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Peter van Minnen  
Department of Classics  
University of Cincinnati  
410 Blegen Library  
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0226  
USA  
peter.vanminnen@uc.edu

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“Goldfinger” on a Leiden Mummy Label?

Raquel Martín Hernández UCM, Madrid and
Klaas A. Worp Leiden University

Abstract

In this article we will revisit the text of a mummy label from the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden. The label was purchased in 1828 and originated from the collection of the diplomat Giovanni d’Anastasi. It is exhibited in the permanent collection of the Museum, carrying the inventory number AH 159. It has the shape of a tabula ansata, measuring 7.5 (H.) x 24.6 (W.) x 0.5 (T.) cm, and it features four lines of incised text, highlighted with black ink and palaeographically datable to the final years of the third or the early fourth century CE. At the beginning of the second line, moreover, appears a word written in red ink that has not been incised, and traces of red ink appear on the left side of the tablet. Unfortunately, there is no reliable information about the label’s provenance; given our present information about

1 This article is part of a wider project on funerary practice in Egypt and mummy labels, in collaboration with the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Research (ACI-PRO-2011-1132). Martín would like to thank all the colleagues at the Leiden Papyrological Institute for helping her during her stay, especially Cisca Hoogendijk, Brian Muhs, Marja Bakker, and Alette Bakkers. Worp records with gratitude his discussion of the name Χρυσοχέριος with D. Hagedorn. They thank Sofía Torallas Tovar for her comments on an early draft of this paper, and Carolina López-Ruiz and the anonymous BASP referees for polishing the English and their useful comments.


4 On its date, see B. Boyaval, “Notes de papyrologie,” ConnHell 38 (1989) 75-76 (BL 9.278) and Sijpesteijn (n. 3) 221.
other texts from the d’Anastasi collection one may speculate in particular about the regions of Abydos, Memphis/Sakkara, or the Theban region as the provenance of this mummy label, but there is no certainty that only these three regions are acceptable candidates.

Since 1842, this label has been studied in various publications. It was first edited by C. Leemans. In his edition, he presents the following reading, in which the first word in the second line, written in red ink, is not transcribed: Σαραπίων Ερμαισκου Χρυσοχερίου, || Εξηγητεύων ἔναρχος, || Ἐτελεύησεν ἐτῶν || νε’.

In 1853 the label was edited again in CIG 3.4976c (addenda et corrigenda). This version presents a different reading of the text which was slightly changed in SB 5.8694, substituting a dot underneath for the brackets around the ν of the name Χρυσογένης. Both of these readings avoid again the painted word in red ink at the beginning of the second line.

Based on this later reading, the name Χρυσογένης was included in the dictionaries of personal names.

In 1875 Le Blant presented the same reading offered already by Leemans with the following translation: “Sérapion, fils d’Hermaïscos Chrysocherios, exerçant les fonctions d’exégète, est mort [âgé] de cinquante-cinq ans.”

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5 For this collection, see http://www.trismegistos.org/coll/collref_list.php?tm=540&partner=all.
6 C. Leemans, *Animadversiones in Musei Antiquarii Lugduno-Batavi inscriptiones Graecas et Latinas* (Lugduni Batavorum 1842) 28. The editor stated in a previous publication that the text was written in three lines; see Leemans (n. 3) 305, X 2: “2. Bois. Tessère Grecque avec une inscription en 3 lignes, relative à Sarapion, le fils d’Hermaïscus Chrysocherius, member du college des interprètes, décédé à l’age de 55 ans.”
8 E. Le Blant, “Tablai Égyptiennes à Inscriptions grecques,” *RA* 29 (1875) 304, n. 81. The edition is only a transcription in capital letters of the Greek text.
Nearly a hundred years later, all these different editions, translations, and commentaries were studied by Sijpesteijn who edited the text including for the first time the first word of the second line, written in red ink. He interprets the third name on the first line as the genitive form of a personal name Χρυσοχέριος. He understood the name not as a second name of Hermaiskos, like Leemans and Le Blant had done, but as the name of the grandfather of Sarapion. He thus offers the following translation of the text: “Sarapion, son of Hermaiskos, grandson of Chrysocherios. He died at 55 years of age during his tenure of office as an exegetes.”

In 1983 the edition by Sijpesteijn was reproduced in SB 14.11993 as follows:

Σαραπίων Ἑρμαισκοῦ Χρυσοχερίου [[ἐναρχος]] ἐξηγητεύων ἐναρχος ἐτελεύτησεν ἐτῶν

Finally, B. Boyaval included this edition in his corpus of mummy labels. Here we offer an alternative interpretation for χρυσοχέριος and a new reading for the second line. The text we propose runs as follows:

Σαραπίων Ἑρμαισκοῦ χρυσοχερίου [[ἐναρχος]] ἐξηγητεύων ἐνα[[ρ]]γχος ἐτελεύτησεν ἐτῶν

Sarapion, son of Hermaïskos “goldfinger,” holding the office of exegetes lately died at the age of 55.

1 χρυσοχείριος: This is the genitive form of a noun χρυσοχέριος or χρυσοχείριος, not yet attested in papyrus documents or in Greek literature. A
masculine personal name Χρυσοχέρης is attested only in late literature, and the same goes for the personal name Χρυσόχειρ. The latter is also attested in Greek literature as a title meaning “the one with gold on his hands,” “knight,” since this apparently refers to rings.

The noun χρυσοχέριος/-χείριος may be explained as a further thematic development, through some form of adjectivization (suffix -*yos), from the compound noun χρυσόχειρ, or as a new compound of the noun χρυσός and the adjective χείριος. The meaning of both formations is the same: “the one with golden hands / gold on his hands.”

In the various editions of this mummy label χρυσοχέριος has been interpreted as (1) the second name (alias) of Hermaïskos, or as (2) the name of Sarapion’s grandfather.

Now we observe that in mummy labels it is not exceptional to find alias-names. While usually these are introduced by expressions like ἐπικαλομένος, “also called,” or ὁ καί, “too,” they sometimes occur without any indication and without the article.

As to the second option, it should be kept in mind that often enough in our documents an article is absent before a papponymic, while in other documents it does appear in the same position (cf. above, n. 10).

14 In the accusative in Thphn. Chron., p. 468. The name is considered an eponym in Phot. Epist. 134 and Contra Manichaeos, 173.

15 Georgius Cedrenus, Compendium historiarum, Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus, De thematibus, Josephus Genesius, Basiileia, or Joannes Scylitzes, Synopsis historiarum. The name Χρυσοχέρης – either derived from Χρυσοχέριος, with the omicron lost (see J. A. Berenguer-Sánchez and J. Rodríguez Somolinos, “Sur la flexion nominale en –ις, -ιν,” in B. Palme (ed.), Akten des 23. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses [Vienna 2007]), or a corruption for Χρυσοχέρης – is also attested, see Petrus, Historia utilis et refutatio Manichaorum vel Paulicianorum 67.

16 As explained in the scholium to Luc. Tim. 20: ἡ τοῖς δακτυλίοις περιαυγαζόμενοι τοῖς χρυσοῖς ἢ δι’ εὐπορίαν υπερβάλλουσαν χειροπληθῶς τὸν χρυσὸν διασπείροντες.

17 A compound noun with a second element in –χαίριος (cf. Lat. Eucherius) seems unlikely.

18 By Leemans (n. 6) and Le Blant (n. 8). On the absence of an introduction of the alias name in question, cf. below.

19 By Sijpesteijn (n. 3).


Next to these two options we think it is also possible to understand this as a nickname meaning “goldhand” or even “goldfinger” (pars pro toto). Such a nickname could refer to a skilful person (an outstanding craftsman or – metaphorically – someone with an exceptional ability to make money). In general, mummy labels often present the profession of the deceased or of his or her father (and often enough without the article) in the same way as in our mummy label.23

In sum, it is quite possible that χρυσοχέριος/-χείριος can be taken as a nickname of Ἑρμαίσκος, based on his excellent qualities. In the final end, however, we feel unable to pronounce a clear preference for any of the three options.22

22 In the same way as some other nicknames composed with χρυσο- like χρυσόστο-, the epithet of orators. A parallel compound / nickname based upon two words, one indicating a material and the other a part of the human body, and related to a profession, is σκυτόβραχιον, “the one with a leather arm.” Suda s.v. Διονύσιος Μυτιληναῖος (Δ 1175) says that he was nicknamed σκυτόβραχιον and also σκυτεύς, “shoemaker.”

23 For example SB 1.1191 = C.Étiq.Mom. 105: Ματρώνα / γυνὴ Ἀπολλωνίου ἱατρ(οῦ), “Matrona, wife of Apollonios the physician”; SB 1.3439 = C.Étiq.Mom. 198: Βῆσις θυγάτηρ Πανίσκου γεωμέτρου, “Besis, daughter of Paniskos the geometer” (in this mummy label the recto is written in black ink and the verso, featuring the same text, in red ink); SB 1.4218 = C.Étiq.Mom. 353: Ψενθατρῆτος / μητρὸς Σενπε/τεβήκιος, θρυο/πάλης, “(Body of) Psenthatres whose mother was Senpe/tebeckis, the reed seller”; SB 1.4387 = C.Étiq.Mom. 361: Πανισκεῦτος / κουρέως σῆμα, “The mummy of Paniskeus, the barber”; SB 1.4970 = C.Étiq.Mom. 2045: Μίκκα/λος Δίδυμου να/υπηγός / Πανώ(γ) πόλεως, “Mikkalos, son of Didymos, the shipbuilder of Panopolis” (note that the Sammelbuch editor inserts a full stop after ναυπηγός, resolving only Πανώ(ν)).

(1) The adverb ἐναγχός (in itself looking like a regular Greek adjective ending in –ος) is connected with the office ἐξηγητέων: “lately holding the office of exegetes.”25 In the papyri it appears, when modifying a participle, a substantivized participle.26

(2) The adverb ἐναγχός is to be taken in connection with the verb ἐτελεύτησεν and must be understood as “he died recently at the age of 55.” Phrasings stressing a premature or, at least, an unexpected death are attested in mummy labels. Likewise, expressions modifying the precise moment in which the deceased died occur,27 but to date the adverb ἐναγχός has never been used. While the first option cannot be ruled out, the second option is marginally preferable in view of the new reading of the third word on this line. In our rendering of the text we have deemed it wise to leave the matter open as much as possible by taking ἐναγχός apo koινού with both ἐξηγητέων and ἐτελεύτησεν.

As regards our reading ἐναγχός, on top of the word’s fourth letter the photo shows an extra stroke, suggesting a scribal correction. The person who incised the text into the wood produced a ρ instead of a γ probably because the use of ἐναρχός in connection with ἐξηγητός was more familiar than the use of the adverb ἐναγχός.28 When he noticed the mistake, probably because of the previous draft, he incised a horizontal stroke on top of the ρ, leaving its loop untouched.

A reading ἐναγχός in this position, therefore, makes the first inked draft agree with the final incised version, and maintains a logical syntax for the text.

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25 For the office of exegetes see D. Hagedorn, “Prosopographie der Exegeten der Städte und Metropolen Ägyptens,” P.Hamb. 4, pp. 217-271. This mummy label is his text nr. 259.

26 E.g. P.Lond. 2.198, P.Thmouis 1, and P.Lond. 5.1708.

27 E.g. SB 1.2632 + T. Möller 23 = C.Étiq.Mom. 196: Θομωσίωτος Σανσνώτος Ψεντφωτος / ἐβίωσεν ἐτῶν μιᾶς Χοι(άκ), “(Body of) Thmosios, daughter of Sansnos, son of Psentphos. She lived 20 years in full until Choiak.”

28 The problematic use of ἐναρχός in this position was noted by Sijpesteijn (n. 3) 222: “the combination of ἐξηγητέων and ἐναρχός, and the order in which these words are used (in this connection it totally escapes me why ἐναρχός has been written with ink before ἐξηγητέων’ but afterwards not incised).” Ἐναρχός in connection with the charge appears in, e.g., PMil. 1.2.63; P.Coll.Youtie 1.28; P.Mil.Vog. 4.221; P.Ryl. 2.120, P.Oxy. 31.2584. The normal use of ἐναρχός with the charge ἐξηγητής (but never with the present active participle), and the clear ρ, must have influenced the editions of the mummy label.
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