

ON THE STARTING DATE OF LITURGIES IN ROMAN EGYPT

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Fifty years ago it seemed reasonable to suppose that, "Dabei hat zunächst wohl und in der Regel als Amtsjahr das ägyptische Kalenderjahr gegolten."¹ Evidence accumulated in the intervening half century raises serious questions about this "general rule." Certainly it is now demonstrable that many liturgists took up their duties at times other than Thoth 1 (= August 29), the first day of the Egyptian calendar year. Some of the evidence is presented in my paper in *Proceedings of the IX [1958] International Congress of Papyrology*, pp. 239-42. Two further examples follow.

I. PSI 1245

The essence of this document is apparent, but its mutilated state obfuscates the details. Two helpful emendations by E. P. Wegener are recorded in *BL* III, p. 229.² Further analysis of the contents will, however, be rewarding.

In outline the document is a petition to the nome strategos (lines 1-6) incorporating a certified copy of an earlier petition to the Prefect of Egypt (lines 7-32) and the Prefect's instructional subscription (line 33), pursuant to which the petition to the strategos was drawn up. The certified copy is dated in Pharmouthi of year 15 (= March/April of 207 A.D.). This date carries the very strong implication that the Prefect's *hypographê* was affixed at his *conventus* of that year, and this

¹ F. Oertel, *Die Liturgie* 363.

² The emendation for line 33 is dubious as to the precise wording but correct in identifying the line as the Prefect's *hypographê*.

in turn would mean that the petition to the Prefect was submitted some time during the preceding twelvemonth. The date in Mesore (=July/August) at the end of the document (line 37) should be that of the petition to the strategos. One may wonder why the petitioner waited four or five months after the Prefect's reply before proceeding to petition the strategos. A possible answer is suggested by BGU 970 (=Mitteis, *Chrest.* 242) and POxy. 2131, which reveal how far a petitioner sometimes had to travel (or send) to obtain a copy of the Prefect's reply. In the first the Prefect's reply was posted in Juliopolis, a suburb of Alexandria, 150 miles from the petitioner in Karanis; in the second a petitioner from Oxyrhynchus received his answer in Antinoopolis, 50 miles away; perhaps the delay in PSI 1245 between the time of the Prefect's reply and that of the consequent petition to the strategos resulted from a similar situation.

Now to the petitioner's grievances. There begins in line 18 a plaintive tale of multiple, chronologically overlapping liturgies. The separate impositions are recounted as follows:

Lines 18–20

[τῷ] ιβ (ἔτει) . . . ἀνεδόθην [ὑπὸ
τοῦ κωμο]γραμματέως κώμης
Ἑρμοῦ πόλεως . . . εἰς [ἐπιτήρησιν
γε]νηματογραφουμένων ὑπαρχόν-
των τῆς κώμης.

In the 12th year I was appointed³
by the village clerk of the village
of Hermoupolis⁴ to a superinten-
dency of confiscated properties of
the village.

Lines 20–22

καὶ πληρ[οῦντός μο]ν τὸν ὀρις-
μένον τριετῇ χρόνον, μὴ δοθέντος
ἀντ' ἐμοῦ ἐτ[έρου ἀνεδόθ]ην εἰς
σειτολογίαν τῆς αὐτῆς κώμης.

And as I was completing the pre-
scribed three-year term, with no
other named in my place I was
appointed a sitologos of the said
village.

³ δίδωμι and ἀναδίδωμι, as used in connection with liturgy, originally denoted nomination. But as nomination often was and increasingly became tantamount to appointment, the verb increasingly signified "to appoint." For examples earlier than PSI 1245, cf. BGU 18 (= Wilcken, *Chrest.* 398), 842, and 1566, *PLeit.* 5 and 11 (= SB 10196 and 10203), *PLond.* 1159 (= Wilcken, *Chrest.* 415), *PPetaus* passim, SB 7331.

⁴ Not the metropolis of the Hermopolite nome, but a village in the Arsinoite.

Lines 22-24

ἔτι [δὲ] καὶ δύο παρὰ τ[ὰ ἀπει-
ρημένα⁵ πονο]υμένου τῷ γ (ἔτει)
καὶ ἰδ (ἔτει) καὶ κατεχομένου μου
καὶ ταύταις τα[ῖς χρεῖαις], οὐκ
οἶδ' ὅπως οὖν ἀνεδόθην εἰς ἑτέραν
[ἐπ]ιτήρησιν κώμη[ς ?Πολυδευ]-
κείας.

And while I was laboring under
two (liturgies)—contrary to the
injunctions⁵—in the 13th year and
the 14th year and I was still en-
gaged in these services, I was some-
how appointed to another super-
intendency of the village of
Polydeukia.

Inter alia the petitioner appears to be saying that he served two years simultaneously in the first epiteresis and the sitologia. Since a sitologos was normally appointed for a single year's harvest,⁶ this point deserves closer scrutiny. The statement, we observe, is that he performed those two liturgies *in*—which does not necessarily mean *throughout*—years 13 and 14. There is, in fact, the greatest likelihood that sitologoi were among the liturgic officials who took office in midyear, in their case probably about February–March, in time for the harvest beginning in April–May.⁷ In this light the sequence of offices recounted in PSI 1245 becomes readily intelligible, and may be tabulated thus:

Office	Appointed	To Serve
ἐπιτήρησις γεν. ὑπαρχ.	Year 12	Years 12, 13, 14 ⁸ or 13, 14, 15
σιτολογία	Year 13	Latter part of year 13 to latter part of year 14
ἑτέρα ἐπιτήρησις	Year 14	Years 14, 15, 16 ⁸ or 15, 16, 17

What happened, then, was this. The petitioner served in the first two offices mentioned. For a twelve-month period he served in both simultaneously even though, as he correctly asserts, this went beyond what could legally be required of him.⁹ While he was so engaged,

⁵ For the restoration cf. *Atti dell' XI [1965] Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia* 524 note 4. The policy of limiting the holding of liturgies to one at a time was reaffirmed by Septimius Severus and Caracalla: cf. *ibid.* 523. One of the relevant texts, PSI 1243, is given in Section 2, below.

⁶ Cf. Oertel (above, note 1) 253–54.

⁷ For the evidence see the paper cited in the opening paragraph of this article.

⁸ Plus some time into the next year if the epiteresis began after Thoth 1 (cf. Section 2, below).

⁹ Cf. above, note 5.

in year 14 he was named to the third office. Thereupon he submitted his petition, which received a favorable reply at the Prefect's next *conventus*, in year 15.¹⁰

The reliefs requested by the petitioner now also become understandable. In the original petition he asked the Prefect to order the strategos ὅπως προνοήσῃ ἀπολῦσ[αί με τῶν ἄλλων χρει]ῶν κ(αὶ) κατὰσχῃ με τῇ σειτολογίᾳ.¹¹ This was his request in year 14: to be released from the two epitereseis and kept in the sitologia (which would soon terminate). When, subsequent to the Prefect's ruling, he addressed his petition to the strategos, he asked only (lines 5–6) [ἔτερον] ἀντ' ἐμοῦ εἰς τὴν ἐπιτήρησιν ἀναδοθῆναι—i.e. it was now late in year 15, the sitologia had come to an end, the first epiteresis was or would soon be over, and his request was now simply for release from the remaining epiteresis.

The grounds on which the petitioner based his plea constitute an eloquent commentary on the liturgic system. When the sitologia was piled on his epiteresis he accepted the double burden. The further addition of a second epiteresis finally drove him to protest, but his plea to the Prefect, after mentioning the chain of cumulation, emphasizes instead considerations of fortune and residence: his means are inadequate, and he neither owns nor farms land in Polydeukia.¹² It seems fair to conclude that in the early third century the injunction against simultaneous liturgies—even though reaffirmed by the reigning emperors¹³—was locally violated with impunity, and it was regarded as so ineffectual a protection that victims of its violation did not even bother to protest to higher authority. The clear implication is that such a complaint would fall on deaf ears unless bolstered by more pressing considerations.¹⁴ Perhaps there is a further implication that

¹⁰ Cf. BGU 908, where action on a petition to the Prefect against nomination to a liturgy is put off to the next *conventus*. Time lags of months in the normal processing of complaints were common in Roman Egypt: cf. e.g. POxy. 1119 (= Wilcken, *Chrest.* 397) 6 ff.

¹¹ Lines 30–31, restored following the lead provided by Wegener, *BL* III, p. 229.

¹² Lines 25–29, ἐν [δὲ τῇ κώμῃ] οὔτε γεουχῶ οὔτε γεωργῶ οὔτε ἐστὶν τῆς αὐτῆς τοπαρχίας οὔδ' ἐκωμο]γραμματοῦ. ὅθεν . . . ἀξιώ δια τὸ ἀπορ[ό]ν με εἶναι, κτλ.

¹³ Cf. above, note 5.

¹⁴ Thus the petitioner who complains of overlapping liturgies in *PStrasb.* 57 (176 or 208 A.D.) is able to plead non-residence.

this state of affairs developed as a result of a shortage of eligible candidates rather than from mere insouciance in provincial administration.

2. *PSI 1243*

Contemporary with the document analyzed above, *PSI 1243* dates from Phamenoth 19 of year 16 (= March 15, 208 A.D.). It too is a petition to a strategos, and it too concerns overlapping liturgies, one of which is an epiteresis of confiscated property. The petitioner, after describing himself as a *δημόσιος καὶ οὐσιακὸς γεωργός* currently holding the office of village presbyteros (lines 4–5, *ὄντος καὶ πρεσβυτέρου τῆς αὐτῆς κώμης*), writes:

Lines 6–24

ἐπεὶ ὁ . . . κωμογραμματεὺς ἀνέ-
δωκέν με νῦν εἰς ἐπιτήρησιν
γεννηματογραφουμένων ὑπαρχόν-
των . . . οὐ δυνάμενος ἀμφοτέρας
τὰς χρεῖας ἐκτελεῖν, καθ' ἃ καὶ
τοῖς κυρίοις ἡμῶν αὐτοκράτορσι
ἔδοξεν μὴ ὑφ' ἑνα καιρὸν δύο
λιτουργίας τινὰ ἐκτελεῖν, δέομαι,
ἄνθρωπος πένης μόλις τὴν πρεσ-
βυτερίαν καὶ τὴν γεωργίαν δυνά-
μενος ἐκτελέσαι βαρυτάτην οὖσαν,
ἀπαλλαγῆναι τῆς ἐπιτηρήσεως καὶ
κελεῦσαι ἕτερον . . . ἀντ' ἐμοῦ
εἰσδοῦναι.

Whereas the village clerk has now appointed¹⁵ me to a superintendency of confiscated property . . . being unable to carry out both services, in accordance with the decree of our lords the emperors that a person is not to (be required to) carry out two liturgies at one time, I beg—being a poor man barely able to carry out the office of presbyteros and my farming, a very heavy burden—to be released from the superintendency and that you order (the village clerk) to nominate another in place of me.

Nothing could be plainer. If the epiteresis had not yet begun at the time of writing, it would begin before the termination of the presbytereia, thus creating an overlapping, or “two liturgies at one time.” The accumulated evidence of the papyri argues strongly that the one-year term of the presbytereia was coterminous with the calendar year.¹⁶ If so, the epiteresis here being protested obviously began at some time other than Thoth 1.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. above, note 3.

¹⁶ Cf. Oertel (above, note 1) 151.

¹⁷ Overlapping could still occur, of course, even if the presbytereia began on a date other than Thoth 1.

This conclusion accords well, moreover, with the nature of the office. It seems reasonable to suppose that such a superintendency would be created at the time when the property was confiscated. And if so, the pragmatic Roman administration would no doubt find it simpler to continue the same anniversary date in appointing the liturgic superintendents, rather than shift arbitrarily to a starting date of Thoth 1.¹⁸ Situational flexibility in provincial administration was one of Rome's "secrets of empire."

¹⁸ Fragments of support for these logical inferences may be at hand in the papyri. (1) *SB* 7173 refers in lines 12–13 to an official letter sent because ἐπι[τ]ηρητὰς τῶν ὑπαρχόντων were not appointed ὅτε ἔδει. (2) *PLeit.* 11 (= *SB* 10203) records the appointment of an epiteretes, after the previous incumbent had served the prescribed term and petitioned for release, in Hadrianus (= Choiak = Nov./Dec.), three months after the start of the Egyptian year. The relevance of this document is direct if, as I thought (*PLeit.* 11.4 note), it relates to a superintendency of confiscated property. If, as the editors of *PPetaus* argue (p. 274), *PLeit.* 11 concerns an ἐπιτηρητῆς οὐσιακῶν, it still constitutes a particularly close parallel, since confiscated property often passed into the imperial estates.