The Spathion Jar in the Papyri*

In recent papers Ph. Mayerson (hereafter M.) suggested that the *σπάθιον* (sometimes spelled *ςπατιον*), a Greek technical term found in the papyri from Egypt for a container of (mostly) liquids, should be identified with a Syriac measure "Sabitha/Sapation" known from the Syriac version of Epiphanius' *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*. This Syriac measure is known to have been reckoned in the city of Askalon as the equivalent of 22 sextarii vs. that of 14 sextarii in the city of Gaza.

Though at first sight M.'s suggested identification seems illuminating for the question of the Greek word's problematical etymology, in the final analysis his argument is not convincing.

1. His lapidary statement "In Egypt, however, *ςπατιον* designated a wineskin" (*ZPE* 121 [1998] 227 middle) is not backed up by any (circumstantial) evidence; on this topic see below.

2. References to spathia together with other jars/containers like the diploun, the dichoron, the keramion, or the knidion (cf. below)

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* All dates are A.D., unless otherwise stated.


3 Usually the noun *ςπαθιον* is regarded as the diminutive form of the noun *ςπαθη*, cf. G. Wagner in *O.Douch* II 84.1n. and K.A. Worp in *ZPE* 101 (1994) 102, note to l. 6.
within a single context suggest that the manufacturing material for the spathia was not intrinsically different from that of the other containers.

3. M. neglects the evidence provided by the text of SB XIV 11552.16-7 (III) in which the sailors of a ship will be provided with, among other things, κ[πε]ω [θ][μ]ο[ξ]χει-1[ου] cπαδίων δέκα.4 It is evident from a comparison of this passage with three entries for "οίνου cπαδίων (l. cπαθίων)" in the administrative list found in SB XIV 11593.18, 25, 42 (IV) that the spelling cπαδίων should be taken as an error for cπαθίων⁵ and that in SB XIV 11552.16-7 we are dealing with "10 spathion-jars of preserved calf meat;" it is out of the question, of course, that one is dealing here with 10 wine skins used for packing preserved meat.⁶

While returning to the traditional interpretation of the spathion as a type of earthenware jar we think that there is good reason to pay some further attention to the term and its use. First we present a listing in chronological order of all attestations of the term in a sense of a jar known to us mostly via the Duke Data Bank of Documentary Papyri (PHI CD-ROM #7); all references concern οίνου cπαθία ("spathia of wine") unless indicated otherwise ("-" indicates that the commodity or a precise amount of spathia is not indicated in the text):

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5 An indication of this error was not given in the ed.princ. of SB XIV 11552, hence the editors of the Sammelbuch did not mention the error in a critical apparatus for this text. For evidence on the interchange of aspirated and voiced dentals (θ > δ, δ > θ), cf. F.Th. Gignac, Grammar, I 96-7.

6 An Askalonion is used as a container for packing calf meat in SB XX 14574.2.
Not listed above are the following doubtful "attestations":

1. P.Oxy. XIV 1751v.2 σπαθίων is restored in an entry "ὑπὲρ τιμής σπα[-" ; one may well wonder why not another word starting with σπα- is restored here, e.g. υπέρ τιμής σπανελαίου?

2. O.Douch II 84.2-5 and 162.2 (cf. also II 145): the measure read as "(σπαθίων)" or "(σπαθία)" is expressed by a monogrammatic symbol consisting of the letters "Chi"+ "Rho" (for which cf. II 128.3-6n.); it should, however, be noted that no such symbol for σπαθίων is known from anywhere else, while the correct

7 We think that the numeral to be restored for the σπαθία should be restored as 17. Adding to these 3 σπαθία (cf. ll. 19-20) one arrives at 20 σπαθία (l. 20). And via adding up the 10 σπαθία from l. 17, the 20 σπαθία from l. 20 and the 10 σπαθία from l. 22, one arrives at 40 σπαθία in l. 23.
reading of *O.Douch* II 84.1 (cf. Pl. 7) seems to be Ξανονος or υπ' Ανον( ) [or -αλινον for -ανον ?]), rather than σπαθια. Therefore, in both of these texts it seems inescapable to prefer the editor's alternative reading, i.e. χρημη (cf. for this measure *O.Douch* II 173.3, 4; III 321.2 ff.; IV 358; 386.4, 5; 390; 448.5).

3. *SB* XVI 12806, republished in *O.Douch* III 327; here, too, the σπαθιον in l. 2 of the ed.princ. has been substituted by the χρημη.

4. *P.Ant.* I 46'.12 [IV], σπαδιον καινον (καιλ.) 24, where the editor takes σπαδιον as standing for σπαθιον; he interprets this, however—probably in view of the following amount of 24 talents—, as "a new knife" (i.e. really the diminutive of σπαθιη), rather than as a type of jar.

5. *SB* XVIII 13613.10-11, where the editorial reading "σφατια (l. σπαθια)" has now been corrected into <ό>ςφατια, cf. *BL* X 221.

6. *P.Laur.* IV 186 B.2-6, 8-11 (VII), where the abbreviation ψαθ( ) should not be taken as an erroneous spelling of σπαθιον. For the correct interpretation ψαθιον = ψαθιον = "small basket" cf. *P.Neph.* 5.11n. Likewise, the reading ψ(αθια) in *P.Laur.* IV 185 A.14, 15 (VII; cf. Plate CXIX) looks exceptional and doubtful to us (we are not even certain of the reading of a letter ψ) and we do not think that this can be taken as an attestation of the jar name abbreviated as σπ(αθιον).

First of all we note that the term spathion is attested from the late II/early III onwards (cf. the 4 toll receipts in *P.Lond.* III 1266 and *SB* XII 10913). The majority of its attestations, however, are found in fourth century papyri; only a few later texts mention it, cf. *P.Ant.* III 194, *P.Oxy.* XVI 2043, 2048, LXIII 4387 (all V), *P.Oxy.* I 155 and *SB* XX 14533 (both VI). The usual spelling is σπαθιον; next to this the spelling variants σπατιον or σπαδιον do occur, but they are not frequent. Furthermore, we note that the term is attested in all more or less important regions of Egypt, hence it appears not to be a "technical" word used only on a limited, regional/local basis.

The largest amount of spathia is found in *P.Nag.Hamm.* 17.2, 3410 σ. This, however, is the only case of hundreds of σπαθια, much higher than the next highest number of 144 σπαθια men-

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8 For σπαδιον, cf. above, *SB* XII 11552.17, 11593.18, 25, 42; *P.Ant.* 46'.12.
9 It should be noted that only here the abbreviation c(παθια) is used, whereas elsewhere one finds usually c(παθιον) or cπαθιον, only rarely (e.g. *P.Oxy.* XLVIII 3387.4) as "c(πα)θιον(ον)."
tioned in *Anal.Pap.* 10-11 (1998/9) 108 #3. Most amounts are in the range between 1-10 σπαθία. Fractions of σπαθία do not seem to occur, and we also do not find terms like *ήμισισσάθίου* (or, for that matter, *δισσάθίου*). This is remarkable in that the occurrences in the papyri of "halves" or "doubles" of a standard jar are numerous (cf. terms like, e.g., ἡμικυκλίδιον and διλέβιδιον, διπλοκέραμον, διπλοῦν, and διχωρον).

It is easily observed that a spathion is predominantly a container for wine, but other commodities are also packed in sathia, cf. *SB* XIV 11552.16-7 (κρέως μοσχίνου = "calf meat"), *P.Abinn.* 4.5, 11 (both with ἐλαίου = "oil"), *P.Oslo* III 161.5, *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2729.38, *P.Ryl.* IV 627.76, *SB* XIV 12173.14 and XX 14956.ii.44 (all with γάρμον = "spicy fish sauce"), *P.Ryl.* IV 627.79 (with ὄλαφακτον = "unbruised lentils") and *P.Ryl.* IV 627.294 (with γλυκέος = "sweet must").

There are a few price indications of wine per spathion (cf. R.S. Bagnall, *Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt*. BASP Suppl. 5 [Atlanta 1985] 66):

ca. 318: The price of 1 spath. = ca. 9.5x that of 1 sext. (cf. *P.Ryl.* IV 629-39).

c. 337-48: The price of 1 spath. = ca. 4.5-6x that of 1 sext., especially if the knidion is reckoned at 5 sext. (cf. *SPP* XX 75, *BGU* I 21 and *P.Ant.* I 46).

c. 338-41: The price of 1 spath. = 4-6x that of 1 knidion (cf. *SB* XIV 11593).

c. 345/46: The price of 1 spath. = ca. 2x that of 1 knidion (cf. *P.Oxy.* LVI 3874.34-5).

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10 Cf. also the 66 στ. in *P.Oxy.* X 1298.14, 18, the 40 στ. in *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2728.23, the 32 στ. in *P.Oxy.* XVI 2043.9, the 30 στ. in *P.Oxy.* LXIII 4387.4, 5, the 20 στ. in *P.Oxy.* I 155.3 and in XXXIV 2728.20, the 18 + 12 στ. in *P.Oxy.* XIV 1771, the 15 στ. in *P.Abinn.* 75.17, and the 12 στ. in *P.Lond.* III 1266 B.5 and C.5 and in *P.Oxy.* LVI 3854.4.6.

11 1 spathion costs 20 tal., 1 knidion costs 3 tal. 2000 dr. - 5 tal. Actually, Bagnall states (op.cit.): "3 tal., 2000 dr./sextarius." but this is an oversight for "3 tal., 2000 dr./knidion."

12 1 spathion costs 20 tal., a knidion costs 9 tal.
These price indications appear incompatible with the hypothesis considered below that a ("the"?) standard size of a spathion may have been the equivalent of 12 sext. It is, however, an open question whether the wine mentioned in the various texts (or even within one single text) was always of the same quality, and it is also uncertain whether in all cases one is dealing with knidia of the same size; after all, knidia are known to have contained 3-5 and 8 sext., while one should also reckon with a 6-sext. knidion.\textsuperscript{13}

As to the question in what relationship a spathion stood versus containers of other names like διπλὴ, κεράμια, and/or κνίδια, one finds the following sequences:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
P.Ant. III 194.4,5 & διπλὴ 10, σπαθία 10 \\
P.Oxy. XVI 2043.7 & διπλὴ 14, σπαθία 4 \\
SB XIV 12576.34 & κεράμια 9, σπαθία 1 \\
P.Ryl. IV 627.67,98 & κνίδια -, σπαθία - \\
SB SIV 11983.5 & κνίδια 9, κνιδίων 1 \\
P.Oxy. I 155.3 & κνίδια 20, σπαθία 20 \\
SB XIV 11983.85 & κνίδια 33, σπαθία 2 \\
P.Oxy. LVI 3862.23 & μεγάλα κνίδια 85, σπαθία 2 \\
P.Ross.Georg. V 61,D'.6 & σπαθία 4, διπλὴ 2 \\
P.Laur. I 17.16 & σπαθίων 1, δίχωρον 1 \\
P.Col. VIII 239.6 & σπαθίων 1, κεράμια 2 \\
P.Col. VIII 239.5 & σπαθία 3, κεράμια 5 \\
P.Abinn. 75.2 & σπαθία 4, κεράμια 3 \\
P.Laur. I 17.9 & σπαθία 2, κνίδια 2, διπλὴ 2 \\
\end{tabular}

This listing shows that one finds spathia either preceded or followed by various type designations of earthenware jars (dipla, keramia, knidia), in other words, there is no fixed sequence of, e.g., the type "διπλὴ X, σπαθία Y, κεράμια Z" (in that case the logical inference would be that the size of an earthenware spathion fell in between that of other earthenware jars like διπλὴ and κεράμια).

About the size of a diploun, resp. a keramion, it will suffice to say that in Roman Egypt a diploun counted $8 \chi\omicron\omicron\epsilon\omicron = \pm 26.25$ l., while in Byzantine Egypt the content of the diploun is attested as ranging between 4.5-8 sextarii. Furthermore, it is known now that in Roman Egypt knidia are attested counting 4 or 12 $\chi\omicron\omicron\epsilon\omicron$ and that likewise there are $\kappa\epsilon\rho\alpha\mu\mu\alpha$ of 2 and 4 $\chi\omicron\omicron\epsilon\omicron$, while in the fourth century the $\kappa\epsilon\rho\alpha\mu\mu\alpha$ (a "neutral" term par excellence) sometimes appears to contain $3 \chi\omicron\omicron\epsilon\omicron = 18$ sext.\textsuperscript{14} It remains, therefore, an open question whether individual scribes preferred to give first the larger jars, then some smaller jar, or vice versa. In this connection it should also be considered that in principle the content of a spathion, too, may have varied, in as far as there may have been $\sigma\pi\alpha\theta\iota\alpha\mu\alpha$ mega\alpha vs. $\sigma\pi\alpha\theta\iota\alpha\mu\alpha\mu\kappa\rho\alpha$, like there were, e.g., $\kappa\nu\delta\delta\alpha$ mega\alpha vs. $\kappa\nu\delta\delta\alpha$ micro\alpha (cf. \textit{BGU XII} 2179.7n.; one might assume that the latter have, e.g., only half the size of the first).

While stressing that spathia should not be considered "wineskins," we make two other observations: (1) on the terminology and use of wineskins in Egypt, and (2) on the size(s) of the spathion:

1. One expects the normal term for "wineskin" to have been in Egypt, as in Classical Greece, $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa\acute{o}$c (= "skin, hide," hence "skin made into a bag," cf. \textit{LSJ} s.v.). Indeed, askoi appear in the papyri a number of times between the third century B.C. (in the Zenon papyri, cf. \textit{Pap.Lugd.Bat.} 21, General Index XX) and the fifth century A.D. (\textit{SB XIV} 11621).\textsuperscript{15} It is, however, striking that one finds this term used in Egypt virtually exclusively to refer to packing oil or water (in \textit{O.Claud.}) rather than wine. Probably it is no coincidence that during the whole of the Ptolemaic and the first part of the Roman period wineskins were apparently never in frequent use in Egypt (otherwise one would probably have found traces of this practice in the papyrus documentation at large). Larger quantities of wine were normally packed always in earthenware jars rather than

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.} (1999) 118-9 and 126-7, and (2000) 65 ff., s.v. $\kappa\nu\delta\delta\alpha$.

\textsuperscript{15} We are not certain that it is inescapable to resolve oivov $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa( )$ in \textit{P.Naqlun} 9'9 into oivov $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa(\omicron\omicron\omicron)$, while in l. 8 the same abbreviation $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa( )$ is resolved into $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa(\alpha\lambda\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron)$. In both lines, and also in 9'31 (where $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa( )$ is left unresolved), we would consider resolving some form of $\acute{\alpha}k\kappa(\alpha\lambda\omicron\omicron\nu\omicron)$, for which see Kruit and Worp, \textit{op.cit.} (above, n. 13, 2000), esp. fn. 84.
in animal skins,\textsuperscript{16} simply because animal skins, given their vulnerability, were probably not well suited for packing quantities of wine larger than for immediate personal use.\textsuperscript{17} The attestations of the term askos indicate that the contents of such skins were (understandably enough) more susceptible to variation than earthenware vessels; in \textit{SB} XII 10906.2-3 one askos of oil was considered the equivalent of 1 metretes, but in \textit{P.Cair.Zen.} I 59012.105 1 askos was the equivalent of 2 metretai while in \textit{P.Wisc.} II 80.88 2 askoi seem to be the equivalent of 1.5 metretai.\textsuperscript{18}

2. In all of the attestations of the term spathion there seems to be no direct indication of its size in terms of choes, kotylai or sextarii. One would reckon, however, that at least some people would have wished to indicate (or wanted to know) more or less precisely how much wine would be packed in a spathion. If, e.g., it was stated in a letter (cf. \textit{P.Oxy.} LVI 3854) that 10 and 12 spathia filled with wine were to be transported to Oxyrhynchus for sale on the local market, without some pre-existing idea about the size of an individual spathion it would have been anybody’s guess (approximately) how much wine was in fact sent in these vessels. This is not a very attractive idea. In fact, in the work of Bishop Epiphanius already referred to above one finds a term "espajhûn" (cf. J.E. Dean, \textit{op.cit.} (above, n. 2) § 35, p. 52). This term is rendered by Dean—apparently following K. Brockelmann, \textit{Lexicon Syriacum}, (Halle 1928\textsuperscript{2}/repr. Hildesheim 1961) 35—into Greek as \(\varsigma \pi \nu \delta \varepsilon \varepsilon \iota \nu\), but to us looks

\textsuperscript{16} One may even ask whether \(\acute{\alpha} \kappa \kappa \iota\) were sometimes made of material other than animal skin; only in \textit{SB} VI 9066.11 are the \(\acute{\alpha} \kappa \kappa \iota\) specifically stated to be \(\delta \varepsilon \rho \mu \alpha \tau \iota \nu \) ("made of skin").

\textsuperscript{17} In order to prevent evaporation and to decrease porosity water skins had to be impregnated with oil. On this subject and on the use of water skins in Mons Claudianus, cf. R.S. Daniel, "Neither Do They Put Old Wine in New Skins," \textit{ZPE} 101 (1994) 61-6. It would be surprising, of course, if only starting with the end of the second century A.D. regular reference would suddenly have been made to such wineskins via the term \(\varsigma \alpha \zeta \delta \iota \nu \varsigma \varsigma \delta \iota \iota \iota \).

\textsuperscript{18} From our discussion of the term \(\acute{\alpha} \kappa \kappa \varsigma\) it follows that we do not share some of the views of Mayerson expressed in \textit{ZPE} 127 (1999) 189-92 on this term. For, e.g., the size of the \(\nu \varepsilon \beta \zeta \lambda = 150\) or 24 sext., cf. \textit{APF} 46 (1999) 99. If one accepts the equivalence with 150 sext. and accepts that 1 \(\nu \varepsilon \beta \zeta \lambda\) was equal to 2 \(\acute{\alpha} \kappa \kappa \iota\), it follows that on average 1 \(\acute{\alpha} \kappa \kappa \varsigma\) should contain 75 sext., i.e., that it was approximately equivalent to 1 metretes of oil.
very much like the transliteration of the Greek term "σπαθίον." And if there is indeed a connection between the two words "espadjhûn" and "σπαθίον," one automatically gains a fixed capacity for the σπαθίον, because Epiphanius says that the term "espadjhûn" stands for a type of jar with a content of 12 sext.

By way of conclusion we suppose that beginning with the third century A.D.—perhaps in fact already slightly earlier, i.e. by the end of the second century—people in Egypt started using a specific type of earthenware vessel, imported from Syria and mentioned by name in Epiphanius' De Mensuris et Ponderibus, i.e. the "shâfithâ" = σαβιθά = "spation" = σάμβαθον (various attestations)/ σάμφατον (only in PSI XIV 1423)/ σάμβαθον (only in P.Oxy. X 1290) with a variable content (depending on local circumstances) of 22, 18 or 14 sext.; cf. J.E. Dean, op. cit. (above, n. 2) § 41, p. 55.

Next to this vessel a separate jar form, viz. the σπαθίον (σπατίον / σπαδίον), was developed more or less simultaneously (or even earlier) at some unknown place in the Mediterranean. The Greek name of this type of jar was rendered by the translator of Bishop Epiphanius' Greek text into Syriac as "espadjhûn"; cf. J.E. Dean, op. cit. (above, n. 2) § 35, p. 52. According to the testimony of this ancient author, it contained 12 sext.

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19 For attestations in the papyri of the σάμβαθον, see our article in APF 46 (2000) 127, s.v. Σάμβαθον; these attestations cover the period III-V.