

23. A guarantee-declaration concerning the Ummayyad naval raids against Byzantium

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[P.Heid. Inv. Kopt. 60](#)

19,5 x 24,0 cm

Esna

late 7th or early 8th century

plate XXV + XXVI

The text on the recto (across the fibres) is preserved from its first to one of its very last lines; it breaks off during the witnesses' signatures. The left margin is intact at the beginning but obscured by more or less extensive lacunae throughout most of the text. Unfortunately, a rather big portion of the entire papyrus is broken off on the right, which makes it very difficult to reconstruct the context of the economic details that are discussed. If the suggested reconstructions of lines 12 and 13 are correct, the lacuna would conceal an approximate amount of either 23 or 27 letters in line 12, the latter being no less than half the entire text of that line, and 26 letters vs. 32 preserved letters in line 13. The colour of the papyrus is a bright orangish brown.

The document starts with an introductory formula invoking the Holy Trinity: “In the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit”, probably extended by “Trinity in unity, indivisible and ineffable” (which seems to be too long based on the suggested reconstructions of lines 12 and 13) or “the consubstantial Trinity”; such formulae have been characteristic of documents from Upper Egypt since the time of Heraclius¹. The author identifies himself as Phêu, son of the late Tôrsh and then gives the name of his town which is lost in the lacuna but which we can safely assume must be Esna, the Greek Latopolis, because he writes to someone whose name is also lost, but whose father is “the illustrious Polytarios”, who, after another lacuna, is followed by the toponym “this same city of Esna” in line 4 (τειπολις ἰογῶτ σνη). In line 11, the addressee is likewise referred to reverently as “your eminence” (τκλαμπροτ). We are dealing with a document that was written from a local official to someone higher up in the administrative hierarchy of Esna whom he hails (χαίρειν, line 4).

He then proceeds to the “meat of the matter” (χε επιδη), the beginning of which is lost but a key phrase of which is preserved at the beginning of line 5: The addressee seemingly has the authority to κω ταλλαγη ἡτανατολη εβολ, “to issue/release/publish the duty of the East”. κω εβολ in the context of legal texts usually means “entlassen, veröffentlichen”². Every known instance of ανατολη, the Greek word for the east, in Coptic documentary texts, most of which from early 8th century Aphrodito, refers not to an abstract “East” but specifically to the Arab province of Syria in the old Byzantine Oriens – ἡ ἀνατολική διοίκησις³. The word usually occurs in connection with the κοῦρσα (i.e. Latin *cursus*), the yearly naval raids that the Ummayyad Khalifate undertook against the Byzantine Empire and its dependencies (starting from the Syrian province) and for which sailors were conscripted from the

1 R.S. Bagnall, K.A. Worp. *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*. Leiden/Boston 2004, 99ff.

2 T.S. Richter, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik*, Wiesbaden 2008, 205.

3 P.Lond. IV, p. xviii.

Egyptian population⁴, in fact it seems that the entirety of the sailors was made up of native Christian draftees. This practice is mainly illuminated by the Archive of Basilios⁵, the Greek correspondence between Basilios, pagarch of Aphrodito and the Ummayad governor of Egypt Qurra ibn Sharik (709–15), which contains many letters in which the governor demands sailors, workmen, and supplies, often specifically for the sea raids. Originating further down the administrative hierarchy (and accordingly written in Coptic), the Aphrodito papyri P.Lond. IV 1494–1503 (perhaps also 1504–06) are for the most part security-guarantees that local officials wrote to their pagarchs (or through them to the governor and the δημόσιος λόγος) regarding the sailors they were obliged to contribute from their respective χωρίον. This type of personal service (that is not to be mistaken as a type of forced labour, as the draftees were paid wages) was organized in a similar fashion to the general way of administrating taxes. “Here too the requisitions of the central Government were addressed to the community, not to the individual; here too it was the central authorities who divided the quotas between the χωρία, every letter to a pagarch being accompanied by ἐντάγμια to the people of each χωρίον contributing to the requisition; and here too, finally, the assignment of the service between the tax-payers seems to have been performed locally in accordance with a register prepared by assessors.”⁶ A peculiar communal agreement from Jême, P.CLT 6, stipulates the preparation of one such register as well as the penalties for individuals who do not comply with their duties⁷. It appears to be mainly concerned with the conscription for the sea raids (the κοῦρσα) while other, non-specified duties are subsumed under the general term ἀλλαγή that our text also employs to refer to the naval duty. The ἀλλαγὴ ἡπτανατολῆς, in accordance with the Greek and Coptic Aphrodito material, must then mean “the duty to participate in the sea raid that embarks in the province of Syria” and we are most likely dealing with a kind of guarantee-declaration (ἐγγυητικὴ ὁμολογία), regarding the supplies and/or sailors that the writer, the official Phêu, must contribute from his χωρίον, addressed to a higher official – perhaps the pagarch of Esna. In the 670s, Papas, the pagarch of Edfu, was likewise hard pressed to comply with the demands coming from al-Fustat, as his own correspondence shows. It also includes his communication with his colleague and friend Platon, the pagarch of Esna, who shared his plight (it is very obvious from all of these texts that the governor’s excessive demand for sailors, workmen, artisans etc. was very unpopular, often led to people fleeing their pagarchy, and that the pagarchs often dragged their feet as much as they could, oftentimes provoking the governor’s anger). In one of his letters to Papas, a frustrated Platon expresses his wish that the governor’s representative to whom he had to answer, the duke (*amir*) of the Thebaid, should drown: “May he taste water!”⁸ Platon

4 T. Muhammad, The Role of the Copts in the Islamic Navigation in the 7th and 8th Centuries. The Papyrological Evidence, *JCOptStud*10 (2008) 1–32.

5 P.Lond. IV, p. xviii. For an excellent recent overview of the Aphrodito papyri and particularly the value of the Qurra-Basilios letters as a source for the Ummayad administration of Egypt, including the conscription of sailors for the sea raids, see Chr. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800*, Oxford 2005, 133ff.

6 *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

7 P.CLT, pp. 56–63.

8 P.Apoll. 37.

or one of his successors may well have been the recipient of our document. In the 6th century archive of Dioscoros, pagarchs were often called λαμπρότατος, as is the addressee of our text, see discussion of line 3.

In line 5, Phêu states that the addressee has received six (...); could this be the number of sailors that were conscripted from his χωρίον? When the following line picks up again after the missing parts, the issue of naval duty is brought up again, obviously in close context with the six (...), as Phêu makes reference to whatever conditions that must be given “until you find the means to issue this duty” (ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉⲕⲉⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲛ̅ⲉ̅ ⲛ̅ⲕⲱ ⲧⲉⲓⲁⲗⲗⲁⲓⲛ̅ ⲓⲃⲟⲗ, line 6).

That Phêu is in fact writing a guarantee-declaration may also be inferred from his referring to the document as “a security (ⲱⲣⲁ⁹) for your eminence” (line 11) as well as his repeated assurance “then it is up to me” (ⲉⲡⲓ ⲧⲱ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ, in line 9 “to pay them” and in line 10 supplemented by “my own liability”).

The text closes with an oath by the heavenly and secular authority of “God Almighty and the health of the rulers” ([ⲡ]ⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲟⲕⲣⲁⲧⲱⲣ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲡⲟϥⲭⲁⲓ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲉ̅[ⲧⲁⲣⲭⲉⲓ, line 12) to heed the document’s authority and goes on to name the witnesses that Phêu brought. These last few lines are very washed out before the papyrus breaks off and no names can be discerned. One of them, however, has his signature supplied by Phêu: “I have written on his behalf for he does not know how to write” (ⲁⲓϥⲗⲁⲓ ϥⲁ[ⲣⲟϥ] ϥⲉ ⲙⲁⲩⲛⲟⲓ ⲛ̅ϥⲗⲁⲓ, line 15).

As is characteristic of Coptic legal texts in general, large portions of the text consist of strictly Greek phraseology – syntagms or “language islands” that are embedded in a (standard Sahidic) Coptic framework while internally keeping to a Greek grammatical structure¹⁰, such as the genitive ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲟⲓⲁⲥ ⲁⲛⲁⲓⲕⲛ̅ⲥ following the preposition ϥⲱⲣⲓⲥ in line 8. The official Phêu was obviously very well versed in the Greek language, an assumption that is further confirmed by the verso, on which only the beginning of one line can be ascertained and which gives the name and location of the sender in Greek, the name of Phêu’s χωρίον being illegible, unfortunately.

In conclusion, we can say with some certainty that our text is the first attestation of the (certainly widespread) practice of conscripting sailors for the sea raids in early Islamic Egypt outside of Jême and Aphrodito¹¹. Due to this specific subject matter, the text most likely dates to the late 7th or early 8th century. This is further supported by the phrase ἰδιοκινδύωνος, whose only other known appearance is in a document pertaining to the sea raids from the year 710 (see discussion of line 10) as well as by the palaeographical features of our text: It is written in a rather cursive sloping minuscule with many ligatures – an *écriture quadrilinéaire* according to Alain Delattre as it is characteristic of the professional scribes of the late 7th and 8th centuries¹².

9 T.S. Richter, op. cit., p. 304.

10 Ibid., pp. 74ff.

11 Although it seems certain that the pagarch of Edfu, whose letters show that he had to build boats, supply boat-builders and canal-diggers, was not spared when it came to the conscription of sailors, nor would many of his colleagues in other pagarchies, see Chr. Wickham, op. cit., pp. 137f.

12 P.Brux.Bawit pp. 127–129.

Recto ↓

- Ϡ̄ Ϸ̄μ̄ π̄ραν̄ μ̄πειω̄τ̄ μ̄ν̄ π̄ω̄ηρε μ̄ν̄ πε̄π̄νᾱ [ε̄το̄γᾱᾱβ ± ca. ?]
 ἀνοκ̄ φ̄ηγ̄ π̄ω̄ηρε μ̄π̄μακᾱριος̄ τ̄ω̄ρᾱ π̄ρ̄μ̄τ̄[± ca. ?]
 π̄ω̄ηρε μ̄π̄μακᾱριος̄' πολ̄υτᾱριος̄ π̄λαμ̄προτ̄(ᾱτος̄) ἡ̄τ̄[± ca. ?]
 τ̄ειπο̄λις̄ ἡ̄νο̄γ̄ω̄τ̄ σ̄η̄η̄ χ̄αιρεῑν̄ χ̄ε̄ επῑδ̄η̄ ᾱ[± ca. ?]
 5 κ̄ω̄ τᾱλλᾱγη̄ ἡ̄τᾱνᾱτο̄λη̄ ε̄βολ̄ ᾱκ̄χῑ σο̄οῡγ̄[± ca. ?]
 [. .] τ̄η̄τη̄ς̄ ω̄ᾱν̄τε̄κ̄σ̄ῆ̄ θ̄ε̄ ἡ̄κ̄ω̄ τ̄εῑλλᾱγη̄ [ε̄βολ̄ ± ca. ?]
 [. . .] χ̄ο̄ μ̄ν̄ τε̄σε̄πισ̄το̄λη̄ ἡ̄ταῑν̄τ̄ς̄ νᾱκ̄ τᾱρε̄κ̄[± ca. ?]
 [. . .] Ϸ̄ομ̄ω̄λο̄γεῑ χ̄ω̄ρις̄ παν̄το̄ιας̄ ἀνᾱγκ̄ης̄[± ca. ?]
 [. .] ο̄γ̄ῆ̄ επῑ τ̄ω̄ ε̄ροῑ ἡ̄τᾱᾱπο̄λο̄γιζε̄ μ̄μο̄οῡ ἡ̄[± ca. ?]
 10 επῑ τ̄ω̄ ε̄ροῑ ο̄ν̄ ἰ̄διο̄κιν̄δ̄ῡν̄ω̄ς̄ ἡ̄τᾱ[± ca. ?]
 [. .].. *vacat* ε̄γ̄ω̄ρ̄χ̄ ἡ̄τ̄κ̄λαμ̄προτ̄(η̄ς̄) ᾱισ̄μ̄ἡ̄[± ca. ?]
 [π̄]νο̄ῡτ̄ε̄ παν̄το̄κρᾱτω̄ρ̄ μ̄ν̄ πο̄γ̄χ̄αῑ ἡ̄νη̄[τᾱρ̄χεῑ ± ca. ?]
 τε̄ρ̄ε̄[ο̄]μ̄ ἀπᾱρᾱβᾱτω̄ς̄ ε̄αῑτ̄ μᾱρ̄τη̄ρο̄ς̄ ε̄ρο̄γ̄ [± ca. ?]
 †̄στο̄ῑχεῑ επῑε̄< >ε̄νη̄γ̄ρᾱφ̄ον̄ κ̄ μ̄ [± ca. ?]
 15 [±5] ᾱῑς̄ρᾱῖ̄ Ϸ̄ᾱ[ρο̄γ̄] χ̄ε̄ μᾱγ̄η̄ο̄ῑ ἡ̄ς̄ρᾱῖ̄ †̄ †̄μᾱρ̄[± ca. ?]
 [±15] [± ca. ?]

1. πνεῦμα 2. μακάριος 3. μακάριος, λαμπρο^ς 4. πόλις, χαίρω, ἐπειδὴ 5. ἀλλαγὴ, ἀνατολή 6. ἀλλαγὴ
 7. ἐπιστολή 8. ὁμολογέω, χωρὶς παντοίας ἀνάγκης 9. ἐπὶ τῷ, ἀπολογίζομαι 10. ἐπὶ τῷ, ἰδιοκινδύνως
 11. λαμπρο^ς 12. παντοκράτωρ 13. ἀπαραβάτως, μάρτυρος 14. στοιχέω, ἔγγραφον 15. μαρτυρέω

Verso →

Πευ Τῶρς ἀπὸ χωρίου τ [± ca. ?]

Recto

(1) In the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit (...) (2) I, Phêu, the son of the late Tôrsh, the man from (... I write to NN) (3) the son of the late Polytarios, the most illustrious (... from) (4) this same city of Esna, hail! Regarding: (...) (5) issue the (naval) duty of the Oriens. You have taken six (...) (6) (...) until you find the means to issue this duty (...) (7) (...) with its document that I have given to you that you may (...) (8) (I) agree without any coercion (...) (9) (...) then it is up to me to pay them (...) (10) then it is furthermore my own liability that I (...) (11) (...) as a security for your eminence. I have issued (this ... I swear by) (12) (G)od Almighty and the health of those wh(o rule [over us?]) that I will heed it according to (13) its authority, intransgressibly, having brought witnesses for it. (I, Phêu, the son of the late Tôrsh,) (14) confirm this document (...) (15) (...) I have written on his behalf, for he does not know how to write. I bear witness (...) (16) (...)

Verso

(1) Peu, son of Tôrs, from the χωρίον (...)

1 The Trinitarian formula probably went on in the lacuna, see the introduction.

2 Based on the mentioning of “this same city of Esna” in line 4, line 2 most likely continues: τ̄ω̄ρᾱ π̄ρ̄μ̄τ̄[πο̄λις̄ σ̄η̄η̄ ε̄τ̄ε̄ρᾱῑ ἡ̄ (...).

3 The honorific appellation λαμπρότατος appears in Coptic documentary texts from the 7th to 8th centuries and seems to have been used too broadly to be narrowed down in its application to any particular stratum of society or a specific rank¹³. A search in the papyri.info database navigator shows that most of the latest Greek documents that employ this term stem from the 6th century archive of Dioscoros from Antinoopolis, where mostly the pagarch is called by this title, but also the dux of the Thebais as well as some people further down the social hierarchy.

7 I believe the third person singular feminine pronoun in τερεπιστολη probably refers to an impersonal feminine noun in line 6, possibly τετραλλαγη. The last letter of the line is Kappa, we are dealing with the beginning of a second person singular masculine Causative Conjunctive ταρεκωτῃ with the verb lost. It took me a good while to see this, because I have come to the realization that the small papyrus fragment at the end of lines 7 and 8 has been erroneously reattached in this place. In its restored position, no satisfactory reading of the last discernable letters of each line is possible. If we remove the fragment, however, we get two very reasonable forms: ταρεκ in line 7 “that you may”, and αναγκης in line 8, the genitive of ἀνάγκη that corresponds with the preceding παντοιας.

8 The expression χωρίς παντοιας ἀνάγκης “without any coercion” is thusfar completely unattested in both the Coptic and the Greek evidence.

10 ἰΔΙΟΚΙΝΔΥΝΩΣ: A compound adverb, attested only once in P.Lond. IV 1393¹⁴, dated January 7, 710, from the Archive of Basilios. In it, the governor Qurra instructs Basilios to provide sailors, workmen, and supplies for the κοῦρσα.

11 ΤΚΛΑΜΠΡΟΤ(ΗΣ): This seems to be the first attestation of the feminine λαμπρότης in Coptic. ΔΙΣΜῆ-, since it is the prenominal state, must have been followed directly by a nominal object, namely a term for the document, most likely with the demonstrative article. It would have to be a masculine noun, since it is repeatedly referred to as such in the following lines. A possibility is πειεγραφον, as this term is used shortly after in line 14. The end of the line certainly contained the typical formula εἰωρκῆ ἢ "I swear by", which is continued by the direct object, πῆνοῦτε, in the next line.

12 Based on the end of line 11 and the beginning of line 13, the lacuna at the end of this line can be reconstructed with some certainty to read at least – perhaps more – "I swear by God the ruler of the world and the health..." ἢνε[ταρχει¹⁵, possibly followed by ταριροεισ εροϋ προς, “that I will heed it according to ...”, which is then continued in line 13:

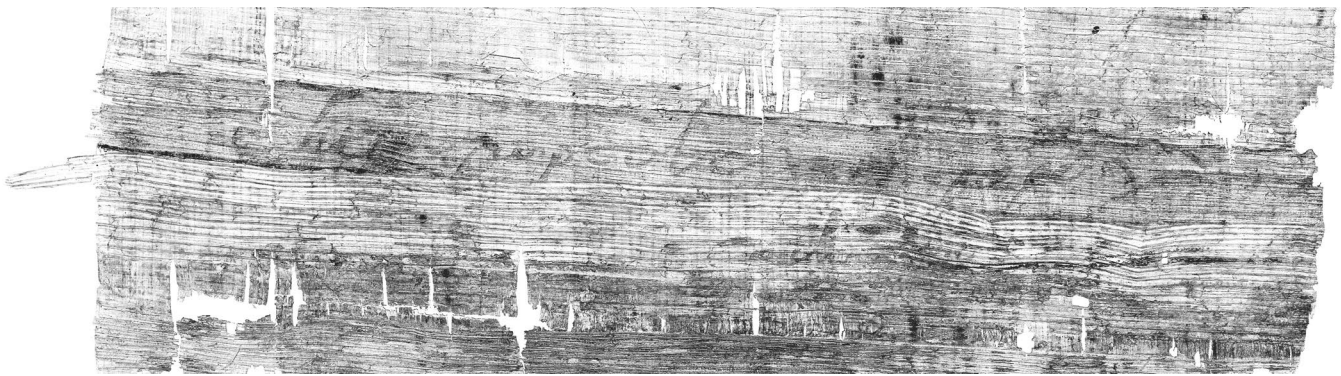
13 Τερε[ο]μ “its authority”. εαιτῃ μαρτηροϋ εροϋ was probably followed by Phêu’s renewed self-topicalisation: ἀνοκ φηγῷ πωηρε ἡπμακαριος τωρω, which would fit the suggested extent of the lacuna in line 12.

14 επε<ι>ενγραφον: The full form of the article is not warranted here.

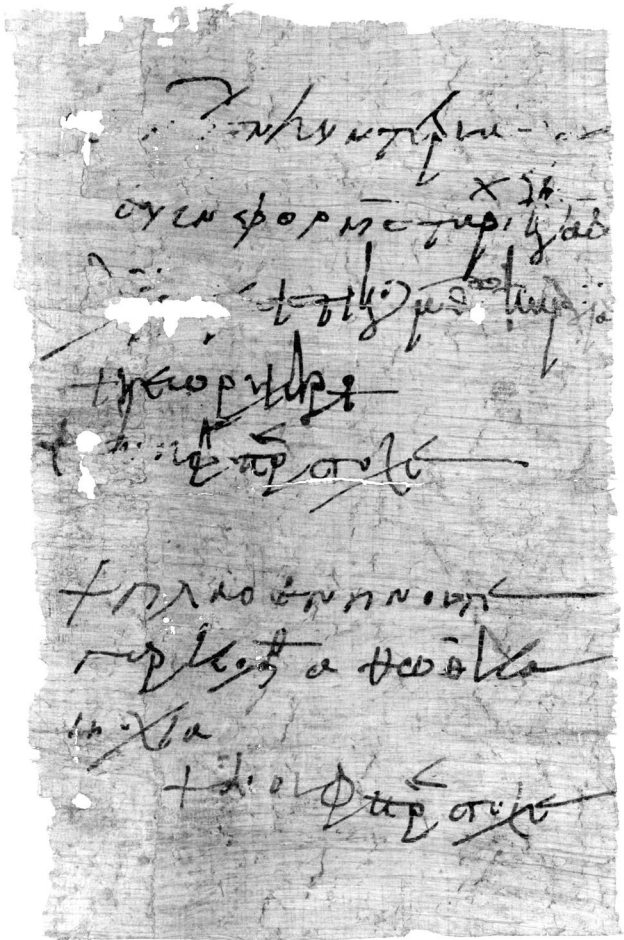
13 See Förster, Wörterbuch, s.v.

14 Reconstructed via attachment of fragments that were missing in Crum’s edition, this letter was edited, translated, and commented upon by H.I. Bell, Two Official Letters of the Arab Period, JEA 12 (1926) 265–281.

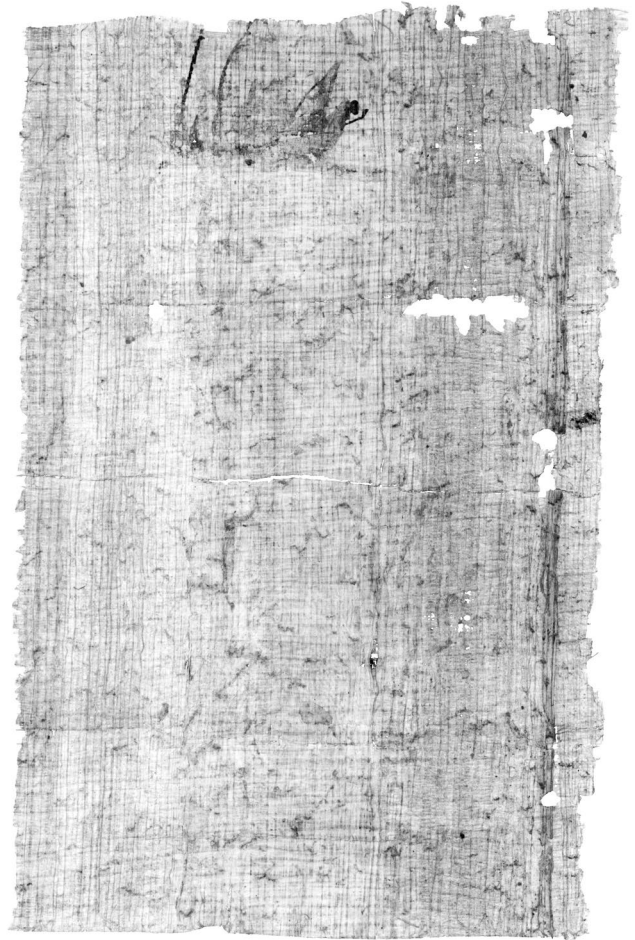
15 Quite possibly: αρχει εχων, “who rule over us,” but since we do not know how much text is missing to the right, this cannot be decided.



Nr. 23 Verso (Ausschnitt)



Nr. 24 Recto



Nr. 24 Verso