

## **New 1,700-Year-Old Christian Letter Sheds Light Into the Lives of Early Christians**



A 1,700-year-old letter was recently unveiled by researches from the University of Basil, detailing the lives of early Christian believers and their lifestyles.

The letter, written from one Christian to another, is the oldest Christian letter outside of New Testament copies.

The letter, written by a man named “Arrianus,” to his brother “Paulus,” is 40 to 50 years older than any other known Christian document outside of the Bible. Researches concluded that “Paulus” is most likely named after the Apostle Paul who wrote a large amount of the New Testament.

In the letter, Arrianus talks about their life under the Roman empire, including their faith, politics, and even food.

The letter translated reads:

"Greetings, my lord, my incomparable brother Paulus. I, Arrianus, salute you, praying that all is as well as possible in your life.

"[Since] Menibios was going to you, I thought it necessary to salute you as well as our lord father. Now, I remind you about the gymnasiarchy, so that we are not troubled here. For Heracleides would be unable to take care of it: he has been named to the city council. Find thus an opportunity that you buy the two [-] arouras.

"But send me the fish liver sauce too, whichever you think is good. Our lady mother is well and salutes you as well as your wives and sweetest children and our brothers and all our people. Salute our brothers [-]genes and Xydes. All our people salute you.

"I pray that you fare well in the Lord."

Sabine Heubner, a professor of Ancient History at the University of Basel in Switzerland, where the letter is located, explained that the letter sheds a light on the lifestyles of the early Christians.

"The earliest Christians in the Roman Empire are usually portrayed as eccentrics who withdrew from the world and were threatened by persecution. This is countered by the contents of the Basel papyrus letter," Huebner explained. "The letter contains indications that in the early third century, Christians were living outside the cities in the Egyptian hinterland, where they held political leadership positions and did not differ from their pagan environment in their everyday lives."

Huebner also pointed out that the author uses an abbreviated version of the phrase "I pray that you farewell 'in the Lord,'" which separates it from other early letters of Greco-Roman Egypt.

"The use of this abbreviation – known as a *nomen sacrum* in this context – leaves no doubt about the Christian beliefs of the letter writer," Huebner explained. "It is an exclusively Christian formula that we are familiar with from New Testament manuscripts."

She further pointed out that the name "Paulus" was an important detail because it "was an extremely rare name at that time," which indicates that the "parents mentioned in the letter were Christians," and probably "named their son after the apostle as early as 200 AD."

The letter, known as P.Bas 2.43, came from the village of Theadelphia in central

Egypt and belongs to the Heronius archive. The Heronius archive is the largest papyrus archive from Rome and has been in the Swiss University for the past 100 years.

Huebner, who wrote "The Family in Roman Egypt: A Comparative Approach to Intergenerational Solidarity and Conflict," is penning her next book "Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament," based off of the social, political, and economic life of the earliest Christians.

[pravmir.com](http://pravmir.com)