Papyrus Sign: Comments on L2/03-194

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Introduction
In document L2/03-194 by Asmus Freytag (hereafter, A), a proposal is made to encode a character PAPYRUS SYMBOL, with the representative glyph shown in Figure 1:

![Figure 1. Representative glyph for proposed character PAPYRUS SIGN](image)

Comments from A clarify the design of this glyph further: “In common with Fraktur designs for the capital letter P the bowl of the glyph touches the baseline and the vertical stroke is a descender.” A explains the source of this glyph as coming from Crossan (1998), and provides a sample, repeated here:

![Figure 2. Source of representative glyph for proposed character PAPYRUS SIGN (Crossan 1998)](image)

A also provides an example from a sample of the SIL Apparatus font that shows a similar glyph:

![Figure 3. Sample using SIL Apparatus font containing a similar glyph](image)

The glyph in the SIL Apparatus font was based on the design used in the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament:
The description in A fits all of these samples: a capital form with the bowl on the baseline and a descending stem.

A goes on to suggest, however, that there is little variation among various sources in the design of the symbol denoting papyri, and that this design is distinct from that of Fraktur p as used for mathematical symbols:

“However, the shape as used in various sources sticks close to a particular form, with rather minor deviations and does not match the more angular forms of the Fraktur font used for the mathematical symbols in the Standard, nor the Fraktur forms that are used for similar textual annotations and in the same context as this letter.”

(The latter point refers, for instance, to the contrast in design seen in Figure 4 between the papyrus sign and the Fraktur M.)

It is certainly the case that the design of the representative glyph in A and of the glyphs in the samples shown above are distinct from those for Fraktur math symbols in the Standard, shown here:

What is not true, however, is that sources are consistent in using a design similar to that in Figure 1 for a papyrus sign.

Discussion

First of all, it is not the case that all sources use a Fraktur or Gothic typeform:

In designating mss. of the Greek N.T., the papyri are indicated by a capital or Gothic capital letter followed by a superscript numeral (e.g., P³⁸). This is the designation used in N.T. textual criticism. Of course, when these mss. are housed in a library they usually have a local library catalog number as well.
Of course, these publications may have avoided Fraktur or Gothic forms for reasons related to cost of production rather than any typographic preference. Even among publications that do use Fraktur/Gothic forms, however, there is by no means consistency on designs like that in Figure 1. The well-known lexicon and grammar from University of Chicago Press (BAGD, BDF) use a capital Gothic form:

Many other sources, including the Greek New Testament published by the United Bible Societies and companion volumes, use a small Fraktur p:
Note also that the SIL Apparatus font contains not only the glyph shown in Figure 3, but also a small Fraktur p based on the design from UBS3 that was illustrated in Figure 11:

ΔΘΕΠΨΜΨΛΒΓΧΚΜΨΤΨΥΠΓΛΕΕ

The designs used in these sources are consistent with the designs from Fraktur fonts cited by A, which were presented in A to demonstrate a contrast between the range of designs of Fraktur p and the limited design variations of the PAPYRUS SIGN:
Conclusions

Whatever the overall merits for proposing a character PAPYRUS SIGN, a case in support of the proposal cannot be made on the basis of a specific design that is used consistently across sources and that is distinct from typical Fraktur designs. In fact, a range of designs are used, and the design used for the representative glyph of U+1D52D MATHEMATICAL FRAKTUR SMALL P is not at all uncommon. Indeed, it has been my impression (and, I believe, that of other implementers and users with whom I have discussed the encoding of the papyrus symbol) that the representative glyph for U+1D52D is perhaps the design most commonly used to denote papyri.

It is not clear to me, therefore, that existing characters U+1D513 and U+1D52D cannot be used to denote papyri in the context of Biblical Greek studies, with designs like those found in Figure 1 and Figure 3 considered glyph variants of U+1D52D.

If a new character PAPYRUS SIGN is encoded, it would certainly be used, and it would make it clear to users what character is considered the appropriate one for denoting papyri. It should be made clear, however, that there is a range of variation in designs for this character rather than one specific design (in contradiction to statements made in A). If a character PAPYRUS SIGN were restricted to a narrow range of designs, that could actually lead to confusion or frustration on the part of some users familiar with a different design.

References.


