "Civic life in fourth-century Trimithis. Two ostraka from the 2004 excavations," *ZPE* 149 (2004) 143-44.
 - 2 The excavation began in 2004 with O. E. Kaper as associate director; P. Davoli has been field director since 2005. From 2008 onwards the mission is jointly sponsored by New York University and Columbia University. Short annual reports are available at <http://www.amheida.org/>. A summary of the results from the seasons 2004-6 is also given by P. Davoli, "Amheida 2004-2006. New results from the excavations," in O. Kaper and F. Leemhuis (edd.), *Oasis papers 5: Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (June 2006)*, in press. See also P. Davoli and O. Kaper, "A new temple for Thoth in the Dakhleh Oasis," *EA* 28 (2006) 12-14; R. S. Bagnall, P. Davoli, O. E. Kaper and H. Whitehouse, "Roman Amheida: excavating a town in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis," *Minerva* 17.6 (2006) 26-29.
 - 3 O. E. Kaper and R. J. Demarée, "A donation stela in the name of Takelot III from Amheida, Dakhleh Oasis," *Jaarbericht "Ex Oriente Lux"* 39 (2005) 19-37.
 - 4 E. Ball has been the supervisor of the team that worked in this house from 2004 to 2007.
 - 5 These will be published by R. S. Bagnall and G. R. Ruffini in a forthcoming volume.

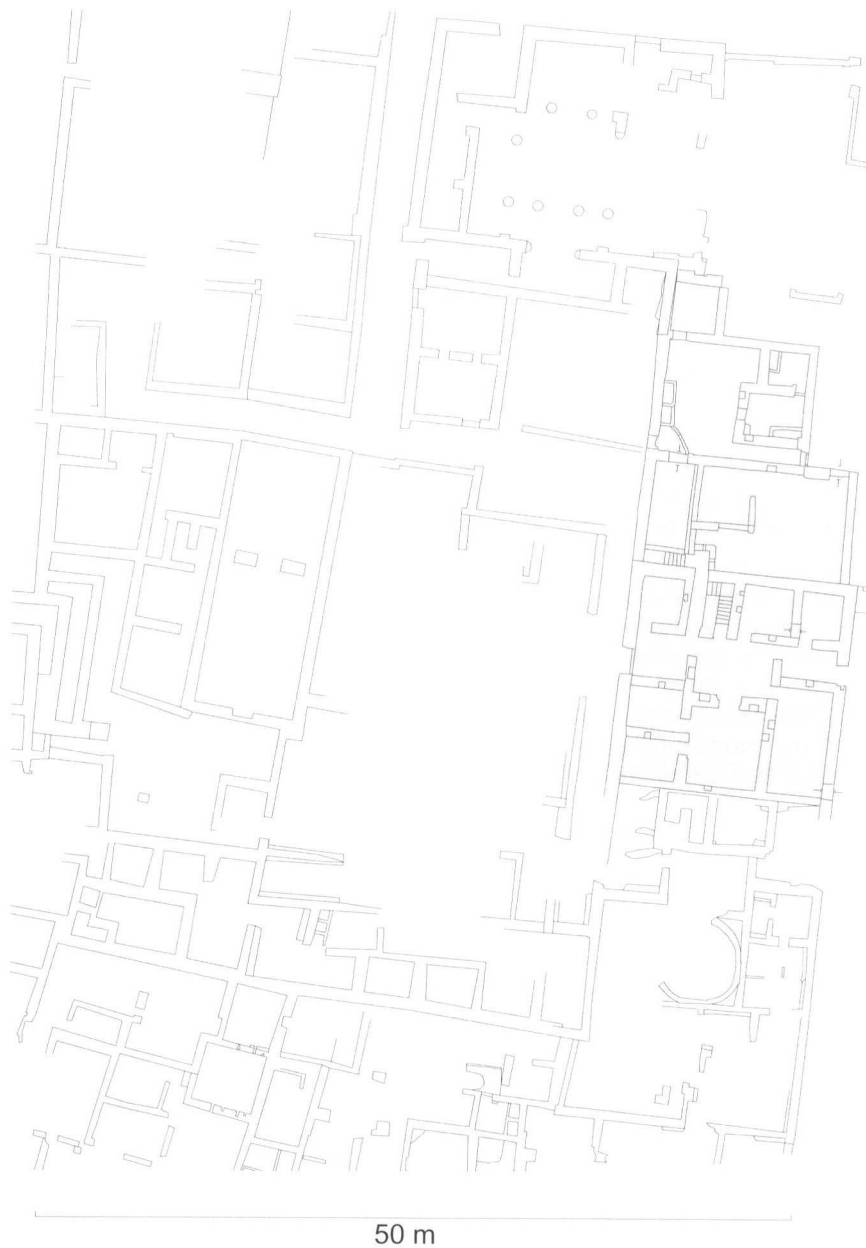


Fig. 2. Amheida, plan of Area 2.

but an overall perspective on the building will provide a context for the dipinto. Figural paintings cover a register running on the preserved upper part of the 4 walls in R1 (color fig. 5). At least two registers have figurative scenes, and the dome too was decorated. On each wall are different themes drawn from Greek epic and mythology. One scene on the W wall apparently depicts the owner of the house sitting at a banquet. Panels with geometric decoration are painted on the lower part of the walls. The room was painted twice (in many spots the earlier paintings partially emerge from under the thin layer of the plaster); the first decoration was different and apparently of a better quality. Panels with geometric and floral patterns covered the walls of three other rooms (R11, R13, R14; color fig. 6).⁶

⁶ For similar decorative patterns, cf. C. A. Hope and H. Whitehouse, "A painted residence at Ismant el-Kharab (Kellis) in the Dakhleh Oasis," *JRA* 19 (2006) 312-28.



Fig. 3. Plan of house in Area 2.1 showing position of Room 15.



Fig. 4. View of house in Area 2.1 with added rooms to north, view from north.

The house underwent three stages. It is likely it was built in the first half of the 4th c. as a square building, probably with three entrances,⁷ at which time R2 was painted in red and yellow ochre and R1 received its first decoration. In a second stage, which seems to have occurred only a few years later, the house underwent a series of substantial alterations: R1 was plastered and painted again with the figured scenes; R2 was re-plastered with plain mud; R11, R13, and R14 were painted; a new door was opened between R7 and R8; and the door between R8

⁷ A third door had opened onto the eastern street in the SE corner of R6, but it was walled up.



Fig. 7. Room 15, overview from southwest, showing position of dipinto.

and R4 was closed, as well as that leading to R6 from the street on the east. Some floors too were re-plastered. To this second stage can be ascribed the extension of the house towards the north (R15): a passage was cut in the perimeter wall, and a narrow corridor (R16) was created under the staircase, extending R17. Two small walls were built to prevent access to the courtyard (R9) and a new doorway opened in the SE corner of R15. In the third phase, the house underwent a kind of restoration, mainly visible in its western rooms as a result of the shifting of the W perimeter wall. Some floors were re-plastered and whitewash bands were laid in some rooms around niches, doors, and on several walls. Some coins⁸ found in correspondence with these floors are datable to A.D. 355-361. Apparently the house was abandoned in the second half of the 4th c., as the ostraka and coins seem to suggest.

The house was built on previous buildings that had been partially levelled. The best preserved parts of these structures are found north of the house, below the courtyard (R9 and R10) and work building (R19-23), an area with a complex history partially connected with the original building to which R15 first belonged (see fig. 4, foreground). Six building phases have been recognized here so far, but little remains of those structures that can serve to elucidate their functions or plans.⁹ Only of one, from the second phase, does enough survive to allow an interpretation as a bath building, partially constructed with red brick and preserved to a height of c.1 m. A round room in mud brick with a hypocaust can be identified as a *laconicum* (dry hot

⁸ The mud floor in R1 was probably replaced with a new one after A.D. 355, as suggested by the presence of a coin (inv. no. A06/2.1/164/11324) under this floor. Coins from inside the upper floor (F150) in R13 confirm this date. Coin A04/2.1/35/136, from the surface of the second floor in R4, confirms the date of the renewal of the pavements.

⁹ The fifth phase coincides with the building of the house 2.1.



Fig. 8. Room 15, overview from north.

room);¹⁰ it was plastered with a thin layer of gypsum mortar and the floor was restored with wooden planks, of which the iron nails and imprints are preserved (fig. 4 shows the N courtyard area with the hot room). The furnace was set to the south in the area between R4 and R8. To the west of the *laconicum* is a square room in red brick and stone, characterized by 4 channels paved with red bricks and gently slanting to flush the water into a drainage channel leading north. The central core of the room is made of hard soil and sandstone slabs. The only plausible interpretation of this room is as a *latrina*.¹¹ The water came from two rectangular holes in the N and W walls, suggesting the presence of two pools or *cisternae*, of which one forms the basement of R15 and the second that of R19. The bathing establishment was only partially demolished in this area; its red brick walls were used as foundations for a series of buildings in mudbrick of different phases, and the baked tiles and bricks were also re-used.¹²

In its earliest phase, R15 was thus part of a building set immediately to the north of house 2.1, and abutted to it (fig. 8). For an unknown reason, part of this building was demolished to

10 F. Yegül, *Baths and bathing in classical antiquity* (New York 1992) 383-86; Y. Thébert, *Thermes romains d'Afrique du Nord et leur contexte méditerranéen* (Rome 2003) 99-101. A *laconicum* with hypocausts was found in the bath at Karanis, but it was built with baked bricks and on a rectangular plan: S. A. A. El-Nassery, G. Wagner, and G. Castel, "Un grand bain gréco-romain à Karanis. Fouilles de l'Université du Caire (1972-75)," *BIFAO* 76 (1976) 259 §10.

11 A similar feature (F5) interpreted as a *latrina* was found at Marea: H. Szymanska and K. Babraj, "Marea. Season 2002," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 14 (2002) 40 fig. 1, 43 fig. 6.

12 Dimensions: 30 x 15 x 5.5 cm. Red bricks were re-used in some spots inside the house, e.g., in the steps of the staircase R5 and in R15.



Fig. 9. Room 15, N end, view from south.

leave room for the courtyard (R9 and R10) and some of its rooms were transformed into work rooms. At the present stage of investigation, we may consider the foundation of the house as contemporary with that of this building to its north. R15 was originally 6.80 m long and 2.60 m wide, with the entrance in the middle of the N wall. The remarkable width of the doorway (1.25 m) and its central position suggest an important function for the room within the building. In this first stage, R15 was plastered with white gypsum plaster, which continued in the doorway and into R19, as we ascertained during the 2008 season. On the white plaster, which is only partially preserved in half the room, various red ink inscriptions were traced (see below). These inscriptions belong to the first stage of the room, the period before it was added to house 2.1. In the second stage, the main door was closed (fig. 9) and a new one opened in the SE corner. The room was re-plastered with mud that is not uniform and is now heavily damaged by ter-

mites. As it appears today, the new mud plaster did not cover the white plaster with the painted texts, but tests will be performed to establish the relationship between the plaster layers.

The room is preserved to a height of 2.20 m, with no traces left in the walls of any windows or the recesses for the wooden beams of the roof.¹³ One of the main features of the room is a corbel 20 cm deep running all along the E wall (figs. 7, 8 and 10). This may have been cut in the second stage, by removing one course of bricks, but in fact in this area the wall is plastered in the same way as all the other walls of the room. The function of the corbel is not clear, but some indentations on the same wall and on the wall to the north (F98) suggest a wooden shelf was probably supported by the corbel itself and by some wooden pegs set in the wall. The shelf may have been about 60 cm wide and c.50 cm above the floor laid in R15 during its second stage. This second floor, of wood, is now completely missing; it was a raised floor built over three beams running N-S and supported by three rows of irregular pillars of baked tile. As all the organic material has disappeared, it is difficult to describe the floor's construction. The absence of traces of the floor along the perimeter of the walls points to the fact that it was not made with mud and reeds, but more probably with planks of wood, partially fitted to the W wall. The level of the raised floor was reached by a staircase of red bricks and tiles set in front of the door (fig. 8). The space beneath this new floor level was less than 1 m high and apparently left empty. The three beams and the pillars occupied most of the space, and the only plausible use for such a space is for storing goods. The fill of the room consisted largely of clean sand that covered fragments from the collapsed flat roof and a great amount (c.130 kg) of pottery, mainly distributed along the W and N walls. It is difficult to establish whether the pots were above or below the wooden floor; we could recognize tableware, bowls, flasks, and some amphorae (Riley's type LRA 7). Despite the quantity of wood present in the room, no traces or imprints of it nor iron nails have been found. For this reason it is possible that all the wood was removed before the roof collapsed.

In the N half of the room it is still possible to recognize the bottom of a rectangular pool (*cisterna*) in red brick that was part of the *thermae* (fig. 9).¹⁴ This pool was one of the sources of water for the *latrina* to the east; the pipe (14 x 20 cm, 35 cm deep) is located in the NE corner (color fig. 10). The floor and probably also the walls of the pool were plastered.

The floor of the first stage of R15 was of simple mud (11 cm thick); it covered completely some mud brick walls to the south which belonged to earlier buildings, the red-brick floor of the pool and its E side wall; as for the western red-brick wall of the pool (F116), it was not hidden under the mud floor but rises c.5 cm above the floor. For these reasons we may consider it as the bottom of a bench in the schoolroom.

The plaster on the W wall¹⁵ of R15 shows two different surfaces. The last is a very thin whitewash on which the red-ink inscriptions were traced. The whitewash covered the original decoration of the room, which consisted of compact yellow ochre topped by a red band (set 1.45 m above the floor). The red-ink texts are much better preserved on the plaster on the E wall,¹⁶ particularly close to the corner and on the plaster between the suspended floor and the wooden shelf (color fig. 10).

At present it is impossible to say more than this about the function and transformations of this room. The red-ink inscriptions on the white plaster suggest that, at the time they were written, it was used as a schoolroom, but none of the anticipated educational furnishings it may originally have had (e.g., benches and a high chair) have survived its change of function into a storeroom. As previously stated, the white plaster belongs to R15's first stage, and it continues into R19, which was originally connected to R15 by the central doorway before it was

13 Windows must have been present at least in the first stage when the room was used as a school. Probably they were located in the roof or in the walls directly under the roof.

14 Its S wall was demolished, but it is certain that this pool had the same length as the *latrina*.

15 It is 2.46 m long and runs N-S from the NW corner of the room; its maximum height is 1.10 m.

16 It is 3.20 m long and runs N-S from the NE corner of the room; its maximum height is 0.90 m.

blocked. During the 2008 season, R19 and the other four rooms belonging to the work-building north of the house were brought to light. According to the preserved features, the school building appears to have occupied an area of c.19 x 9.5 m, articulated into at least three rooms. The whole building was set on the ruins of the *thermae*, of which the floors were used as a base for the new mud floors and some of the lateral walls as benches. These are preserved along the S and W walls of R19 and on the W and N walls of R23. The most remarkable bench is that running along the shared S wall of R19 and R22, which are connected. It is perfectly preserved thanks to the fact that it was buried under the floor of a later phase. The bench consists of two steps, each 8 cm high, 38-47 cm wide, and 5.90 m long.

The white plaster is only partially preserved in R19, but on its W wall two red painted inscriptions are still legible. They will be the subject of a later study by R. Criore.

The *dipinto* (R. Criore and D. M. Ratzan)

The *dipinto* currently occupies a roughly rectangular patch (3 m²) of white gypsum plaster on the N half of the E wall of the large room designated R15 (for its position see fig. 7; for an overview of the inscription, fig. 10). The plaster shows numerous gaps and holes, and the surface of what remains is often pitted and abraded. Although the present condition of the plaster is likely to be at least in part the result of the renovations and the room's subsequent life as a storeroom, even at the time of painting the surface was not uniformly pristine, as one can see from the occasional lines painted over rough patches (e.g., col. 1.5-8; color fig. 12); there are also ancient rivulets of dried mud running down from the top of the wall over all of the columns. On archaeological grounds, the plaster may be assigned to the room's first phase, dated to the first half of the 4th c. Some 20 years later, probably not long after mid-century, the room was re-oriented to the south and connected to the house, the walls replastered in mud, and a raised floor installed. The secondary layer of mud plaster probably covered the *dipinto*, which was later exposed fortuitously by flaking. Even if for some reason the *dipinto* had not been plastered over, the new floor would have concealed much of the writing beneath it, with whatever was still visible above obscured by the shelf laid into the corbel. The legible life of the *dipinto* may thus be dated to Phase 1 of R15, or c.340-360.

The *dipinto* consists of a series of at least 8 epigrams in elegiac couplets and hexameters, written by a teacher for his students, as we may infer from both the contents of the poems and the surviving lemmata. The poems are arranged in columns of varying sizes and formats, all cut at the top by the corbel. It seems likely that no more than one or two lines (and possibly a lemma) are missing from any column. While the upper limits are fairly secure, the overall dimensions of the columns are more difficult to establish, as most are now faded or lacunose at the bottoms and margins; none, however, appears to have continued beyond the point at which the plaster breaks off. The first column is the only one whose original proportions are reasonably certain: it occupied an area c.62 cm wide by at least 53 cm tall, standing between 116 and 169 cm from the original floor level, and ending with enlarged letters and a conspicuous *diple*.

The paleography may be described as a mix of styles befitting the intermediate nature of the text, somewhere between an inscription and a book. The poems are painted in red ink with fairly bold strokes, the average letter being c.2 cm high. The upper lines are generally straight and well drafted, the letters fitted into notional boxes 2 cm tall by 2.5 cm wide and exhibiting a careful shading. The script approaches an upright, rounded book hand characteristic of the late 3rd or early 4th c., which fits well with the dating suggested by the archaeological and documentary data. The lower lines, by contrast, begin to buckle and their spacing becomes more inconsistent and letter-forms more unstable. Thus the higher up in the column, the better or more bookish the hand, while the lower lines, particularly in col. 1, begin to resemble the style of other poetic *dipinti* from Imperial Egypt.¹⁷ Yet even in the most "bookish" of lines (e.g., col.

17 E.g., E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* (Paris 1969) nos. 20-21, 97; and G. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs* (Cairo 1987) 50-51 (pl. 17).



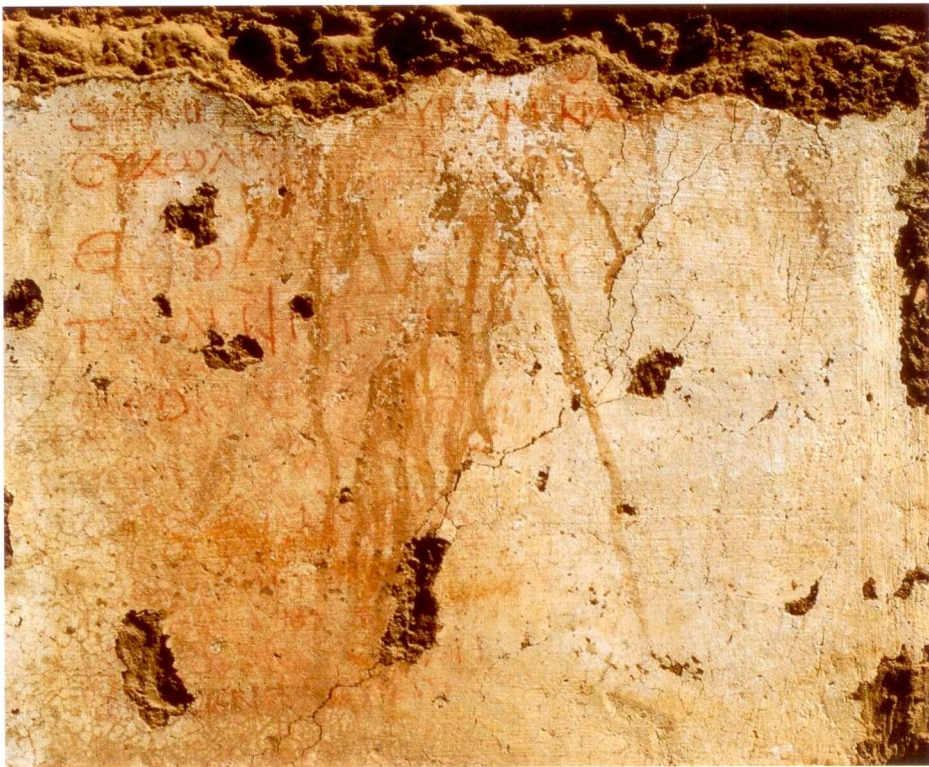
Color fig. 5. Room 1, E wall with mythological scenes.



Color fig. 6. Room 11, S wall with geometric decoration.



Color fig. 14. *Dipinto*, column 3, detail.



Color fig. 15. *Dipinto*, column 5, detail.

> —
 εἰς τᾶσαις[.]φο.[-5-]

12 χρυσοκ[ο]μας δέ..έτ[...].π[
 ἀλλω...ν...εχω[.]

> >
 εἰς

Traces

>

Traces of lines 14-21

Column 3 (color fig. 14)

Traces of at least 9 lines

10]ω μ.[.'Η]ρακλῆς ραφε[ρ
 ἀλλα [...] εὐψυχη[ρη.τα
 ἐκ ψυχῆς παρεχεῖ ...[
 [-2-] ρον [.] [-3-]]μ[

Column 4 (not illustrated)

Illegible traces of at least 6 lines, the rest obliterated

Column 5 (color fig. 15)

μ . . . ω[
 συν μη[-6-]ν ούρεα μ[α]κρά θ[. .]ω ρα[
 ευχωλης . [-3-] ερ . [-4-] . λθε . [traces .

4 ρ[
 εύχομαι . μα . . . αν[traces
 ηδεφύλ . [

τῶν ἀμφιτρομέω[-11-]α

8 πολλα μέν[
 εἰς ὅ κε ν . . . ἐ[traces

Traces of 7 more lines

Commentary

Column 1

1. The ink at the beginning of the line might belong to a previous text. The ε at the end might be θ.
2. Traces after χ are compatible with ω, so that a form of the verb χωρέω (e.g., χωρῶ, χωρῶν) might be a suitable supplement.
- 3-4 On]εῖρων the circumflex is barely visible. Πέταλον appears frequently in both epic and lyric poetry. It is not clear with which kind of leaves the epigram is concerned, but the context suggests that τῶν ἱερῶν πετάλων might refer to laurel leaves, as in Nonnus, *Dion.* 19.75 and 33.132; see *Or.* 26.7 of the sophist Himerius and *Anth. Pal.* 64.
5. ετ: tacit elision is observed here unlike elsewhere, e.g., in col. 2.7.
6. The writer apparently continued on the same line, made a mistake, and erased the word, which could conceivably have been πάντων, perhaps intended to begin the construction that concludes with μουσάων — with which, of course, it would not have agreed. The plaster at this point is defective.
7. The integration πάντα is likely but not certain. The grave over μελιχρά is in fact over the χ. This is the case with all other oxytone graves in the *dipinto*, which seem to be marked at the beginning of the syllable, regardless of the type of letter, e.g., κᾶλδον (col. 1.15), μ[α]κρά (col. 5.2) and πολλα (col. 5.8). Compare also the placement of the initial grave in ἀμφιτρομέω (col. 5.7). Cf. J.-L. Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VIe siècle: La bibliothèque et l'oeuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité* (Cairo 1999) vol. 1, 26-29.
9. The initial ε in συν shows midway a tiny downward diagonal that might be an ink blot or the beginning of a cross stroke (ευ?). The mistake in the following word might be explained by the influence of the Epic form πάσηιαι. The writer was perhaps momentarily confused between this and πάσαις. On the α of παση ἴς only the right end of the *macron* is visible. The caesura after χαρίτεαι is marked with a medial stop, as opposed to the high stop used at the ends of verses; cf. col. 2.4. Uncharacteristically, the teacher appears to have missed the rough breathing on Ἐρμηι.

10. This dative form of *υῖός* with the circumflex accent appears in Homer together with the form with the acute.
13. After *παῖδες*, the text is fainter than what precedes. Here the writer marked the caesura after *θαρσεῖτε* with a high stop. In *μέγας*, the *γ* and *α* are fused together.
15. The reading *παντοίης* is secure, even though the *ν* is larger and clumsier than anywhere else in the text. The adjective often refers to virtue in Homer, e.g., *Il.* 22.268 and *Od.* 18.205.
17. Only here in the *dipinto* does the *diple* include a large round dot. This dot might have conceivably belonged to a previous text or be an ink blot later incorporated into the *diple*.

Column 2

1. Most likely this is the first line of a stand-alone couplet or a couplet at the end of a short epigram. If the writer maintained perfect alignment, only one letter would be missing initially. It should be a relatively small letter, perhaps *τ*; the small oblique trace after that is compatible with *α* or *λ*. But if the line was protruding more to the left, a *μ* could be possible, as in *Μούσα*.
2. This line is probably a hexameter. The *ε* of *μητέρα* ends in a sort of flourish, which is similar to the curl that ends the last stroke of *ε* in *ην*. Cf., the initial *ε* of *εχολαετικουε* in the following line. A form of the adjective *νεοθηλής* ("fresh", "young") should be restored, perhaps the dative plural *νεοθηλέσιν*. For instance, our teacher might have had in mind Homer, *Il.* 14.347 and Hesiod, *Th.* 576 and might have written a line such as (*exempli gratia*) *μητέρα σὴν ποθεῶν νεοθηλέσιν ἄνθεσι ποίης*.
3. Lines 3-5 contain a new epigram with its lemma, as in the following 1.6. In both cases the didactic imperatives make it likely that the lemma was an address: "To my students (*εχολαστικοί*)."
4. What appears to be a macron over the *ε* of *παῖδες* is in fact the remnant of small lines framing the lemma, in the same way as titles of books are presented in the papyri, e.g., in Sappho's poems: E. G. Turner, *Greek manuscripts of the ancient world* (2nd edn., London 1987) no. 17. The adjective *χαρίεις*, which in Homer most often qualifies inanimate objects, begins to be applied to people, especially women, with Hesiod. Here it must mean "talented and educated", perhaps with a hint of irony as in Attic prose, e.g., in Plato, *Rep.* 452b; Plut., *Quaestiones conviviales* 7.8.1 (711c). After *κρήνης* several restorations would be possible: *ιοειδοῦς* (from *ιοειδής*, "deep blue") was used by Hesiod for the Muses' fountain on Helicon (*Th.* 3 and *Op.* Fr. 380.1 [Merkelbach–West]) and was well known in late antiquity; *ζαθέοιο* (from *ζάθεος*, "very holy"), cf. Hes., *Th.* 6 and later, describing Helicon; or *μελανύδρου* (from *μελάνυδρος*, "with black waters"), which often describes fountains in Homer (e.g., *Il.* 16.160).
5. The circumflex accent on *περικῶν* and the diaeresis on the *υ* of *υδάτων* are very faint. There may be a rough breathing on *υδάτων*, but it is now difficult to be certain. After *μέχρι* the vertical stroke of the next letter is visible; it is compatible with *κ* so that a possible integration could be *κόρου* (satiety), an expression that is, however, attested only in prose. The *περικὰ ὕδατα* must stand for the streams on Helicon, the only waters with which the Muses are regularly associated (cf. Hes., *Th.* 1-8). While the Muses are from Hesiod onwards often referred to as the *Πιερίδες* (*Sc.* 206; cf. *Op.* 1), the expression here is unusual, if not unparalleled in Greek, since *περικός* usually means "of Pieria" (e.g., *SH* 185) and the streams were in Boeotia. One would thus expect the metrically equivalent *περίδων ὕδατα* (cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 10.65; *IK Kalchedon* 32), while the idiom here is more akin to Latin (e.g., Statius, *Silv.* 1.2.6).
7. The adjective *εὐήγορ* is likely to be in the nominative agreeing with *κάματοι* (that is, toils make people manly). The original line might have been something of the sort: *κάμνετέ μοι κάματοι δ'εὐήγορές εἰσιν ἀπάσιν*. On the *η* of *εὐήγορ* there is a mark that appears to be a circumflex but may in fact be an acute combined with a previous trace.
8. On the *ι* of *Ἡρακλῆι* there seems to be a diaeresis, which might belong to a previous text. The traces after *π* are compatible with *α* and *λ*. The letter after the lacuna is far from clear. It might consist of *λ* (or less likely of the right stroke of *ω*). Thus one might read forms of *μειλίσσειν* (or *ἀνοίγειν*). It is likely that this epigram consists of three hexameters, since no verse is indented (to distinguish a pentameter) as in the preceding and following epigrams in this column.
9. One could possibly restore *νίκη* after *σοφίη* and then read *φέρε* as the Epic imperfect.
10. The line contains the lemma of the following epigram. The traces are compatible with *εἰς τὰ Σισύφου [πάθη]* ("On the toils of Sisyphus").
11. The text is barely visible, but the reading is secure. The lyric term *χρυσοκόμας* "golden-haired", refers to several gods and particularly Apollo. This is the only Doric form in the text and, if correct, perhaps to be explained by its occurrence in Pindar (cf. Arist., *Av.* 217), a writer who often inspired rhetors; cf. *School of Libanius* (infra n.21) 46, 167-68.
12. All the dotted letters in this line are extremely uncertain because the text is very faded. After 1.12 the marks of separation are very faint.
13. This appears to be the *lemma* of another poem. The original text consisted of 21 lines in all, but it is unclear if the bottom lines belonged to these epigrams or to a pre-existing text.

Column 3

This column of writing was almost entirely destroyed by loss of plaster. What remains is quite faded, but there seem to be traces of at least 9 lines.

10. It is uncertain whether only one letter is missing before ω (perhaps τ , making this an article in the dative?) or more. In the latter case, the line protruded to the left more than the following line. After μ the beginning of a horizontal stroke is visible, which might be part of a letter (η or α ?) or might be only a linking stroke. The adjective $\sigma\phi\alpha\lambda\epsilon\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ would indicate that Heracles was ready to fall.

11. In the lacuna after $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$, there might have been $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$. $\text{E}\acute{\upsilon}\psi\upsilon\chi\eta\iota$ is a form of the verb $\text{e}\acute{\upsilon}\psi\upsilon\chi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$, “to be of good courage”.

12. The expression $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \psi\upsilon\chi\eta\varsigma$ occurs often (but not exclusively) in Christian texts. Another possible reading is $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \tau\iota\mu\eta\varsigma$, which is relatively rare. The impersonal $\text{p}\alpha\rho\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota$ would give a sense “from the soul — or from honor — it is in one’s power” and would be followed by an infinitive and a dative.

In the rest of this column there are very few, illegible traces of writing, and in the lowest part of the wall on the left there is a mark that might be a *diple*.

Column 4

The writing is almost all obliterated except for faint traces of 6 lines.

Column 5

2. $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\rho\epsilon\alpha\ \mu\alpha\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}$, which is well attested in epic poetry, is a secure reading, though it produces a difficult line because of the lack of caesura in the third foot. Note also that the first two lines do not appear to match the pattern of lineation in the rest of the column.

3. The letter after $\epsilon\rho$ is round, perhaps \omicron or ω . $\lambda\theta\epsilon$ is probably to be restored as $\tilde{\eta}\lambda\theta\epsilon$ *vel sim*.

6. On the λ of $\phi\upsilon\lambda$ there is an oblique stroke that might be an acute accent.

7: On $\tau\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ the circumflex is not entirely preserved; $\acute{\alpha}\mu\phi\iota\tau\rho\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ with the genitive occurs only once, in *Od.* 4.820 with the meaning “to tremble for”. Two accents are marked on this word, the first a grave on the first syllable over the μ , cf. C. M. Mazzucchi, “Sul sistema di accentazione dei testi greci in età romana e bizantina,” *Aegyptus* 59 (1979) 145-67.

10-16. Only a few isolated letters are visible.

Translation

(Col. 1) ...here (I withdraw) near the sources of the sacred leaves. But may god grant my wishes that [you all] learn the Muses’ honeyed works, with all the Graces and with Hermes son of Maia reaching the full summit of rhetorical knowledge. Be bold, my boys: the great god will grant you to have a beautiful crown of manifold virtue.

(Col. 2) ... yearning after your mother... *To my students:* My talented boys, from the spring of the Pierian waters drink till you are sated (or till the end). *To the same:* Work hard for me, toils make men manly...

The didactic content of the dipinto

The language of the epigrams is rich and allusive; the tone is didactic, directing and exhorting the addressees in various ways, especially through imperatives. The text allowed a teacher to expand on his explanations, drawing the students’ attention to the various layers of meaning. Metrical inscriptions of the Imperial period typically used a composite, literate diction with terms that had intricate pedigrees and with the occasional employment of rare words. These epigrams are no exception. There is an abundance of Epic words and forms that appear in Homer, Apollonius and, later, in Quintus Smyrnaeus and Nonnus. Many of these are terms that also passed into rhetorical and Christian prose; so, for instance, $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\chi\omega\lambda\acute{\eta}$, which occurs twice, and is often found in epic poetry, re-appears in Gregory of Nazianzus. The term $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$ (col.2.7) is also interesting. It was heavily used in epic poetry, later passed into prose, and in Lucian sometimes (e.g., *Herm.* 7.1) refers to intellectual toil. Rhetors such as Aelius Aristides, Themistius, and Libanius (e.g., *Or.* 55.12.9) also adopted it. Again, in the same line, the relatively rare adjective $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\eta\nu\omega\rho$ with the meaning “which makes man manly” is a sophisticated choice. In the last column the term $\acute{\alpha}\mu\phi\iota\tau\rho\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ (col. 5.7) is a Homeric *hapax*.

The initial lines of the preserved text do not refer to a realistic description of nature in the oasis but define an ideal landscape, similar to that of *Anth. Pal.* 64, an epigram with Helicon and its waters and vegetation, the Muses, and Hesiod receiving the “sacred laurel”, which is described as $\kappa\alpha\lambda\lambda\iota\pi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\eta\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, that is, “with beautiful leaves” (cf. 1.4). The text of our epigram, though, conjures up immediately a context of *paideia*, since it encourages young men to learn

(μαθεῖν, 1.8) the sweet works of the Muses with the help of the Graces and Hermes. The Muses sometimes appear in epigrams composed for young men who were devoted to them.²⁰ The word μελιχρός, which is rarely used in epic poetry, became a favorite in epigrams mostly, but not exclusively, in erotic contexts. The epigram of the grammarian Simias honoring Sophocles, which also presents the Muses together with the Charites and the εὐμαθίη ("learning") of the tragedian, is a significant parallel to ours. Later rhetorical prose appropriated μελιχρός mostly with reference to the "sweet voice" of sophists such as Philostratus and Libanius (cf. Lucian ironically in *Rh.Pr.* 11.5).

With the assistance of the Graces and Hermes the students are supposed to reach the "full summit of rhetorical knowledge". They are addressed as παῖδες (cf. col. 2.4), which means not only "boys" but also "sons" or "children". Himerius (e.g., *Or.* 69.2; 38.64) constantly employs this form of address with his students. It was probably the standard way to address pupils, at least in Late Roman times, when the model for pedagogic relationships was often described in terms of teacher–father and student–son.²¹ The image of aiming for the summit of *paideia*, the top of the hill of learning, occurs in countless educational contexts.²² For instance, in Lucian's *Rhetorum praeceptor*, Lady Rhetoric is represented as waiting for students on top of the hill, while in this epigram Hermes will hand the crown to them once they arrive. Here, as often in rhetorical contexts, the term σοφία means "knowledge and expertise" and not "wisdom".²³ The expression ἄκρον σοφίας, which occurs first in Pindar (*Isth.* 7.18), is subsequently restricted almost exclusively to prose.²⁴ It is transferred to the wisdom and knowledge of Christ as ἱερὰ σοφία in Christian writers.

The identities of the gods mentioned in ll. 5 and 13 are not entirely clear. Μέγας θεός is an epithet attached to several gods in antiquity, but in Imperial Egypt it is most often attested as a cult name for Serapis or Hermes Trismegistos/Thoth. The fact that Thoth (Hermes) was not only the god of rhetoric but also the main god of the city makes this an attractive identification. A veiled allusion to the Christian God, however, cannot be entirely ruled out, as the epithet was often employed by Christian epigrammatists. The poetic language of the epigram also contains possible echoes of Christian texts. For instance, the imperative θαρσεῖτε in l.13 occurs together with παῖδες in classical poetry (Aesch., *Th.* 792 and *Supp.* 600), but also in the New Testament and other Christian writers. While "the great god" may allude either to Hermes or the Christian god, it seems unlikely that the θεός of l.5 refers specifically to either, since the content of the prayer explicitly includes Hermes (l.9), which would then be either redundant or awkward. It is more likely that θεός here simply means "the divine", a common usage in both pagan and Christian idioms. The first epigram, then, reads equally well in a classicising or Christian mode. A good parallel would be the poetic parody of Homer found in Kellis in which there is likely a subtle identification of Zeus with the God of the *pater noster*.²⁵

The end of the first epigram points again to an educational context, with the students hopefully receiving the crown of excellence. The crown of ἀρετή was given to athletes at public games, to actors in the theater, and to Roman officials in civic celebrations. According to Menander Rhetor (2.398.11-12), Isocrates every month rewarded his best pupil with a crown. This phrase, which occurs mainly in prose, often rhetorical, continued to be used by later rhetors and Christian writers. We may also find here an allusion to a crown given in school, such as in the ἄθλον τῶν λόγων (a rhetorical contest) in Libanius, *Ep.* 371.6.

20 Bernand (supra n.17), no. 74; cf. no. 168.

21 R. Criore, *The School of Libanius in late antique Antioch* (Princeton 2007) 138-41.

22 R. Criore, *Gymnastics of the mind: Greek education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton 2001) 1 and passim. See also *Anth. Pal.* 2.667; Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* no. 1974.1 f. = Kaibel, *Epigrammata graeca* no. 442.

23 Cf. B. Puech, *Orateurs et sophistes grecs dans les inscriptions d'époque impériale* (Paris 2002).

24 E.g., Galen, Kühn vol. 3, 257.4: ἄκρον ἅπαντα σοφίας.

25 C. A. Hope and K. A. Worp, "Miniature codices from Kellis," *Mnemosyne* 59 (2006) 226-58.

In the second column, at least 4 epigrams in varying states of preservation are visible. The first might refer to a child taken away from his mother, perhaps to be handed over to a teacher, if there was some connection with school. The next two epigrams contain lemmata (i.e., titles) that show that they concern students (σχολαστικοί). The word σχολαστικός may denote an intellectual and a learned man, but in late antiquity it mostly designated advocates.²⁶ In these epigrams, however, it is quite clear that the σχολαστικοί are students, even though the Greek word appears to have this specific meaning only rarely in literature. It is likely that Latin usage influenced the Greek perception of this term as “student”, because in Latin (e.g., Quint. 12.11.16) *scholasticus* often designates a student of rhetoric. A text where σχολαστικός always applies to “students” is the *Vita Aesopi*, which depicts the school of the philosopher Xanthos in Samos, whose students are called σχολαστικοί.²⁷ The extant text is Roman and 5 papyri from the 2nd to 7th c. preserve some fragments of it.²⁸ This text was enriched with colloquialisms and Latin words. Similarly, σχολαστικός designates not only an advocate, an official, but also a student in the *Philogelos*, a collection of ancient anecdotes attributed to the grammarian Hierokles, which is assigned to the 4th-5th c. A.D. but brought together material from various times.²⁹

In the third epigram of the *dipinto*, the poet-teacher exhorts his σχολαστικοί to drink the water of learning from the Muses’ fountain; in the fourth, he urges them to work hard, imitating Heracles’ stamina. The meaning of the latter epigram is clear even though the text is lacunose. Teachers always believed that learning required effort, which this text calls κάματοι in grand Epic language, but which are usually called πόνοι in prose (e.g., constantly in Libanius). With toil and application, students could attain perfect expertise. It is conceivable that the fifth epigram further insisted on this topic, even though little is preserved and the reading of the lemma is tentative. Yet the suggestion we give is attractive considering the long connection Sisyphus had with πόνος, beginning with Homer (*Od.* 11.593-600). Sisyphus’ exhaustion might refer to that of his students. Alternatively, his toils might represent the didactic work of a sophist who struggled with speeches and with students (cf. Libanius, *Or.* 25.46.3).

Very little remains of the subsequent epigrams in the other columns, but it is likely that their content continued the education theme. Heracles, for example, appears again in the third column, probably as a paradigm of courage that students should emulate.

A teacher’s model

An important question is whether the teacher composed these poems or copied them from an established collection. The indications are mixed, but the question is of sufficient interest to warrant a brief discussion. There are a few evident mistakes in the surviving text, most of which have been corrected (e.g., col. 1.6, 9), but they may reasonably be understood to be the product either of extemporaneous composition or of faulty copying. It could also be that the teacher was copying from a text he had written himself and so was engaged in an activity falling somewhere between composing and copying as he wrote on the wall.

The lemmata in col. 2 are similarly ambiguous. As discussed above, the first lemma appears to address a specific group of students, introducing epigrams that explicitly encourage them in their studies. While εἰς with the accusative can be used for addressees in certain constructions, the form of the address has here been clearly assimilated to that of a lemma, as can be seen from its position in relation to the epigrams.³⁰ Were it not for the striking immediacy of the personal pronoun (echoed in the epigrams, e.g., 1.6, 13; 2.4, 7), the presence of lemmata would

26 A. Lukaszewicz, “ΟΝΗΣΙΣ ΑΠΟ ΒΙΒΛΙΩΝ,” *JJP* 24 (1994) 97-103.

27 G. A. Karla, *Serta graeca* 13 (Wiesbaden 2001), with commentary and translation by C. Jouanno, *Vie d’Ésope* (Paris 2006).

28 *Vie d’Ésope* 15-16 and n.34.

29 Edition by R. D. Dawe (Munich 2000); cf. A. Thierfelder, *Philogelos. Der Lachfreund* (Munich 1968) 17-20.

30 A. S. F. Gow, *The Greek Anthology: sources and ascriptions* (London 1958) 16.

naturally suggest a written collection as the source.³¹ The use, moreover, of the editorial shorthand common to such collections in the subsequent lemma (6: εἰς τοὺς αὐτοὺς) further supports this supposition. Personal lemmata, however, are unknown from papyrus collections or in the subsequent manuscript tradition of the major anthologies. Perhaps, then, we should imagine a teacher as having composed a series of pedagogical epigrams over time for his students and then collecting his own models, aping the literary fashion of heading poems with subject-lemmata.³² Alternatively, it may be that the teacher was using an established collection. A series of 5th-c. epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* (9.451-80) provides a suitable *comparandum*: these epigrams, written in epic (Nonnian) hexameters, are mythological *ethopoia* based primarily on the Trojan cycle, and may have come from the same school.

While questions of composition and attribution must remain unresolved, it is clear that these epigrams were written on this wall in order to function as teaching models for students engaged in learning how to compose the sort of short, occasional poetry worthy of an educated person. We may surmise this from the nearly flawless orthography and the careful, systematic deployment of lectional signs throughout. We find rough breathings, *diplai*, acute, circumflex, and grave accents, high and medial stops, apostrophe, macra and diaeresis. The writer's lone mistake comes in adding a rough breathing to the aeolic form ὕμμιν (col. 1.14). With the exception of the stops and the apostrophe, the signs generally appear to have been applied after the text was written, usually displaced slightly to the right.³³ The sheer number of signs immediately recalls marked-up school copies of Homer.³⁴ There is, however, an important difference between such school copies and this text. Excepting occasional omissions (which may in part be attributed to the state of preservation), accents are applied consistently only to certain parts of speech and never to the lemmata.³⁵ Also, macra appear only on particular types of words, namely ambiguous natural longs necessary to the meter.³⁶ Our text thus shows that the teacher was concerned with demonstrating correct poetic composition. The closest parallel is an approximately contemporary wooden tablet of Homer, which shows a similar, systematic use of lectional signs;³⁷ the tablet was written by a relatively advanced student who may have copied it from a model much like this *dipinto*.

The meter and diction of the epigrams further testify to the quality of the model. Our poet was conversant with Epic and Ionic forms and vocabulary, and did not introduce false quantities. Twice he avails himself of correption and hiatus, a standard practice in literary epigram, and he has only two unexceptional elisions.³⁸ He appears to prefer third-foot feminine caesurae in the hexameter and avoids oxytones at the pentameter caesurae, fixing the last syllable before it as long by nature.³⁹ From the evidence of our meager sample it seems our poet understood the finer points of Imperial epigram, although this need not mean that he was a professional poet.⁴⁰

Finally, it is appropriate to mention the likelihood that the wall is a palimpsest: not only were single letters or words corrected here or there, but whole lines were scrubbed out and then repainted (e.g., col. 2.7-9). The inconsistent presentation of the poems across the different col-

31 On this particular form of lemma, see Gow *ibid.* 17-18. Cf. *SH* 985 [= *P. Petr.* II 49(b)]; *P. Oxy.* LIV 3725; LXVI 4502.

32 For a useful discussion of the relationship between collections and authors, see L. Argentieri, "Epigramma e libro. Morfologia delle raccolte epigrammatiche premeleagree," *ZPE* 121 (1998) 1-20.

33 Graves on oxytones are an exception to this rule, as they appear to be situated over the beginning of the syllable and so displaced to the left. See commentary to col. i.7.

34 E.g., the "Bankes" Homer, *P. Lond. Lit.* 28.

35 Nouns, adjectives, articles, and verbs always receive accents; monosyllabic prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs and particles do not, unless they are, or are affected by, an enclitic. It is hard to explain why εμοι should go unaccented (cols. 1.13; 2.4; cf. μοι, col. 2.7 and ὕμμιν, col. 1.14).

36 E.g., 1.3, 7, 9, 15; 2.5 (note that in this same line he misses a necessary macron on πῖετε).

37 R. Cribiore, *Writing, teachers, and students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, GA 1996) no. 340.

38 Correption and hiatus: cols. 1.9 and 2.8. Elision: cols. 1.5 (unmarked) and 2.7 (marked).

39 See M. L. West, *Greek metre* (Oxford 1982) 177-82.

40 Cf. L. Robert, *Hellenika* 4 (1948) 109.

umns provides further evidence for erasure and rewriting on an even larger scale. In the first (and perhaps fifth) column, the layout comprised a continuous text with elegiac couplets distributed evenly into 4-line units, whereas column 2 (and probably 3) contained a series of epigrams with the verse confined to the line. The idiosyncratic layout and frequently crowded line-ends of col. 1 suggest that something was already in place where col. 2 now stands before it was painted (color fig. 11). Though the meaning of this re-writing is not clear, it must be connected with teaching and the use of the wall as a sort of blackboard.

A rhetor in the oasis

In late antiquity, and especially in Egypt, educated people often preferred to express themselves poetically.⁴¹ Writing accurate verses was a demonstration of literary culture, a token of personal *paideia*.⁴² Yet, while the form of the lesson in this *dipinto* is metrical, the content is rhetorical. Poetry and beauty had been connected with eloquence ever since Homer. As the rhetor Aristides wrote in the 2nd c. (*Or.* 28.40 Keil), “with charm the grace of words and the beauty of oratory surpass physical beauty”. And yet if one follows the traditional view of the curriculum as established by modern historians of education, poetry was the province of the grammarian, while the teacher of rhetoric was supposed to concern himself only with prose.⁴³ Pace H. I. Marrou, poetry remained an abiding part of the educational process for students after leaving the grammarian.⁴⁴ These epigrams are further proof of the fact that the rhetorical curriculum was various and rich. In schools of rhetoric, students continued to read poetry, learning to appreciate it at a deeper level, all the while engaging with prose. Their “preliminary exercises” (προγυμνάσματα), moreover, were based on poetry; therefore it was necessary for them to know poetic texts well. In Egypt, the connection with poetry was even tighter, as the surviving examples of these exercises show. They are all in verse, despite the fact that handbooks of rhetoric mention only examples in prose. Didactic epigrams such as these reinforced a student’s knowledge of poetical themes and helped him build his skills in composition. The students in this ancient schoolroom may have expanded the epigrams of this model when writing their exercises.

A rhetorical education implies a *rhetor* in Trimithis. This would at first seem unlikely, since as a rule sophists taught only in major cities, such as Alexandria, Oxyrhynchus, or Arsinoe, not in provincial outposts. The Great Oasis, as Dakhleh and Khargeh were known in the Roman period, is separated from the Valley by hundreds of kilometers of inhospitable desert. The last twenty years, however, have dispelled the illusion of total isolation the geography inspires by demonstrating the intimate connections the Great Oasis had with the rest of Roman Egypt. For instance, we see the inhabitants of nearby Kellis in constant contact with the Valley, travelling freely back and forth, marrying into families of the Panopolite and Antinoopolite nomes, and holding property on both sides of the intervening desert.⁴⁵ It was thus a natural development that the region was officially brought into the administrative orbit of the *praeses Thebaidos* about the time that these poems were painted, and indeed we find his office routinely involved in daily affairs.⁴⁶ These contacts also extended to the realm of culture, as the Oasis could boast of an accomplished poet, the learned and prolific Soterichus the Oasite. The close ties of the Great Oasis with the Valley are reflected in the cities

41 Cf. Eunapius, *VSoph* 493 and his distinction between the Egyptians’ ability in poetry and rhetoric.

42 Cf. A. Cameron, “Poetry and literary culture,” in S. Swain and M. Edwards (edd.), *Approaching late antiquity* (Oxford 2004) 344-49.

43 On teachers of the various levels, cf. Cribiore (supra n.22) 50-59.

44 H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité* (7th edn., Paris 1975) 296; Cribiore (supra n.21) 155-65.

45 Kellis (mod. Ismant el-Kharab) was a village dependent on Mothis (mod. Mut), c.30 km southeast of Trimithis. See, e.g., *P. Kell.* I 31, 32, 42; cf. *P. Grenf.* II 71.

46 E.g., *P. Kell.* I 15, 19a-b, 20, 23, 26. On the administration of the Oasis, see Bagnall and Ruffini (supra n.1).

(Hermopolis and Antinoopolis) that appear in his poems. Here in Trimithis he would have found a propertied and cultivated class that could appreciate his *œuvre*.⁴⁷

It comes as no surprise, then, that the Oasite élite, who conducted their affairs like their Valley counterparts, should have aspired to the same level of *paideia*, and that teachers travelled to the Oasis in order to satisfy this demand. *P.Kellis* I 69 preserves a letter to the λογιστής from the son of an Ammonios διδάσκαλος, although whether Ammonios was a teacher of letters is not entirely certain, since the title διδάσκαλος was also used in the Manichaean church. *P.Kellis* I 53, however, refers unambiguously to wages paid a καθηγητής, an itinerant teacher, as confirmed by a mention of transportation costs.⁴⁸ Whereas διδάσκαλοι taught at various levels, καθηγηταί taught mostly at the upper levels of education.⁴⁹ In addition, school exercises and an impressive wooden codex of Isocrates for the instruction of advanced students have been found in domestic settings, while the central Temple of Tutu (Tithoes) has yielded reed pens and an assortment of school texts on wood and ostraka.⁵⁰ Among the usual collection of school exercises, there is also the Homeric parody mentioned above and an ostrakon containing a prose account of the myth of Kyknos.⁵¹

Kellis, however, was a village at a time when Trimithis had been elevated to the status of a *polis*, a status proudly advertised in the wall-paintings of the residence to which R15 was ultimately joined (cf. fig. 5, the figure of Polis).⁵² The local élite of Trimithis accordingly sought an education that befitted the next generation of the Oasite civic and cultural élite, who would in turn decorate their homes and celebrate their public benefactions around the Great Oasis with the myths and measures they learned at school.⁵³ The teacher-poet of the *dipinto* may have been an itinerant καθηγητής or may have returned to his native Oasis after travelling and being active in the Valley. In Trimithis, he would have provided instruction to élite young men who preferred not to study in some other important educational center. Twenty years ago, the literary sophistication of Trimithis was hinted at by isolated bits of poetry published by G. Wagner.⁵⁴ The epigrams in this *dipinto* make good on their promise and afford us a rare glimpse into the setting that helped Greek culture thrive even in the desert.

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47 E. Livrea, "Poema epico-storico attribuito a Soterico di Oasi," *ZPE* 138 (2002) 17-30. In our opinion, Braccini ("L'oasi di Soterico," *Aegyptus* 83 [2003] 163-81) is misguided in changing the traditional provenance of Soterichus from the Great to the Small Oasis.

48 He may be the same person as the *rhetor* mentioned in *P.Kellis* I 54 (a list of expenses).

49 Cribiore (supra n.22) 53-54 and 57.

50 *O. Kell.* 153-57; C. A. Hope and K. A. Worp, "A new fragment of Homer," *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998) 206-10.

51 Hope and Worp (supra n.25) and K. A. Worp, "A mythological ostrakon from Kellis," in G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (edd.), *Oasis Papers III* (Oxford 2003) 379-82.

52 Bagnall and Ruffini (supra n.1). Similar wall-paintings have been found in Kellis (supra n.6); H. Whitehouse, "Wall paintings in shrine IV of the Temple of Tutu," in C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (edd.), *The Dakhleh Oasis Project: preliminary reports 1994-95 to 1998-1999* (Oxford 2002) 311-22.

53 E.g., Bernard (supra n.17) nos. 118-21; Cf. Roueché 1997 (supra n.18).

54 Wagner (supra n.17) 79.