

Andreas Bammer  
Universität Salzburg  
Fachbereich Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte  
Universitätsplatz 1  
5023 Salzburg  
Austria

## An Approach to the Papyrological Understanding of Paul's Labouring "Night and Day" (1Thess 2:9)

This article deals with the question how Paul's notion of labouring "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 labouring "night and day" in 1Thess 2:9 and the occurrence of  $\nu\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\mu^{\circ}\rho\alpha\omega$  in documentary papyri and ostraca. A conclusion will finally present the main results.

### Introductory remarks

As a project assistant of Peter Arzt-Grabner I have been given the chance to comment 1Thessalonians within the PKNT (Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament)-series.<sup>1</sup> 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.

### The ancient town Thessalonike and Paul's engagement towards the young community

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<sup>1</sup> The approach of comparing the NT and the everyday language of documentary papyri and ostraca is introduced in detail in Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, PKNT 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 39–56; Peter Arzt, "Ägyptische Papyri und das Neue Testament: Zur Frage der Vergleichbarkeit von Texten," *Protokolle zur Bibel* 6 (1997): 21–29; Peter Arzt, "Das Salzburger Forschungsprojekt „Analyse der Paulusbrieve auf dem Hintergrund dokumentarischer Papyri," in *Die Wüste spricht: Papyri beleuchten Literatur und Alltagsleben der Antike. Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung in der Bibliotheksaula der Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg, 16. April bis 5. Juli 1996. Exponate der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, edited by Michael Ernst, 30–34 (Salzburg: Institut für Ntl. Bibelwissenschaft, 1996); Peter Arzt, "Analyse der Paulusbrieve auf dem Hintergrund dokumentarischer Papyri," in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses: Berlin, 13.–19.8.1995*, vol. 1, edited by Bärbel Kramer et al., APF Beiheft 3, 31–36 (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1997); Peter Arzt, "Analyse der Paulusbrieve auf dem Hintergrund dokumentarischer Papyri," *Protokolle zur Bibel* 3 (1994): 99–114; Peter Arzt and Michael Ernst, "Neues Testament und Papyrologie," in *Jahrbuch der Universität Salzburg 1989–1991*, edited by Arno Buschmann, 11–18 (München and Salzburg: Roman Kovar, 1993).

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. In 316/315 BC it was founded by Cassander, the oldest son of Antipater and later king of Macedonia (302–297 BC).

Around 50 A.D., approximately at the time of Paul's arrival in Thessalonike, the town had an eminent multicultural character because of its long and diverse settling history: Thracians (around 1000 BC), Greeks (6th–5th century BC), Macedonians (around 500 BC) and Romans (from mid 2nd century BC) had left their traces among the population.<sup>2</sup> According to Acts 17, Paul on arrival in the town preached at the synagogue and won not only Jews but also numerous Greeks for his message of Jesus Christ, among them even socially distinguished women. 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 structures 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 whole life with the community members (cf. 1Thess 2:8)<sup>3</sup> 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 labouring “night and day”.<sup>4</sup> Initially, it is impossible to understand this notion literally, but is it, in fact, impossible? In order to gain knowledge of its everyday use and understanding, the meaning of  $\nu\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\ \sigma\mu^{\circ}\rho\alpha\omega$  will be investigated in the following as it occurs in documentary papyri and ostraca.

Paul's notion of labouring “night and day” and the occurrence of  $\nu\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\ \sigma\mu^{\circ}\rho\alpha\omega$  in documentary papyri and ostraca

The notion  $\nu\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\ \sigma\mu^{\circ}\rho\alpha\omega$  occurs frequently and in different contexts in the documentary papyri. The first of them comprises the field 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

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Christoph vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki – Stadt des Kassander und Gemeinde des Paulus: Eine frühe christliche Gemeinde in ihrer heidnischen Umwelt*, WUNT 2/125 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 86–96.

<sup>3</sup> 1Thess 2:8 attests Paul's and his collaborators' loving care towards the community:  $\omicron\lambda\tau\omega\ \iota\mu\epsilon\iota\rho\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota\ \iota\mu\kappa\epsilon\lambda\ \epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omicron\kappa\omicron\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\ \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\delta\omicron\epsilon\lambda\iota\ \iota\mu\epsilon\lambda\ \omicron\epsilon\ \mu\omicron\lambda\omicron\mu\omicron\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\ \epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\ \tau\omicron\epsilon\ \gamma\epsilon\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\ \acute{\epsilon}\iota\lambda\lambda\ \kappa\alpha\ \tau\acute{\alpha}\omega\ \bullet\alpha\upsilon\tau\kappa\epsilon\lambda\ \kappa\upsilon\chi\acute{\alpha}\omega\ \delta\iota\omicron\tau\iota\ \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\alpha\phi\tau\omicron\ \sigma\mu\epsilon\lambda\ \eta\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\ \sigma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\eta\tau\epsilon$  (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”).

<sup>4</sup> 1Thess 2:9:  $\mu\eta\eta\mu\omicron\eta\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \acute{\epsilon}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\epsilon\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\nu\ \kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\mu\ \sigma\mu\kappa\epsilon\lambda\ \kappa\alpha\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\nu\ \mu\omicron\chi\upsilon\gamma\omicron\mu\ \nu\kappa\tau\acute{\upsilon}\omega\ \kappa\alpha\ \sigma\mu^{\circ}\rho\alpha\omega\ \eta\gamma\alpha\zeta\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\ \pi\rho\acute{\upsilon}\omega\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\ \mu\theta\ \eta\gamma\alpha\zeta\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\ \tau\iota\ \iota\mu\kappa\epsilon\lambda$  (KJV: “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God”).

of personal responsibility for a baby or child.<sup>5</sup> One text shows that this understanding is not attested only in nursing contracts exclusively but also occurs in a private letter, which 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 behaviour towards the community.

In order to interpret 1Thess 2:9, first the context of typical manual work shall be taken into consideration.<sup>6</sup> The following excerpts show that a person or a group of persons was actually forced to work “night and day” for certain reasons:

In the petition to an epimeletes, P.Tebt. III/1 782 (153 BC), a certain Heliodoros, cultivator of Crown land, complains – l. 6–9:  $\text{genom}^{\circ}\text{nou mou di}\acute{\alpha} \text{ nukt}\acute{\upsilon}\omega \text{ ka}\kappa \leq \text{m}^{\circ}\text{raw} \mid \text{per}\kappa \text{ t}\acute{\upsilon}\text{n} \text{ [t]}\text{o}\acute{\epsilon}\text{t}\nu\text{n potism}\acute{\upsilon}\text{n x}\acute{\alpha}\text{r}\text{i}\text{n to}\acute{\epsilon} \text{ gegon}\acute{\omicron}\text{t}\omega \mid \text{per}\kappa \text{ t}\acute{\omicron}\text{n k}\approx\text{mhn } \text{§kr}\acute{\epsilon}\text{gmat}\omega \text{ pr}\acute{\upsilon}\omega \text{ t}\acute{\upsilon} \text{ m}\emptyset \mid \text{§kpese}\text{ }\text{n to}\acute{\epsilon} \text{ d}^{\circ}\text{ont}\omega \text{ kairo}\acute{\epsilon}$  (“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”).<sup>7</sup> 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 BC)<sup>8</sup> is addressed to the komogrammateus Menches. The  $\text{presb}\acute{\epsilon}\text{teroi t}\kappa\text{n gevrg}\kappa\text{n}$ , 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  $\text{gevrgo}\epsilon$  by a certain date (10th of Pachon) in addition to an extra amount of 80 artabae in connection with the forthcoming visit of King Soter II.<sup>9</sup> In order to achieve their ambitious

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

<sup>6</sup> A complete papyrological investigation and interpretation of the whole verse would of course require to comment on the occurrence and understanding of  $\text{§rg}\acute{\alpha}\text{zomai}$  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 ( $\text{skhnopoi}\acute{\omega}\text{s}$ ), which means that he was used to manual work; cf. generally Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, PKNT 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 65–66. The verb  $\text{§rg}\acute{\alpha}\text{zomai}$  designated manual work in general, cf. Franz Winter in Peter Arzt-Grabner et al., *I. Korinther*, PKNT 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 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. Ingomar Weiler, “Arbeit und Arbeitslosigkeit im Altertum,” in *Otium – Negotium: Beiträge des interdisziplinären Symposions der Sodalitas zum Thema Zeit, Carnuntum 28.–30.8.1998*, edited by Ernst Sigot, 39–65 (Wien: Edition Praesens, 2000); Ingomar Weiler, “Mensch und Arbeit in der Antike: Umbrüche – Wandel – Kontinuität,” in *Bericht über den 23. Österreichischen Historikertag in Salzburg. Veranstaltet vom Verband Österreichischer Historiker und Geschichtsvereine in der Zeit vom 24. bis 27. September 2002*, Veröffentlichungen des Verbandes Österreichischer Historiker und Geschichtsvereine 32, 50–70 (Salzburg: Verband Österreichischer Historiker und Geschichtsvereine, 2003); Stanislaw Mrozek, *Lohnarbeit im klassischen Altertum: Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Bonn: Habelt, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> The notion  $\text{nukt}\acute{\omega} \text{ ka}\kappa \leq \text{m}^{\circ}\text{raw}$  appears in the unfortunately fragmentary text SB XVI 13014,7–8 (2nd century BC) too, apparently also in connection with the irrigation of land.

<sup>8</sup> According to P. W. Pestman in P.Rain.Cent. p. 129 (fn. 9) the papyrus might date from 117 BC: “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 11.271 confirms that it is not compulsory to date P.Tebt. I 48 from the exact year 117.

<sup>9</sup> For further details cf. the introductory information by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt in P.Tebt. I p. 154–155.

goal, the presbĒteroi – l. 9–12: *prosjedreuŌntvn diā te nuktŪw | ka< sm°raw m°xri toĒ tŪ prokeŒjmenon Œkplhr«sai* (“have been working night and day to make up the aforesaid amount”).<sup>10</sup> Under the peculiar circumstances it can be imagined that the group was actually committed to work permanently.

The fragmentary text P.Lips. II 132 (25 CE) is an oath on office, in which the presbĒteroi 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 *laografoĒmenoi* are mobilized to secure the embankments. 50 men are obliged to watch the water level at the river banks and the relating fields. In groups of ten they have to be on guard – l. 11: *nuktŌw te ka< sm°raw* (“during the night as well as during the 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.<sup>11</sup>

The texts show clearly that *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* can – at least in the context of typical manual work – be comprehended in the literal sense of working permanently for a certain time. The persons were under pressure and had effectively no alternative but to perform their work without interruption.

The following text, which also deals with dyke work, attests the notion *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* supposedly in reference to shift work:

The official letter P.Tebt. III/1 706 (171 BC) lines out 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 *xvmatofĒlakew*. Not so in the present text, in which the less specific terms *fulakŏtai* (l. 5–6? and l. 15) and *frouroĒ* (l. 24) are mentioned together with peasants (l. 21).<sup>12</sup> The variability of terms, which is rather uncommon<sup>13</sup>, may indicate the predicament the persons in charge were confronted with. The text states the necessity of – l. 8: [*diā nuktjŪw ka< sm°raw poeŏsyai* (l. *poieŏsyai*) *tŌn tĒrh[sin]*] (“performing the controlling during

<sup>10</sup> According to Pierre Maraval in P.Stras. VII 646 p. 68 the prepositional expression has the same meaning, it only occurs more seldom: “L’ expression *d’iā t’e nuktŪw ka< sm°raw* (cf. P.Tebt. I 48, l. 10) semble plus rare que *nuktŪw ka< sm°raw*.” Thus the prepositional expression is not investigated separately in this article.

<sup>11</sup> A comparable use and understanding of the notion *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* encounters in another oath on office and in a similar context: In BGU XVI 2590 (25 BC) a group of seven persons swears to work – l. 12: *nuktŪw ka< sm°ra[w]* (“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 guard P.Oxy. XXXVIII 2876 (212–214 CE), in which a certain Diogenes swears – l. 17–18: *parafulājein | nuktŌw te k’a< sm°r’a’w* (“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 p. 96–97.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Arthur S. Hunt und J. Gilbert Smyly in P.Tebt. III/1 p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. generally Pieter J. Sijpestein, “Zum Bewässerungssystem im Römischen Ägypten: Der *xvmatepimelhtĒw* und der *xvmatepeekthw*,” *Aeg.* 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 *xvmatepimelhtaĒ* and *xvmatepeektai* and not merely by normal policemen and peasants.

night and day”).<sup>14</sup> In order to ensure that continuous performance, the work was supposedly done in shifts.

Let the attention be drawn to another specific context, namely the caring for a person in nursing contracts, in which the notion *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* occurs frequently too:

Nursing is a physical work, so the texts cannot be investigated completely separated from those referring to the context of typical 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 for the child actively on the one hand as well as perform her standby duty during “night and day” on the other hand.

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 – l. 22–23 (with BL 8.67): §`p`[i]m°leian poiεs`y`a`i` diā te nuktŪw | [ka< sm°ra]w (“take care of [the child] during night and day”).<sup>15</sup>

P.Ross.Georg. II 18 (l. 309–321 = C.Pap.Gr. I 31) (139–140 CE), 316–317 (with BL 8.290) reads: poiÆsetai dç ≤ ÑHrΔ tØn toĒ paid€o[u §pim°leian diā te nuktŪw ka< sm]°raw, ka< oĒk éndrokoitÆsei oĒdç dia[fyere> tŪ gāla oĒd' êllo | pajid€on sungalaktotrofÆsei aĒt“ (“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 *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* does not only occur in nursing contracts, but is attested as well in a private letter.

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 (=Æmata kakā in l. 14, cf. also l. 27) and libellous letters, which shocked a woman so severely that a certain Heliodoros<sup>16</sup> – l. 21–22: throĒnta<sup>17</sup> aĒt°w (aĒtØn) nuk|t[Ūw k]a< sm°raw (“cared for her during night and day”).<sup>18</sup> The text reveals that the notion *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* must be interpreted literally in a context different from typical manual work. The reason for the literal interpretation can be found in

<sup>14</sup> Another mention of the notion *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* in l. 17 can unfortunately not be interpreted because of the fragmentary condition of the text.

<sup>15</sup> Quite similarly, in P.Stras. VII 646 (117–138 AD) a certain nurse was not allowed to put away the child – l. 4: d`iā t`e nuktŪw ka< sm°raw (“during night and day”).

<sup>16</sup> The content and coherence of the defamation and the persons involved, can unfortunately not even be presumed. Herwig Maehler in P.Rain.Cent. p. 374: “Wer Heliodoros ist (Z. 19 und 24) und warum die ‘Herrin’ in seiner Obhut 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.”

<sup>17</sup> The participle *throĒnta* can not be interpreted properly in the context; therefore Herwig Maehler in P.Rain.Cent. p. 375 suggests to supplement a Iota in order to argue the medial form *throĒnta<i>*.

<sup>18</sup> It shall be mentioned here that one more text, which does not relate to the conduct of typical manual work as well, gives reference to the literal understanding of *nuktŌw ka< sm°raw* too: According to the hardly interpretable notice O.Narm. I 74 (2nd–3rd century CE) someone, maybe in order to prepare for a notarial inspection, dedicates himself or herself – l. 2–4: diā nu|ktŪw ka< sm°raw ka< §n êkrvi | énaġin≈skin (“to read loud during night and day”).

two specific aspects: First, it seems to be the precarious situation of the woman and secondly, the moral or professional binding of Heliodoros towards her, which determined him to care for her “night and day”.

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 behaviour towards the community with an attitude of professionalism and responsibility.

Resuming briefly the papyrological evidence of *nuktōw kaκ σm°raw*, in the connection with typical manual labour, demanding situations and a high level of personal stress give reason for the literal interpretation of the notion. In the other context of caring for someone especially in nursing contracts the specific duty, which is also physical, but not actually typical manual work, reveals the important aspect of personal responsibility and commitment towards a person and a specific task.

Both aspects are important for the understanding of 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.

## Conclusion

According to 1Thess 2:9 Paul worked “night and day” in order not to burden the community members financially. This can hardly mean that he worked without interruption, at least not for a long time or in general. Nevertheless the papyrological evidence shows that the notion *nuktōw kaκ σm°raw* can be interpreted literally in specific contexts, such as working manually or caring for someone as a nurse. Concerning the documentary evidence and the closer

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<sup>19</sup> 1Thess 2:7: *dunāmeoi šn bārei e%onai ...w XrstoË éoÖstoloi. éllā šgenÆyhmen nÆpioi šn m°sf Ím«n, ...w šân trofÚw yālp' tā •aut°w t°kna* (KJV: “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children”).

context of 1Thess 2:9, which attests Paul's missionary efforts, one comes to the conclusion that the notion serves to focus on Paul's attitude of professionalism and responsibility towards the community. Mainly because he did not find stable structures but had to establish them, he expected the community members to learn from his example. Against the background of *nuktōw kaç sm°raw* in the papyri, two aspects, working continuously for a certain time and being responsible for someone, can contribute to the understanding of Paul's missionary engagement towards the newly formed community, of which his labouring was certainly an important part.