

P.Oxy. 42.3035

Oxyrhynchus

28 February 256

Oxford, Sackler Library, P.Oxy. inv. 19 2B.76 F (8-11) a. P.J. Parsons, ed. (1974) pl. X.

Small oblong slip, 11.7 (B) x 9.5 (H) cm., cut for the purpose, well-preserved, with some minor holes and indentations. Recto(→): effectively complete text of summons, left margin 1.5, lower margin 2 cm., gap of 1 cm. before date, but no X-series fillers. Upright, documentary cursive script with considerable ligaturing; in general impression rather like that of Seider, *Pal.* 1.47, pl. 29 (an account of 292-93). The routine formula is written quite quickly but the word *chresianos* is written more slowly. Verso: blank.

<p>π(αρά) τοῦ πρυτάνεως κωμάρχαις καὶ ἐπιστάταις εἰρήνης κώμης Μερμέρθων. ἔξαυτῆς ἀνα- πέμψατε Πετοσορᾶπιν Ὁρου χρησι- 5 ἀνόν, ἢ ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ ἀνέλθατε. (ἔτους) γ' ' Οὐαλεριανοῦ καὶ Γαλλιηνοῦ σεβαστῶν Φαμενώθ γ'</p>	<p>From the <i>prytanis</i> to the comarchs and superintendents of peace of Mermertha village. At once send up Petosorapis (son) of Horus, <i>chresi-</i> <i>anos</i>, or yourselves come up. Year 3 of Valerianus and Gallienus Augustuses, Phamenoth 3.</p>
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1 π' 2 ἐπισταταις corr. in pap. from ἐπιστατη 6 (ἔτους): L

The reading *chresianos* is clear. It cannot reasonably be taken as anything other than 'Christian' (cf. **1, 3, 59**, with Introduction 000), making this the earliest explicitly dated document of a Christian in Egypt (the scribe was not used to the word). But why has Petosorapis been identified as such?

Formal notices of a summons (conventionally, though not satisfactorily, called 'orders to arrest', for which see P.Oxy. 44.3190) are not uncommon across the second and third centuries, mostly from the Arsinoite nome, but also (though less than half as frequently) from the Oxyrhynchite. Gagos and Sijpesteijn (1996) counted 93 examples. Browne, Hagedorn and Drexhage (1989) provide analysis of their function.

No other example from these two centuries bears a date. The summons often concludes by giving the name of the person who has lodged the complaint (e.g. P.Oxy. 43.3130), though the offence itself is not specified. It must however be a matter within the competence of the official who issues the summons. The *prytanis* is the annually selected president of the town council of Oxyrhynchus, which bore a general responsibility for good order in the nome, especially over the taxation system, administered on a liturgical basis (Bowman, 53-67). In P.Oxy. 22.2341 the *prytanis* appears before the prefect to accuse the *strategos* (nome governor) of late delivery of taxes in kind. In P.Oxy. 48.3397 and 3409 the comarchs are to be arrested and sent to town to persuade them to pay the village taxes (p.75 for the system). P.Grenf. 2.66 has a crop inspector accusing two collectors of the grain tax.

The purpose of a summons is to ensure that the accused is present when the complaint is dealt with. If he cannot be found, or cannot be persuaded to appear, the village authorities must go themselves. (On the comarch, see Oertel, 153-56, and on 'superintendents of peace', 278-81.) They will have the necessary local knowledge (P.Oxy. 1.65), as well as being obliged to pick up the defaulter's debt (P.Oslo 2.20).

Petosorapis is surely not named as *chresianos* because being a Christian is itself his offence. The comarchs could hardly be required to stand in for such a defect. The date is eighteen months too early for it to be linked to Valerian's campaign. That was to be aimed anyway at prominent ecclesiastics in the capital cities, where the governors sat with penal jurisdiction. Town councils

had no standing in such affairs. Certainly there could have been sporadic local outrage against Christians, but the process of summons at village level offered no outlet for it.

On rare occasions, as with other types of document, a summons will identify a man by his occupation. We had earlier suggested this as the explanation here (Intro. 000). But in the following year Aemilianus was to show himself well aware of the terminological distinction between one's clerical post and one's being a *christianos* (which signified the commitment of belief, Eus. *HE* 7.11.1). Petosorapis may well have been an elder in the church, but he is identified in the village in terms of his personal profession (the more conspicuously no doubt since the Decian *supplicatio*). Perhaps he was the owner of the building used by the church. One might even imagine that his offence was to have sought to deflect the liturgical functions that encumbered it (not wanting to pay for the *caerimoniae* of the public cult?)

Whatever the explanation, the summons of Petosorapis shows that by his day there was an active Christian community associated with him in Mermertha, one of the better documented villages within the upper toparchy of the Oxyrhynchite nome (Pruneti, 103). In some way his Christian identity has become involved in a dispute within the civil community, perhaps over burden-sharing.

A.K. **Bowman**, *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt* (Toronto 1971); G.M. **Browne**, *Documentary Papyri from the Michigan Collection* (Toronto 1970) 47-54; A. **Bülöw-Jacobsen**, 'Orders to arrest: P.Haun.inv.33 and 34 and a consolidated list', *ZPE* 66 (1986) 93-98; H.J. **Drexhage**, 'Zu den Überstellungsbefehle aus dem römischen Ägypten', in *Migratio et commutatio: Studien zur Alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben* (Festschrift Pekáry, St Katharinen 1989) 102-18; T. **Gagos**, 'Orders to arrest', *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 61 (1995) 90-94; T. **Gagos** and P.J. **Sijpesteijn**, 'Towards an explanation of the typology of the so-called "Orders to arrest"', *BASP* 33 (1996) 77-97. U. **Hagedorn**, 'Das Formular der Überstellungsbefehle im römischen Ägypten', *BASP* 16 (1979) 61-74; P. **Mertens**, *Les services de l'état civil et le contrôle de la population à Oxyrhynchus au III^e siècle de notre ère* (Brussels 1958); H.E.L. **Missler**, *Der Komarch: Ein Beitrag zur Dorfverwaltung im ptolemäischen, römischen und byzantinischen Ägypten* (Diss. Marburg 1970); F. **Oertel**, *Die Liturgie: Studien zur ptolemäischen und kaiserlichen Verwaltung Ägyptens* (Leipzig 1917, repr. Aalen 1965); P. **Pruneti**, *I centri abitati dell' Ossirinichite: Repertorio toponomastico* (Florence 1981).