An Approach to the Papyrological Understanding of Paul's Laboring "Night and Day"
(1Thess. 2.9)
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This article deals with the question how Paul's notion of laboring "night and day" in 1Thess. 2.9 can be understood properly against the background of contemporary documentary papyri and ostraca. After short introductory remarks the general situation of 1Thess. is illuminated briefly in order to provide some basic information on Paul writing about his engagement towards the community. The main interest is focused on comparing the notion of laboring "night and day" in 1Thess. 2.9 and the occurrence of μυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας in documentary papyri and ostraca.

1. Introductory remarks

As a project assistant of Peter Arzt-Grabner I have been given the opportunity to comment on 1Thessalonians within the PKNT (Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament) series.1 This article presents a few details of my work within the research project "Papyrologischer Kommentar zum 1. und 2. Thessalonikerbrief" of the Austrian Science Fund. Before concentrating on the papyrological matters, some basic information shall be provided about the socio-geographical and historical context of Paul's engagement towards the Christian community of Thessalonike.

2. Ancient Thessalonike and Paul's engagement towards the young community

Thessalonike is situated at the northeast end of the Gulf of Thermae. As the main port of Macedonia and because of the Roman route for commerce Via Egnatia in the North of the town, it was of great economic and military importance. It was founded by Cassander in 316/315 BCE, the oldest son of Antipater and later king of Macedonia (302–297 BCE).

Around 50 CE, approximately at the time of Paul's arrival in Thessalonike, the town had a distinct multicultural character because of its long and diverse settlement history: Thracians (around 1000 BCE), Greeks (6th–5th century BCE), Macedonians (around 500 BCE) and Romans (from mid-2nd century BCE onwards) had left their traces among the population.2 According to Acts 17, Paul upon arrival in the town

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preached at the synagogue and won not only Jews but also numerous Greeks. Concerning the multifaceted image of the town and the diversity of the newly formed community Paul did not find any stable structures he could have relied on, but was forced to invent new ones in order to establish the community very carefully. In this respect it was one of his basic interests to earn his own living, which might have had two major reasons. First, he wanted to share his entire life with the community members (cf. 1Thess. 2.8) in order to let them learn from his example. Secondly, he simply did not want to burden the community financially. Paul therefore declares in 1Thess. 2.9 that he was laboring "night and day." In order to gain knowledge of the everyday use and understanding of νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, the meaning of the expression will be investigated in the following as it occurs in documentary papyri and ostraca.

3. Paul’s laboring "night and day" and νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας in documentary papyri and ostraca

The notion νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας occurs frequently and in different contexts in the documentary papyri. The first comprises the area of typical manual work like dyke maintenance, irrigation or harvest work or shift work. The second, which is also to be seen as physical work, covers the context of caring for a person in nursing contracts, which reveals the aspect of personal responsibility for a baby or child. One text shows that this understanding is not attested only in nursing contracts exclusively but also occurs in a private letter, and covers both aspects as well: performing a physical duty and being responsible for someone. The connection of both aspects is of importance for the understanding of Paul’s attitude and behavior towards the community.

In order to interpret 1Thess. 2.9, first the context of typical manual work shall be considered. The following excerpts show that a person or a group of persons was actually forced to work "night and day" for certain reasons.

3 1Thess. 2.8 attests Paul’s and his collaborators’ loving care towards the community: οὕτως ἀμερόμενοι ὡμῶν εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦμεν ὡμίν ὡν μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἐαυτῶν ψυχὰς, διότι ἄγαπητοι ὡμίν ἐγεννηθήτε (KJV: “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us”).

4 1Thess. 2.9, μνημονεύετε γάρ, ἀδελφοί, τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μή ἐπιβαρήσαι τινα ὡμόν (KJV: “For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God”).

5 It shall be stated here that in both contexts the physical aspect of working continuously for a certain time period is prevailing, but especially in the case of nursing contracts the aspect of personal responsibility comes into consideration.

6 A complete papyrological investigation and interpretation of the whole verse would of course require to comment on the occurrence and understanding of ἔργαζομαι in the documentary material. This would exceed the frame of the article. So I only make reference to Acts 18.3 at this point, where Paul is introduced as a tentmaker (σκηνοσκευαστής), which means that he was used to manual work; cf. generally Arzt-Grabner (2003), op.cit. (above, n. 1) 65–66. The verb ἔργαζομαι designated manual work in general, cf. F. Winter in P. Arzt-Grabner et al. (eds.), 1. Korinther. PKNT 2 (Göttingen 2006) 179–180. It might be mentioned that manual work had a rather bad social reputation in antiquity, so Paul was definitely not a member of the establishment, but he performed his mission-activity as a member of the socially disprivileged working-class; cf. I. Weiler, “Arbeit und Arbeitslosigkeit im Altertum,” in E. Sigot (ed.), Oitium – Negotium: Beiträge des interdisziplinären Symposiums der Sodalitas zum Thema Zeit, Carnuntum 28.–30.8.1998 (Vienna 2000) 39–65; id., "Mensch und Arbeit in der Antike: Umbrüche – Wandel – Kontinuität,” in Bericht über den 23. Österreichischen Historikertag in Salzburg. Veranstaltet von...
In the petition to an epimeletes, *P.Tebt. III.1* 782 (153 BCE), a certain Heliodoros, cultivator of Crown land, complains in ll. 6–9: γενομένου μου διὰ νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας | περί τὸν [τι]όυτον ποτισμὸν χάριν τοῦ γεγονότος | περί τὴν κόψιν έκρήγματος πρός τὸ μή | ἕκπεσεύ τοῦ δέοντος καιροῦ ("I have busied myself night and day with the irrigation of these [arurae of Crown land] owing to the breach of the dyke in the village in order not to miss the right season"). The lines reveal that Heliodoros was under pressure and had apparently no other chance but to stay at work during "night and day" if he wanted to avoid further damage and save the harvest. He indeed seemed to have worked without interruption throughout the described problematic situation.

The petition *P.Tebt. I* 48 (118–112 BCE) is addressed to the komogrammateus Menches. The πρεσβύτεροι τῶν γεωργῶν, represented by the komarch Horos, complain about having suffered an assault while conducting their duty. The group had put itself under considerable pressure since it had undertaken to collect 1500 artabae of wheat from the γεωργοῖ by a certain date (10th of Pachon) in addition to an extra amount of 80 artabae in connection with the forthcoming visit of King Ptolemy Soter II. In order to achieve their ambitious goal, the πρεσβύτεροι (ll. 9–12): προσ | ἑδρεύοντων διά τε νυκτός | καὶ ήμέρας μέχρι τοῦ ἐπι προκείμενον ἐκπληρώσαι ("have been working night and day to make up the aforesaid amount"). Under the peculiar circumstances it can be imagined that the group was actually committed to work continuously.

The fragmentary text *P.Lips. II* 132 (25 CE) is an oath on office, in which the presbyteroi of the village Leukos Pyrgos in the Hermopolite nome obligate themselves to coordinate the work at the embankments of the Nile during the high tide. All λαογραφούμενοι are mobilized to secure the embankments. Fifty men are obliged to watch the water level at the riverbanks and the relating fields. In groups of ten they have to be on guard (l. 11): νυκτός τε καὶ ήμέρας ("during night and day"). The responsibility of their assignment did not allow the men to interrupt their work; they were forced to work around the clock for a certain time period.

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7 The notion νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας appears in the unfortunately fragmentary text *SB* XVI 13014.7–8 (2nd century BCE) too, apparently also in connection with the irrigation of land.

8 According to P.W. Pestman in *P.Rain.Cent.* p. 129 (fn. 9) the papyrus might date from 117 BCE: "*P.Tebt. I* 48 mentions a visit of the king and dates from 21–28 May of one of the years 118–112, more precisely of the year 117, I suppose, so that around 22 May 117 Menches could personally present his petition (*P.Tebt. I* 43) to the king." *BL XI,* 271 confirms that it is not compulsory to date *P.Tebt. I* 48 exactly to the year 117.


10 According to P. Maraval in *P.Stras. VII* 646.68 the prepositional expression has the same meaning, but it occurs more rarely: "L' expression διά τε νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας (cf. *P.Tebt. I* 48.10) semble plus rare que νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας." Thus the prepositional expression is not investigated separately in this article.

11 A comparable use and understanding of the notion νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας is found in another oath to undertake an office and in a similar context, namely *BGU* XVI 2590 (25 BCE), where a group of seven persons swears to work: (l. 12) νυκτός καὶ ήμέρας[5] ("during night and day") acting as mutual guarantors for each other in order to undertake the upkeep of three canals until the river recedes. Cf. also the oath of a guard in *P.Oxy. XXXVIII* 2876 (212–214 CE), in which a certain Diogenes
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The texts show clearly that νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας can – at least in the context of typical manual work – be comprehended in the sense of working continuously for a certain time. The persons were under pressure and had effectively no alternative but to perform their work without interruption.

P.Tebt. III.1 706 (171 BCE) is an official letter that outlines the necessity of taking measures for the security of the embankments. This kind of work was usually performed by local peasants who were engaged as χωματοφύλακες. This is not the case in the present text, in which the less specific terms φυλακίται (l. 5–6? and l. 15) and φρουροί (l. 24) are mentioned together with peasants (l. 21). The variability of terms, which is rather uncommon, may indicate the predicament that the persons in charge confronted. The text states the necessity of: (l. 8) [διὰ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ποιεῖσθαι (l. ποιεῖσθαι) τὴν τήρησιν] ("performing the controlling during night and day"). In order to ensure that continuous performance, the work was supposedly done in shifts.

Let us now consider another specific context, namely the caring for a person in nursing contracts, in which the notion νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας occurs frequently. Nursing is physical work, so the texts cannot be investigated completely separate from those which concern manual work, but it is noteworthy that nursing contracts clearly reveal the responsibility which the specific task demanded. The nurse was expected to take care of the child actively as well as perform her standby duty "night and day."

In this sense e.g. P.Bour. 14 (126 CE), the duplicate of a nursing contract, gives reference for the ongoing duty of a nurse to: (ll. 22–23, with BL VIII, 67) ἐπί[η]μελειαν ποιεῖσθαι διὰ τε νυκτός | [καὶ] ἡμέρας ("take care of [the child] during night and day").

P.Ross.Georg. II 18.316–17 (ll. 309–321 = C.Pap.Gr. I 31, with BL VIII, 290), dating to 139–140 CE, reads: ποιήσεται δὲ Ἡρώ τὴν τοῦ παιδίου ἐπιμέλειαν διὰ τε νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας, καὶ οὐκ ἁνδροκοίτησι οὐδὲ διὰ[θερεῖ τὸ γάλα οὐδ' ἄλλο | πα]δίου συνγαλακτοφρήσει αὐτῷ ("Hero [a nurse] has to take care of the child during night and day, and she must neither have sex with a man nor let her milk spoil nor nourish another child together with it").

As already stated above, one text shows that the notion νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας does not only occur in nursing contracts, but is attested as well in a private letter.

swears: (ll. 17–18) παραφυλάξειν | νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας ("to stand guard by night and by day") in a boat along the embankments of the Nile. Cf. general bibliographical reference regarding liturgies and the irrigation work in P.Lips. II 96–97.

12 The genitive expression νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας tends to circumscribe rather unspecific time periods while the accusative νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν might serve to describe an actual time period, cf. νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν in Mk 4.27 (the time in which the sower slept and woke) to νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας in Mk 5.5 (more generally to where the demoniac spent all his time). Nevertheless the idioms are close in meaning, cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch. Bearbeitet von Friedrich Rehkopf (Göttingen 2011) sec. 161 (2) and 186 (2).


14 Cf. generally P.J. Sijpestein, "Zum Bewässerungssystem im Römischen Ägypten: Der χωματεπιμελητής und der χωματεπικτής," Aegyptus 44 (1964) 9–19, who plainly confirms on the basis of numerous text surveys that the supervision of the dykes and probably also of the irrigation work (cf. p. 18, fn. 2) was usually organized by the appropriate officials, foremost by χωματεπιμεληται and χωματεπικται and not merely by normal policemen and peasants.

15 Another mention of νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας in l. 17 unfortunately cannot be interpreted because of the fragmentary condition of the text.

16 Quite similarly, in P.Stras. VII 646 (117–138 CE) a certain nurse was not allowed to put away the child: (l. 4) διὰ τε νυκτός καὶ ἡμέρας ("during night and day").
The text of concern is *P.Rain.Cent. 72* (end of 3rd century CE), which is partly in fragmentary condition. It refers to slanderous talking (ῥήματα κακά in l. 14, cf. also l. 27) and libelous letters, which shocked a woman so severely that a certain Heliodoros: 17 (ll. 21–22) τηροῦντα αὐτής (αὐτήν) νυκτὸς καὶ ημέρας ("cared for her during night and day").

The text reveals that the notion νυκτός καὶ ημέρας must be interpreted literally in a context different from typical manual work. Against the background of nursing contracts and the private letter *P.Rain. Cent. 72* it is evident that two facets of Paul's self testimony are to be seen as interconnected. Most interestingly in *1Thess. 2.7* Paul speaks of himself as a nurse. Considering the two self declarations (*1Thess. 2.7*, being gentle as a nurse and *1Thess. 2.9*, working during night and day) as interrelated within the greater coherence of Paul's missionary engagement towards the community, they attest that Paul might not only have practiced his work as a tentmaker "night and day," but he also reckoned his behavior towards the community with an attitude of professionalism and responsibility.

In summary, the papyrological evidence for νυκτός καὶ ημέρας in connection with typical manual labor, demanding situations, and a high level of stress, urge someone to work continuously. In the other context of caring for someone, especially in nursing contracts, the specific duty, which is also physical, but not typical manual work, reveals the important aspect of personal responsibility and commitment towards a person and a specific task.

Both aspects are important for understanding Paul's engagement towards the community of Thessalonike. Paul did not want to burden the community, so he worked "night and day" (*1Thess. 2.9*) for a certain time and if it was necessary, one can argue against the background of the documentary material. Moreover, Paul was committed to the community personally and felt deeply responsible for it. This finds an expression in his self-depiction as a nurse in *1Thess. 2.7*. One can conclude that Paul comprehended his engagement extensively, professionally as well as emotionally.

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17 The content and coherence of the defamation and the persons involved, unfortunately cannot even be presumed. H. Maehler in *P.Rain.Cent.*, 374: "Wer Heliodoros ist (Z. 19 und 24) und warum die "Herrin" in seiner Ohhunt steht, geht aus dem Brief nicht hervor; diese und andere Einzelheiten, die der heutige Leser nicht wissen und kaum je erraten kann, müssen dem Adressaten jedenfalls bekannt gewesen sein."

18 The participle τηροῦντα can not be interpreted properly in the context; therefore, H. Maehler in *P.Rain.Cent.*, 375 suggests to supplement an iota in order to argue the middle form τηροῦντα<ι>.

19 One more text which does not relate to the conduct of manual work also contains the expression νυκτός καὶ ημέρας. *O.Narm. I 74* (2nd–3rd century CE) is a hard document to interpret, but it seems that someone, maybe in order to prepare for a notarial inspection, dedicates himself or herself: (ll. 2–4) διὰ νυκτός καὶ ημέρας καὶ ἐν ἀκρωί ἀναγινώσκων ("to read loud during night and day").

20 *1Thess. 2.7*, δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι. ἄλλα ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι ἐν μέσω ὕμων, ὡς ἐὰν τροφός δὰλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα (KJV: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children").