

PETITION TO A *BENEFICIARIUS*
FROM LATE THIRD CENTURY A.D. OXYRHYNCHUS¹

P.Mich.inv.1960

H. × W. = 14.5 × 11 cm

17 March A.D. 291

The University of Michigan acquired this document in 1924. With the exception of the last part of *ll.* 6-7, which are slightly effaced, the text is fairly well preserved. A narrow lacuna runs vertically down the middle of the text from *ll.* 1-12 and again from *ll.* 20-23 owing to a fold in the petition. The last four lines of the text (*ll.* 24-27) are almost entirely missing but can be reconstructed since they contain a regnal formula for Diocletian and Maximianus. There is no writing on the verso and kollesis is 5 cm from the left edge. The Greek contained in the petition is carefully composed and of a high quality despite minor orthographic errors.

Whereas the majority of extant petitions from the Roman period are addressed to the strategus, since he acted as the chief civil officer over a nome, this petition belongs to a relatively small but not insignificant number of petitions addressed to lesser military officials (centurions, decurions and *beneficarii*).² However, a survey of these petitions reveals that for the most part the circumstances under which they were necessitated (to report a crime, make a complaint, etc.) are generally no different from those presented in petitions to a strategus; and likewise, with the exception of soldiers, there is often no discernable difference in the kinds of people submitting them.³ It is therefore unclear in many of these kinds of petitions why a military official is being petitioned instead of the strategus.⁴

Another conspicuous feature of these petitions that has been recently noted is that for the most part they are overwhelmingly provenanced to the Arsinoite, whereas a disproportionately low number come from the Oxyrhynchite.⁵ Though the reasons for the discrepancy are not immediately obvious, one possibility may be due to the fact that many of the texts from the Arsinoite come mainly from the villages, where military officials may have been more readily accessible than the strategus, whereas many of the texts from the Oxyrhynchite come from the nome metropolis Oxyrhynchus where it was perhaps easier to petition the strategus directly.⁶ Whatever the case may be, the present petition is of much interest since it belongs to only a handful of petitions addressed to the *beneficiarius* of Oxyrhynchus: PSI VII 807 (30 Jan A.D. 280); PSI XXI Congr. 13 ii (A.D. 284/85); P.Oxy. VIII 1121 (9 Feb A.D. 295); P.Laur. III 60 (III); P.Oxy. XLVI 3304 (6 June A.D. 301); P.Oxy. XLIX 3480 (c. A.D. 260-90).

In this petition a lady by the name of Aurelia Hermanoubiaina beseeches the *beneficiarius* of Oxyrhynchus to exact punishment on a sailor whom she believed played some maleficent role in the recent disappearance of her husband. In the petition she reports how her husband had left on business for the Arsinoite with the sailor on 7 Mechir (= 1 Feb A.D. 291). Given that the petitioner identifies

¹ I would like to thank Jean-Luc Fournet and especially Peter van Minnen for teaching me some of the essentials of papyrology at the Summer Papyrological Institute held at the University of Cincinnati in 2005 and for their help with deciphering the present text and helping me to interpret it. I would also like to thank Traianos Gagos at the University of Michigan for permission to publish the text.

² The most recent list of such petitions may be found in J. Whitehorne, "Petitions to the Centurion: a Question of Locality?" *BASP* 41 (2004) 155-69. For a good bibliography on petitions generally see P.Dub. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴ R. Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt. A Social History*, 91-93.

⁵ Whitehorne, "Petitions to the Centurion," 161-69. Of the ninety extant petitions at least sixty-four may be securely provenanced to the Arsinoite while only ten come from the Oxyrhynchite.

⁶ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 87; P.Sijp. 15, p. 84-85.

herself as a “citizen” (*l.* 4) it may be assumed that she and her husband were citizens of either Alexandria, or one of the three Greek cities of Egypt (Naucratis, Antinoopolis or Ptolemais). Nevertheless, it need not be assumed that her husband had set out on his trip to the Arsinoite from one of these cities, as there is evidence that at least Alexandrian citizens might live permanently in the *Chora* or have holdings there. Given that the petition was filed in Oxyrhynchus the most likely scenario was that the petitioner’s husband had left from Oxyrhynchus for the Arsinoite. Later in *l.* 11 reference is made to the fact that her husband had not yet “come up” from the Arsinoite and in *l.* 14 the petitioner gives the impression that she had been in the vicinity of Oxyrhynchus ever since her husband departed.

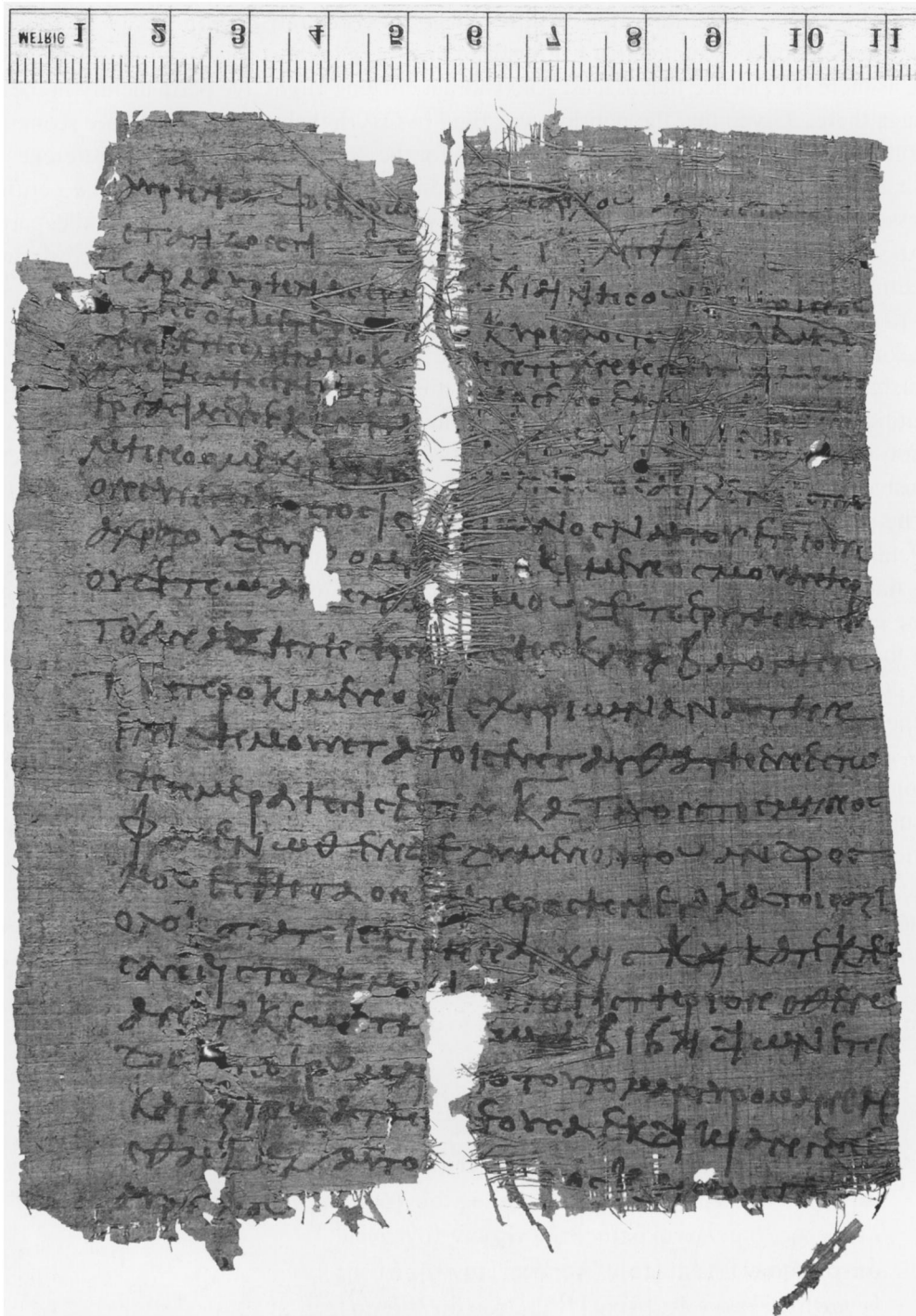
At some point after the departure of the petitioner’s husband she became worried about him, suspecting something had happened to him since he had not returned, and began to search for him (*ll.* 9-12).⁷ While searching throughout the city she reports that on 21 Phamenoth (= 17 March A.D. 291), some forty-five days after her husband had first departed, she found the same sailor with whom her husband had taken passage (*ll.* 12-16). At this point the petition becomes especially intriguing as the petitioner reports that the sailor was dressed in her husband’s “clothes,” although there is no specific mention within the petition of just how the petitioner could be sure that the sailor was actually wearing her husband’s clothes since she does not identify any specific article.

The petitioner then relates that she brought the sailor to the local irenarchs who consequently had him detained in the city’s treasury office (*ll.* 17-19). Assuming that the report is accurate at this point it raises many questions? How exactly did she get the sailor to go to the irenarchs? Did he go willing or was he compelled by the women or by some companions who were searching with her? Likewise, given the rather meager evidence upon which her case against the sailor seems to have been built it is rather curious that he appears to have been readily detained by the irenarchs.

The petition ends with a plea to the beneficiarius that he dispatch swift justice against the sailor (*ll.* 19-23). What makes this petition unusual at this point is that it is clear that she is submitting the petition on the very same day that she had the sailor detained. However, petitioners frequently let the first stages of justice get in motion, which typically took some time, before they sent off a petition to the beneficiarius. In light of the rapidity with which the sailor is detained and the petition submitted, a couple of explanations are possible. First, there is almost certainly more to the story than what is being reported in the petition and that would help to explain the abruptness of the whole procedure. Second, given that the petitioner styles herself as a “citizen” it may be assumed that she may have been a fairly prominent person who could command some degree of respect. As in just about any age the wheels of justice always tend to work fastest for the well to do.

- Αὐρηλίω Διοσκόρω β[(ενε)]φ[(ικιαρίω)] ἐπάρχου Αἰγύπτου
στατίζοντι ἐν [τῷ] Ὀξυρυγχίτη
παρὰ Αὐρηλίας Ἑρμ[α]νουβιαίνης Οὐικτωρίνου
ἀστῆς. ὁ ἡμέτερο[ς] ἀν[ή]ρ Κύριλλος τοῦν[ομ]α δακτυ-
5 λενδετης (?) μελανοκόπ[ος] τὴν τέχνην τυγχάνων
ἀπεδήμησεν ὡς ἐπὶ [τὸ]ν Ἀρσηνοεῖτην τῆς αὐτῆς
ἐργασίας ἕνεκεν ἔτι [ἀ]πὸ [τ]ῆς ζ' τοῦ διελθόντο[ς]
μηνὸς Μειχίρ ἐνβα[λ]όμενος ὅσα εἶχεν εἰς πλῆ-
10 ον συνπλέοντος Ἰσχ[υ]ρίωνος ναύτου. ἐπὶ οὖν
ἄχρι τοῦ δεῦρο ὁ με[ν] πρ[ο]κίμενός μου ἀνήρ
οὐδέπω ἀνήλθε[ν], ἐμοῦ δὲ περὶ τὴν τού-
το ὕ' ἀναζητήσθαι οὔσης κατεβαλόμην

⁷ In P.Tebt. II 333 (A.D. 216) a petition to a centurion, foul play is likewise assumed when a father and brother fail to return home from a hunting trip.



- 15 τὸν προκείμενον Ἰσχυρίωνα ναύτην
 ἐπιδημοῦντα τοῖς ἐνταῦθα τῇ ἐνεστώ-
 σῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἣτις ἐστὶν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος μηνὸς
 Φαμενώθ ἐνδεδυμένον τοῦ ἀνδρός
 μου ἐσθήτα, ὃν καὶ προσήνεγκα τοῖς ἀξι-
 ολοκοτάτοις εἰρηνάρχαις καὶ κατέκλει-
 σαν εἰς τὸ δημόσιον λογιστήριον. ὅθεν

- 20 ἀναγκέως τῆ[ν] τῶν βιβλιδίων ἐπί-
 δος[ι]ν ποιῶμαι [αὐ]το τοῦτο μαρτυρομαίνῃ
 καὶ ἀξιούσα τὴν δέουσα(ν) ἐκδικίαν γενέ-
 σθαι. (ἔτους) ζ Αὐτοκ[ράτ]ορος Καίσαρος Γαί[ο]υ
 Αὐρηλίου [Οὐαλερίου Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ (ἔτους) ς]
- 25 [Αὐτ]ο[κράτορος Καίσαρος Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου]
 [Οὐαλερίου Μαξιμιανοῦ Γερμανικῶν μεγίστων]
 [Εὐσεβῶν Εὐτυχῶν Σεβατῶν Φαμενώθ̄ κ̄α.]

1. βφ pap. 2. Οξυρυγχιτη: η corr. ex ο. 8. l. ἐμβαλόμενος. 8-9. l. πλοῖον. 9. l. συμπλέοντος. l. ἐπεί. 10. του: τ post corr. l. προκείμενος. 12. ἀναζητησιν: ζ post corr.; ει corr. ex η. l. ἀναζήτησιν. κατεβαλόμην: ε corr. from α. l. κατελαβόμην. 13. l. προκείμενον. 17. εσθητα: τ post corr.? προσηνεγ'κα. pap. 17-18. l. ἀξιολογοτάτοις. 20. ἀναγκέως pap., l. ἀναγκάως. 21. μαρτυρομαίνῃ: η corr. ex αι. l. μαρτυρομένη. 23. L pap.

Translation

To Aurelius Dioskorus, *beneficiarius* of the prefect of Egypt, on duty in Oxyrhynchus, from Aurelia Hermanoubiaina daughter of Victorinus, citizeness.

My husband Cyril, by name, . . . being an ink seller by trade, went abroad to the Arsinoite on account of the same work, having left as long ago as the 7th of the month of Mechir loading what he had [in ink?] onto a boat when he sailed with Ischyron the sailor. And since as of yet my aforementioned husband has not come up hither, and with me being concerned with searching for him, I found the aforementioned Ischyron the sailor visiting here on the present day, which is the 21st of the present month Phamenoth, who was dressed with the clothing of my husband. I have brought him forward to the most noteworthy irenarchs and they have shut him in the public treasury office. Wherefore I necessarily make submission of the petition, witnessing this very thing and requesting that a punishment occur.

Year seven of Emperor Caesar Gaius Aurelius [Valerius Diocletianus and year six of] Marcus [Aurelius Valerius Maximianus Augustus, 21 Phamenoth.]

Notes

- 1 Αὐρηλίω Διοσκόρῳ. No other individual bearing this name and the title of *beneficiarius* is attested in any other contemporary documents from Oxyrhynchus. While an Aur. Dioskorus appears in P.Oxy. IX 1205.12 (14 Apr A.D. 291), a text that deals with a manumission of a Jewish women and her children, given that the name was undoubtedly a common one it need not be the same individual.
 β[(ενε)]φ[(ικαρίῳ)]. An official known mainly from other 3rd and 4th century papyri: *P.Amh.* II 80.12 (A.D. 232/33); *P.Oxy.* VIII 1121.2 (A.D. 295); *P.Cair.Isid.* 63.1 (A.D. 296); *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2187.12 (A.D. 304); *P.Erl.Diosp.* 1. i.149, 191 (c. A.D. 313/14); *P.Oxy.* LXIV 4441. ii.9 (c. A.D. Jan. 315 – Feb. 316); *P.Oxy.* LXIII 4363.20 (c. A.D. 314-25); *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4606.16 (A.D. Aug. – Sept. 361); *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4611. ii.7 (A.D. July/Aug. 363). A *beneficiarius* was typically a soldier of long and distinguished military service who was appointed by the prefect of Egypt for special service onto his staff. It was therefore not unusual that they were sometimes identified, as in this text, as a “*beneficiarius* of the prefect of Egypt” (β(ενε)φ(ικαρίῳ) ἐπάρχου Αἰγύπτου) (cf. *P.Oxy.* VIII 1121.2 (8 Feb 295); *P.Laur.* III 60.1 (III); *PSI Cong.* XXI 13.ii.1 (c. A.D. 284-85); *PSI V* 469.4 (18 Sept 334 A.D.). During one’s time in office as a *beneficiarius* one was exempted from normal military service and acted most often in the role of a police chief of a nome. See Joachim Ott, *Die Beneficiarier* (*Historia Einzelschriften* 92; Stuttgart 1995), esp. 34-5 and 183-4; R.L. Dise, *Anc. Hist. Bull.* 9.2 (1995) 72-85; *P.Louvre* II 120 n. 27f; *P.Sijp.* 16.
- 3 Ἑρμ[α]γουβιάνης. This female theophoric compound name is unattested and constitutes an *addendum onomasticis*. However, it would seem to be the normal fem. form corresponding to the masc. form ending in -ίῳν of Ἑρμανουβίων (*P.Berl.Leihg.* I 18.2 [22 May A.D. 163]).
- 4 ἀστέης. The use of this term by the petitioner shows that she was a citizen of either Alexandria or one of the three Greek cites in the *chora*, Antinoopolis, Naucratis or Ptolemais. It should not be taken to refer to citizenship in one of the nome metropoleis. Since it was unnecessary from the Roman point of view to distinguish female citizens of one Greek city from another, it only mattered that they were not Egyptians, rarely did female citizens ever specify of what city they were a citizen. See Delia, *Alexandrian Citizenship During the Roman Principate*, 20-21.

- 4-5 δακτυλενδετης (?). This reading is uncertain. Consequently, the attendant meaning is likewise uncertain even though it seems that the petitioner was attempting to render some additional information concerning the identity of her husband. One possibility is that the petitioner's husband bore some nickname by which he was commonly known and owed its origin to some unique feature having to do with his fingers (δάκτυλοι). Another possibility may be that it has something to do with his occupation as an "ink seller."
- 5 μελανοκόπ[ος]. This word constitutes a *hapax legomenon*. Given that the word appears to end in -κόπος and is placed immediately before the phrase τὴν τέχνην τυγχάνων that employs the accusative of respect, it must refer to the occupation or craft of the petitioner's husband. Consequently, the most plausible meaning for the word is an "ink seller" or even "ink maker."
- 12 κατεβαλόμην. It is almost certain that the petitioner intended to write κατελαβόμην as in P.Oxy. III 474.34 (16 Dec A.D. 184 or 216), P.Turner 34.17 (25 Dec A.D. 216), P.Sakaon 39.11 (7 Sept A.D. 318), instead of κατεβαλόμην given that the latter term makes little sense within the context of the petition. I owe this suggestion to Dieter Hagedorn who pointed out that in UPZ I 23.10 (14 Dec A.D. 162) a similar error was made as ἐπιβαλόντες was accidentally rendered instead of ἐπιλαβόντες.
- 13-14 ναύτην ἐπιδημοῦντα τοῖς ἐνταῦθα. Suggests that the sailor was not a resident of Oxyrhynchus but was merely visiting.
- 17-18 ἀξιολοκοτάτοις εἰρηνάρχαις. While the use of the adjective ἀξίολογος to describe the office of irenarch is somewhat unusual, in that this adjective is typically used for more prominent offices, on one other occasion it is used to refer to the office (P.Oxy. XXXI 2568.2 (23 Jul A.D. 264).
- 19 τὸ δημόσιον λογιστήριον. While the usual meaning of τὸ δημόσιον λογιστήριον appears to be something like a "public treasury office" (P.Oxy. XLIV 3195.39 (13-14 June A.D. 331); P.Oxy. I 125.3 (A.D. 560), it frequently served as a place of detention or even as a temporary prison (P.Tebt. II 420.26 (A.D. III); P.Oxy. XLIII 3104.8 (A.D. 228); P.Amh. II 80.4 (A.D. 232/33); P.Oxy. XLVI 3302.15 (A.D. 300/1). As T.C. Skeat has noted (*Papyri From Panopolis*, 119 n. 228): "Since the building [public treasury office] presumably handled large sums of money, it provided an obvious place of security. There is a curious parallel in the English 'counter', originally denoting a city court or office, and later transferred into a place of detention attached to such an office."
- 21 [αὐ]το τοῦτο μαρτυρομαίνη. This somewhat superfluous phrase is employed to add greater emphasis to the petition by attempting to stress its veracity. With similar intent the same phrase is attested in other petitions: P.Ant. II 88.11 (c. A.D. 221); P.Oxy. LIX 3978.16-18 (A.D. 249/50).
- 22-23 ἀξιούσα τὴν δέουσα<ν> ἐκδικίαν γενέσθαι. A similar request is made in P.Tebt. II 304.20-21 (A.D. 167/68) in a petition to a decurion from the Arsinoite nome. While it is tempting to suppose that the *beneficiarius* will necessarily adjudicate the affair, based on the hope or expectation of the petitioner at this point, he is under no obligation to do so. As Michael Peachin has pointed out (P.Sijp. 15, p.91) "In sum, we must be very careful with these Egyptian petitions to soldiers. They may sometimes indicate that civilians wanted soldiers to undertake a *cognitio*, and the military men might sometimes have acquiesced. But, no extant document proves that a soldier sat as judge – that is, unless he had been properly assigned by a higher authority as *iudex datus*."
- 24-27 This formula is also attested in P.Corn. 18.19-23; P.Oxy. IX 1205.14-16; P.Oxy. IX 1208.1-2; P.Oxy. XXXVIII 2855.18; P.Oxy. XLVI 3296.17-20; PSI XIV 14.17.21-25; P.Stras. VI 529.18-19 (see Bagnall and Worp, *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt*, 4; Bagnall and Worp, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (2004) 226f).