

III.—Ostr. Skeat 11

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H. C. Youtie published this ostracon in *TAPA* 81 (1950) 110–111 (Plate Ia). It was purchased at Luxor, but its provenance is unknown. A substantial piece is lost on the right side. The text, as edited, reads:

Κλαύδιος Γερμ[ανὸς]
 κουράτορι πρεσιδ[ίου χ(αίρειν).]
 ἀπόλυσσον Ἰούλι[ον]
 [ίπ]πέα (καί) πρ[ωτήκτο-]
 5 [ρα έ]πάρχου [

Youtie assigns the hand to the third century, and obtains a closer date from the title *protector* (lines 4–5), which came into use only in the second half of that century. He interprets the text as an order from a military commander to “the administrative chief of the garrison” to release an *eques* and *protector praelecti*. For the key word, ἀπόλυσσον in line 3, he compares *POxy.* 1271. This is a request to the prefect of Egypt, with the prefect’s subscription, asking him to instruct the *procurator Phari* to allow a woman to leave Alexandria by sea, and contains the phrase ἀπολῦσαί με κατὰ τὸ ἔθος. Similarly, Youtie sees in our ostracon “a soldier’s pass, which permits him to leave the camp.” No explanation is offered for the use of Greek instead of Latin, the official language of the army.

Claire Préaux has already raised objections to some parts of the editor’s interpretation of the text in a review in *ChronEg* 27 (1952) 294–295. First, she would date the hand in the second half of the second century, which of course would make the published restoration of lines 4–5 impossible. She also quite rightly questions the expansion of the abbreviation in line 4, pointing out that one would expect a cavalryman to be identified by his troop, i.e. by *turma* and the decurion’s name in the genitive.

There are other difficulties in the reconstruction and interpretation of the text as printed. One may very well suspect that more

was lost on the right than is assumed. As it is, we have Claudius Germanus with no title and the *curator* with no name. In line 3, we must conclude that Iulius had a very short *cognomen*. All of this is possible, but the need for three such assumptions makes the restorations somewhat doubtful even before they are examined in detail.

In interpreting *curator praesidii* (line 2), for which there seems to be no exact parallel, it is not really very helpful to compare the *praefectus castrorum*. This officer was found only in a legionary camp, and even there the one prefect of this kind that remained in Egypt apparently lost his original character and separate identity during the second century.¹ Whatever his duties may have been at any period, he was one of the highest ranking officers in the province, and there would seem to be little need for his counterpart in a mere *praesidium*. In any event, *curator praesidii* would seem not to be a regular title or rank in the military hierarchy but rather a post or function to which men of quite varied standings could be assigned. In Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.36 we find *Corbulo . . . curam praesidiorum Paccio Orfito, primi pili honore perfuncto, mandat*. In other words, Orfitus was a *primipilaris*, temporarily acting, one may say, as *curator praesidiorum*. Closer parallels are found in inscriptions, including a number from Egypt. In one a legionary soldier is, like the man in our ostrakon, called *κουράτωρ*.² Probably quite similar in function is the *decurio alae* who is described as *curam agens operis dominici*.³ One may also compare another *decurio*, to whom an inscription is dedicated by *omnes commilitones qui sub cura eius sumus*.⁴ All three men seem to be in charge of small detachments stationed at mines or quarries. It seems reasonable to conclude that the *curator praesidii* in our text was probably a centurion or *principalis* who, like many other subordinate officers, was for a time *curam agens* of a post, with a detachment *sub cura eius*.⁵ The *praesidium* may well have been one of those in the

¹ See J. Lesquier, *L'armée romaine d'Égypte d'Auguste à Dioclétien* (Cairo 1918) 119–132; H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions* (Oxford 1928) 193–196; G. Lopuszanski, *Mélanges* 55 (1938) 138–158.

² *AEpigr* 1910 no. 207 (A.D. 10/11, Wadi Semna). Lesquier, rightly I believe, explains him as the commander of *stationarii*, placed *sub cura eius*; (above, note 1) 142. The station itself would be called a *praesidium*. The *curator* is identified as belonging to *centuria Bassi*; thus he was not himself a centurion.

³ *CIL* 3.75 = *ILS* 4424 (A.D. 203/209, Philae).

⁴ *CIL* 3.12067 = *ILS* 2609 (Djebel-el-Tukh).

⁵ For the very common formula *sub cura* see e.g. *ThLL* 4.1468 and G. C. Picard,

Eastern Desert: such posts were particularly numerous there;⁶ Luxor, where the ostracon was purchased, is near the western terminus of the ancient routes into the desert; and the use of an ostracon instead of papyrus possibly suggests the same region.⁷ Claudius Germanus is clearly the *curator's* superior in the chain of command, but there is of course no evidence for his identity. Since he writes to a military officer in Greek and not Latin, it is very possible that he was himself a civilian. In any event, it seems highly improbable that the *curator* was Germanus' "Platzkommandant" or that the two men were officers in the same garrison.⁸

As regards the restorations in lines 4–5, Miss Préaux's dating of the hand would be enough to make them impossible, if one were prepared to accept her judgment without further question.⁹ But actually even granted the editor's date, his restorations seem hardly possible. The combination *equus* and *protector* is very strange, when one remembers that *protectores* were at least centurions in rank.¹⁰ *Protector praefecti*, moreover, is without parallel and hard to accept.¹¹ The inscription, finally, on which the editor models his restoration is so fragmentary that both its text and interpretation must be regarded as quite uncertain.¹²

Castellum Dimmidi (Algiers/Paris 1944) 92–93. Picard remarks that the title *curator* seems to correspond to the phrase *sub cura*.

⁶ For such desert posts see Lesquier (above, note 1) 238–247, 417–458. Many of them guarded mines or quarries. A *praesidium* is mentioned in a recently published ostracon from the Wadi Fawakhir; *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 179, no. 23; cf. 187, no. 36.

⁷ Cf. the ostraca containing the private correspondence of soldiers which were found in the Wadi Fawakhir and published by O. Guéraud in *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 141–196. But it is still strange to find an official letter on an ostracon.

⁸ Possibly Claudius Germanus was the *praefectus praesidiorum et montis Beronices* (ILS 2699) or his successor; for this officer see Lesquier (above, note 1) 427–431. Lesquier suggests that the region controlled by the prefect in the first century was placed under civil administration during Hadrian's reign. If E. G. Turner's restoration and dating of the hand are right, the prefect is mentioned in a late second or early third century papyrus, *PAbderdeen* 149.

⁹ When two such able authorities differ, it is perhaps best not to use the hand as a criterion in restoring the text. But Miss Préaux's experience in editing the ostraca from Pselcis gives her opinion particular weight.

¹⁰ See A. Alföldi in *CAH* 12.219–220 and his references. The fullest study of these officers is by E. Ch. Babut, *RHist* 114 (1913) 225–260, and 116 (1914) 225–293.

¹¹ Youtie does not state whether he has in mind the *praefectus Aegypti* or a *praefectus legionis*.

¹² *CIL* 13.7535a. On this inscription see the remarks of E. Stein, *Geschichte des spätromischen Reiches* I (Vienna 1928) 84, note 3.

Miss Préaux's suggestion that the abbreviation in line 4 may represent *turma* points in the right direction. The symbol, however, does not appear to be one for *turma*, but, as the plate shows, rather the Latin abbreviation for *centuria*. The Latin centurial symbol does occur in Greek texts in Egypt, though infrequently,¹³ and one may compare the common use of the Latin denarius sign in Greek inscriptions and papyri. There are several obvious possibilities for the centurion's name, which follows the symbol: e.g. Priscus or Proclus.¹⁴ In an Egyptian text a cavalryman who belongs to a century and not a *turma* can only be a legionary,¹⁵ and the legion must be the *II Traiana*, the only legion in Egypt after the middle of the second century.¹⁶ No restoration for the rest of lines 4 and 5 can be regarded as certain, but possibly the text ran [. . . κατὰ κέλυσιν, ἐξ ἐπιστολῆς, or the like] [τοῦ ἐ]παρχου.¹⁷

The question remains how to interpret ἀπόλυσον. One possibility is suggested by *Sammelbuch* 4639 (A.D. 209) in which a prefect of Egypt writes: Νιγέραν Παπειρίου καταδικασθέντα εἰς ἀλαβαστρῶνα . . . πληρώσαντα τὸν τῆς καταδίκης χρόνον ἀπέλυσα. Perhaps Iulius had also been sentenced to work in a mine or quarry. The *curator praesidii*, as we have seen, may have been in charge of a detachment at a mine or quarry (above, note 6), and if the suggested restoration of lines 4–5 is substantially correct, Iulius was, like the prisoner, also released by direct order of the prefect. Moreover, it is well known that soldiers were employed in mining in one capacity or

¹³ *SEG* 8.860, correcting *CIG* 5074 = *IGRR* 1.1362 and *CIG* 5095 = *IGRR* 1.1364 (both from Pselcis in Nubia). The dates are A.D. 26 and 136. The sign is shown quite clearly in the plates of the publication in which the correction was first made; G. Roeder, *Der Tempel von Dakke*, II (Cairo 1930) plates 19a and 26b.

¹⁴ Centurions with these names are found among those of the *II Traiana*, but needless to say, there would be very little chance that either was the centurion in the ostrakon. For lists of the legion's centurions see Lesquier (above, note 1) 138–139; E. Ritterling, *RE* 12 (1925) 1491–92, s.v. "Legio."

¹⁵ See A. von Premerstein, *Klio* 3 (1903) 26–27; Lesquier (above, note 1) 134–135; Parker (above, note 1) 211. Another possible instance of a cavalryman belonging to a century is found in an ostrakon from Wadi Fawakhir; *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 195, no. 57. *Equites* are mentioned in six of these ostraca and evidently made up a considerable part of the desert garrisons; *loc. cit.* 147. Cavalrymen in the praetorian cohorts were also assigned to centuries, but there could be no question of a praetorian *eques* here.

¹⁶ Lesquier (above, note 1) 54–55, 67–71. The *XXII Deiotariana* had probably disappeared by A.D. 161; see also Ritterling, *RE* 12 (1925) 1794–95, s.v. "Legio."

¹⁷ As Youtie suggests, the order may have ended at this point. I assume, especially because he acts through an intermediary, that the prefect is *praefectus Aegypti*, but it is possible that he is *praefectus legionis*. Cf. also the unidentified prefects in *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 169–171, no. 14 (Wadi Fawakhir).

another: the unfortunate men under the command of Curtius Rufus furnish the most familiar example.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it seems very unlikely that a soldier would have actually been condemned to the mines, especially one who retained the rank of *eques legionis*.¹⁹

It is perhaps best to assume that ἀπόλυσον has here its common and regular meaning as a technical military term: "discharge."²⁰ Precisely what the *curator* would do is not clear. In theory the emperor alone granted discharges, acting through provincial governors.²¹ But in practice, local commanders presumably carried out part of the process, which doubtless was a complicated one involving several stages. If nothing else, they would have to share in the paperwork and see to it that all the necessary entries were made in the unit's or detachment's records.²²

¹⁸ Tacitus *Ann.* 11.20. Soldiers were employed in mines and quarries in Egypt as guards or in various technical capacities; see Lesquier (above, note 1) 238–247; Fiehn, *RE* 3A (1929), 2287–88, s.v. "Steinbruch." See also the *pridianum* published by A. S. Hunt, col. II, line 58: in *Dardanis ad metella* (l. *metalla*); *Raccolta di scritti in onore di Giacomo Lumbroso* (Milan 1925) 270; cf. G. Cantacuzène, *Aegyptus* 9 (1928) 75.

¹⁹ See *Digest* 49.16.3.1 (Modestinus): . . . *nam in metallum aut in opus metalli (milites) non dabuntur nec torquentur*. But of course the distinction between fatigue duty and punishment is often rather obscure in army life. An *eques legionis* was a *principalis*; see A. von Domaszewski, *BonnJbb* 117 (1908) 49.

²⁰ For its use in the papyri see F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* III (Berlin 1931) 203–204.

²¹ See Th. Mommsen and H. Nesselhauf, *CIL* 16, p. 161.

²² Cf. *POxy.* 1204 (A.D. 299) in which the petitioner, a civilian, states that he was in the Small Oasis for the discharge (πρός ἐκσφόνγγενσιν) of the soldiers stationed there, in accordance with the order (ἐκ προστάξεως) of the prefect (lines 6–7; cf. line 19).