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James G. Keenan
Loyola University Chicago, jkeenan@luc.edu

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Undertaking under Oath for a Military Recruit (P.Mich. Inv. 3470)

James G. Keenan (Chicago)

Abstract: This is an edition of P.Mich. inv. 3470, the lefthand side of a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dating to AD 350. In it Aurelius Eulogius guarantees the appearance of a recruit named Isak, from the Oxyrhynchite village Episemou, at Alexandria or other required posting.

Keywords: army, recruitment, Late Antique Egypt, Oxyrhynchus

P.Mich. inv. 3470 W 7.3 x H 26 cm Oxyrhynchus, AD 350

This is an undertaking under oath with several formal parallels, especially from Oxyrhynchus in the first half of the fourth century. P.Oxy. 50.3576 is the closest match to the present document’s format and layout; but see also 54.3746, a tomos synkollēsimos of such documents. The relevant boilerplate had various particular uses, serving sometimes, as in the present case, to assure the presentation of a person or persons to a designated place or before a prescribed authority. Special interest is that the present example concerns a military recruit from the Oxyrhynchite village Episemou in AD 350. By its terms Aurelius Eulogius of Oxyrhynchus swears he has received into custody the recruit, Isak by name, whom he will deliver to Alexandria or other suitable posting, as required, along with the requisite paperwork. There is no clear indication of the unit to which the recruit was destined, but his (possible) Alexandrian assignment (lines 16–17) is an unusual instance of an Egyptian recruit’s being sent to serve at a significant distance from his origo; see Anna M. Kaiser, “Rekrutierungspraxis im spätantiken Ägypten,” in C. Wolff (ed.), Le métier de soldat dans le monde romain. Actes du cinquième congrès de Lyon organisé les 23–25 septembre 2010 par l’Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3. Collection Études et de Recherches sur l’Occident Romain (Lyon, 2012): 99–120 + Bibliographie. Dr. Kaiser also points (e-mail, July 11, 2013) to P.Oxy. 9.1190 (AD 347, recruits sent to Egyptian Babylon) and W.Chr. 469 (= Sel.Pap. II 228, after AD 380–382, recruits sent to Antioch) as exceptions to this practice.

The present document conforms to A.H.M. Jones’s description of military conscription in the fourth century (Later Roman Empire 614–619, esp. 615–616): levies were made city by city, but burdens fell principally upon the rural population. It is a nice complement to W.Chr. 466 and 467, both fourth century. In the former, the villagers of Toou of the Herakleopolite Nome pay 30 solidi to the nome’s ἐπιμελητής τιρόνων (read τιρώνων); with this money he identifies and purchases the services of a recruit from the same village. The latter is a sworn
guarantee by the villagers of Pesla of the Hermopolite Nome for a recruit from their own village. The former is therefore perhaps initially concerned with a payment associated with the *aurum tironicum*; the latter, like the present document, is directly concerned with a recruit “en chair et en os.” Cf. *P.Oxy.* 45.3261 (AD 324), also concerned with flesh-and-blood recruits.


The present undertaking preserves: consular year date (line 1–[2]); address (lines 3–8); agreement on oath (lines 8–20), identification of the party to be delivered (lines 21–23), consular date, abbreviated but presumably adding month and day (line 24), and the oath-taker’s subscription (lines 25–28). Only the left half of the papyrus survives. There are margins at top, left, and bottom. The top margin, discounting the oversized upsilon at the start, measures 1 cm. (but see the marginal intrusion described below). The left margin is fairly evenly maintained at ca. 1.5 cm. The bottom margin is likewise ca. 1.5 cm. But for the descender of rho from πρόκιται in line 28. There is a vertical kollesis from the left edge in, about 2 cm. wide, with a ragged right edge.

Despite the document’s discrete segments, in one case (between lines 23 and 24) set off by a vertical space, in another (between lines 24 and 25) set off by a paragraphus, the hand appears to be the same throughout, a cursive of medium size that runs with the fibers. This must therefore be a copy, not the original document, a conclusion that may be supported by traces of tiny writing in the top margin where, with the eye of faith, alpha and nu may perhaps be discerned, suggestive of the word ἀντίγραφον. The abbreviated consular date (mentioned above) and the short form of the oath formula (lines 9–10n.) also support this conclusion.

Where writing survives, the writer shows a preference for iota over epsilon-iota (e.g., lines 3, 16–17, 26, but see 1, 24) and in one case (lines 26–27) omicron over omega. I have nevertheless retained standard spelling in restorations except for line 28 where the writer’s proclivity seemed too obvious to ignore.

The verso is blank.

According to APIS records, this papyrus was purchased from Maurice Nahman in 1925. It came to Michigan in October 1926 “as a gift of Oscar Weber and Richard H. Webber (of Detroit).” According to John G. Pedley, *The Life and Works of Francis Willey Kelsey: Archaeology, Antiquity, and the Arts* (Ann Arbor, 2012), the two men were brothers; he indexes them under “Webber.” Kelsey’s
papers in the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, examined by Todd M. Hickey in June 2013, prove Pedley is correct. Working through the amous “papyrus cartel”, Kelsey nominally acquired the lots to which P.Mich. inv. 3470 belongs, 350 documents in all, in late 1925. The Webbers pledged money to cover the cost, at $1250 apiece (the two checks were sent from Detroit to Ann Arbor, April 9, 1926). The papyri, originating from Nahman’s collection in Cairo, were being held for Michigan at the British Museum, which was serving as go-between in transactions with Nahman. Both Kenyon and Bell, the latter of whom presented Kelsey with a detailed evaluation, judged the lots disappointing. In any event, Kelsey brought the papyri to Ann Arbor from London in October 1926.

Although both brothers were donors, Kelsey’s correspondence concerning this transaction is with Oscar Webber (sic, correctly) only.

The image is digitally reproduced with the permission of the Papyrology Collection, Graduate Library, University of Michigan. I am grateful to C. Michael Sampson and Todd M. Hickey: to the former, especially for his close readings of the article in its manuscript form; to the latter, especially for the information supplied in the preceding paragraph. Important refinements are owed to members of the “papyrology group” that met in Hatcher Library 807 on June 19, 2013, especially Graham Claytor, Drew Stimson, and Arthur Verhoogt. Remaining defects are mine alone.

1 Ὑπατείας Ἰλασοῦ Σερ[γίου καὶ Νιγρινιανοῦ τῶν λαµ[προτάτων].]
   Φλαουίοις Διογένι [καὶ ca. 10 letters]
   κέντημα[ιος ca. 9 letters]
4 παρὰ Αὐρηλίου Εὐλογίου ἀνὰ τῆς λαμ[πράς]
   καὶ λαμ[προτάτης] Ὠξυρυγχίτων [πόλεως ca. 9 letters]
   πρὸς τῷ Καπιτωλίου 
8 τοῦ ἤτοι προπομ[ου. - - - ὀμολογοῦ]
   ὅμως τὸν σεβά[μιον θείον ὄρκον τοῦ]
   δεσπότου ἡμῶν Ἀντιοχοῦ παρελή-
   φέναι τὸν ἔξης ἐγγ[εγραμμένων]
12 νεολέκτην παραγ[νυμευὸν ἀνὸ κό-]
   μῆς Ἐπισήμου γ’ πά[γου] [τοῦ Ὠξυρυγχίτου]
   νομοῦ ἑπέρ τῆς α[ὔτης κόμης μετὰ τῶν αὐ-
   τοῦ τροφῶν ἄχρι οὗ π[αραστάσιον τὸν]
16 αὐτὸν τίρωνα χι[λαρχὸς εἰς Ἁλε-
   ξάνδριαν ἡ ποῦ δ[ ca. 14 letters]
   εἰς στρατίαν καὶ τῆς [παραστάσεως]
   γ[ράμματα ἐπενεγκέιν εἰς τὸ ἐν μηδὲν μεμ-]
20 φθῆναι ἡ ἐνοχὰς εἰς τοῦ θείον ὄρκω.
   ἐσ[τι δὲ]
   Ἰσάκ Θεονί[ο ἀνὸ τῆς]
   αὐτῆς κόμης[
   (space 3.4 cm.)]
In the consulship of Flavii Ser[gius and Nigrinianus clarissimi.]
To Flavii Diogenes [and NN], centenarii .... from Aurelius Eu[logius from the brilliant] and most brilliant [city of] Oxyrhynchites ... at the ... of the Capitolium, ... or escort. [I agree] swearing the sacr[ed divine oath] of our lord Augustus that I have recei[ved the recruit in]scribed] immediately below, com[ing from the vil]lage Episemou of the 3rd pa[g]us [of the Oxyrhynchite] nome, on behalf of the s[ame village together with] his provisions until [I p]resent the said recruit to the trib[une at Alex]andria or wherever ... for military service; and for [his presentation] I have sub[mitted a written document] so that no fault [be found in any respect], or [may I be] liable [to the divine oath.]
He is:
Isak son of Tho[n]s [from the] same vil[lage.]
Consulship the [aforementioned, (month and day).]
I, Aurelius Eul[ogius, have presented] the afore[mentioned recruit and I shall pre]sent him, [... iliterate, as afor[ementioned].
I, Aurelius Eul[ogius, have] presented the afore[mentioned recruit and I shall pre]sent him, [... iliterate, as afo[ermented].

1–3 Under the initial upsilon’s bowl, enormous in size, are three dots, each apparently serving as guidepoints for the vertical spacing of the opening lines. No writing survives after the second dot because (I presume) the second line of the consular date was indented, as in P.Oxy. 50.3576.1–2, cf. P.Oxy.10.1261.1–2. The writing of line 2 must therefore have been tiny (vertically). It is impossible to tell where to place the break between lines 1 and 2. The writer has no qualms about dividing words, never mistakenly, between lines; see the transitions at lines 7–8, 10–11, 12–13, 14–15 (apparently), 16–17, and 19–20. There seems not to be suffi-cient space for writing λαμπροτάτον in full, cf. lines 5–6 and n. For the two con-suls, not known in Egypt for the first two months of the year (at least), see R.S. Bagnall and K.A. Worp, The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt (Leiden, 2004) 186, R.S. Bagnall, A. Cameron, S.R. Schwartz, and K.A. Worp, Consuls of the Later Roman Empire (Atlanta, GA, 1987) 235.
3–4 centenarii = centuriones (Vegetius 2.13). See S. Daris, Il lessico latino nel greco d’Egitto (Barcelona, 1991) 53 for references. In line 4 the name of the military unit presumably follows, though part or all of this space may have been left blank.

5 Ἐὐλογίου: for Eulogius, see line 25. There is nonetheless a significant descending stroke starting from the v-point of the upsilon, an apparent stray, without evident purpose. Both restorations thus seem unavoidable.

5–6 For λαμψ twice as abbreviation, see P.Oxy. 50.3576.5 and [6], 54.3746.50.

7 πρὸς τῷ Καπιτολίου: for the Oxyrhynchus Capitolium, see A. Lukaszewicz, Les édifices publics dans les villes de l’Égypte romaine (Warsaw, 1986) 55, 173–174, and J. Krüger, Oxyrhynchos in der Kaiserzeit. Studien zur Topographie und Literaturrezeption (Frankfurt am Main, 1990) 104 (no. 24). Whether at this late date it retained its cultic functions is unascertainable: cf. AnneMarie Luijendijk, Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (Cambridge, MA, 2008) 15–16. See P.Oxy. 54.3757.3 (and line 3n.) and 3758.156, for the Capitolium as a setting for court proceedings in AD 325. Both citations have πρὸς τῷ Καπιτολίῳ, but since our writer exhibits no examples of case confusion, I assume here that the genitive case is correct and the writer is continuing his description of Eulogius’ positions, carrying over from line 6. Eulogius may therefore have been in charge of a part of the Capitolium that began with chi. There are no parallels.

8 προπομποῦ: see P.Oxy. 50.3576.6n. If ἦτοι assumes the third sense identified by P.J. Sijpesteijn, “The Meanings of ἦτοι in the Papyri,” ZPE 90 (1992) 241–250 at 245–246, i.e., “and especially,” the word that begins on line 7 and carries over to 8 provides the genus of which προπομποῦ gives a species. No such pairing of terms is recorded in the papyri, but the use of the verb ἔγγυητο in combination with παρίστημι in analogous circumstances (e.g., P.Abinn. 61.5–6, 9, 15–17) hints at ἔγγυητος as perhaps the missing term: “guarantor whose assignment is to serve as recruit escort.” But there are other likely options, including ἐπιελητοῦ (τιρώνων, read τιρώνων), W.Chr. 466.4; φροντιστοῦ (for procurator), based on the Latin legal texts cited by Jones, Later Roman Empire 615–616 with notes on 1235–1255; κεφαλαυστοῦ (for capitularius, also from legal texts), Carrié “Le système de recrutement” 373; προστάτου, Carrié 374. The “escort” is of course Eulogius and the word προπομποῦ marks the end of the document’s address. A blank space may follow; or there may be room for χαίρειν, but this is not indicated by the cited parallels.


12 νεολέκτην: see below, line 16, for the Latin equivalent, τίρωνα.

13 Ἐπισεμοῦ γὰρ πάντως: For the village Episemou, see A. Benais sa, Rural Settlements of the Oxyrhynchite Nome: A Papyrological Survey, Version 2.0 (May 2012), Trismegistos Online Publications IV, 68–70. Pagus identification is expected next: P.Oxy. 12.1425.6, 54.3746.25. Gamma (for 3rd) and the pi that follows are joined by a ligature that rises in its middle to a little loop, which must serve as the number marker for gamma.

14 Because of τῆς ἀριστῆς repetition of the village name is unnecessary: e.g., P.Oxy. 12.1425.10–12.

14–15 μετά τῶν αὐτῶν τροφῶν: The term here suggests food, but could also include clothing, equipment, and travel expenses — all part of his “draft allowance.” See Zuckerman, “Two Reforms of the 370s,” esp. 94–97. Considering the length of the supplement which extends line 14 up to 31 letters, one could assume that ἀριστῆς was abbreviated (ά[υτ]), but since line 19 has 3 more letters, this seems not really necessary.

16 χιλιάρχῳ: common term for commander of a military unit in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods; its latest attestation as such seems to be from the beginning of the fourth century (SB 24.16000). Its function in the later period seems to have been assumed by the Latin loanword tribunus. See Daris (lines 3–4n.) 112.

17 ἢ ποῦ δ---: i.e., to Alexandria “or wherever is necessary” (δ[έ] or δ[ή])? The expression is unparalleled. What seems intended is an indirect question construction like ὡς οὖν (ἐὰν) δ[ή], or perhaps one beginning with ὡς οὖν[ά]ν, but the hoped-for omicron is nowhere to be seen.

18–20 A common formula, but with variations, sometimes in restoration: P.Oxy. 10.1261.10–12; 43.3127.12–13; 50.3576.13–15; 54.3746.10–13, 35–37, 60–62, cf. 60.4086.10. The restoration in line 19, at 22 letters, is the longest of those proposed for the entire text, but one where the formula εἰς τὸ ἐν μὴ δὲν μεμορθῇσι is at its most strict (numerous additional examples in the Navigator of www.papyri.info). Meanwhile, the supplement in line 18, at 11 letters, is among the shortest. Perhaps supply there also τοῦτο according to the model of P.Oxy. 50.3576.13.

21 The line is just about perfectly centered; such alignment would be ruined by restoration of the recruit’s status designation, whether Aurelius (W.Chr. 467; cf. P.Oxy. 12.1425.10–12, 1426.15–17, though not from a military context) or Flavius (W.Chr. 466).

22 Iota in Ἰσάκ is written enormously, its lower extension occupying also the beginning of line 23. Of interest is the combination of this presumably Christian

23 The parallel provided by *P.Oxy.* 12.1245.12 together with αὐτῆς proves the village name in line 13 does not require repetition here. See above, line 14 and note.

24 Restore either προκ(εμένης), *P.Oxy.* 50.3576.24, cf. 12.1425.13, or α(ύτης), *P.Oxy.* 54.3746.38 and 63.

28 ματόν: only ἄγραμ ματόν comes to mind, perhaps to suggest that the recruit in his illiteracy was not “officer material.” See *W.Chr.* 466.15–16, where the recruit is similarly noted to be illiterate.