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von

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CIVIC LIFE IN FOURTH-CENTURY TRIMITHIS TWO OSTRAKA FROM THE 2004 EXCAVATIONS

The site of Amheida lies a few kilometers south of the renowned Islamic mud-brick village of Qasr, in the northwest part of the Dakhleh Oasis. Qasr dates back at least to the Fatimid period; it was at its peak in the 18th and first half of the 19th century, and it was the capital of the oasis before Mut, ancient Mothis, recovered that distinction in more recent times.¹ Amheida was its ancient predecessor as the most important town of northwest Dakhleh. It has, indeed, long been recognized as one of the two most important archaeological sites of Dakhleh, along with Ismant el-Kharab. Ancient Mothis, which was certainly more important than either in antiquity, had already in the last century been to a large extent destroyed by modern occupation and by plundering, a fate that both Ismant and Amheida escaped.²

In his monumental work on the oases published in 1987, the late Guy Wagner suggested, on slender evidence, that the village of Trimithis, known from several ancient texts as a major administrative center,³ was more likely to have been situated at Ismant el-Kharab than at Amheida, offering no identification for the latter.⁴ The excavations by the Dakhleh Oasis Project and Monash University at Ismant el-Kharab, directed by Colin Hope, which began in 1986 while Wagner's book was in the course of publication, soon proved through abundant papyrological discoveries that Ismant was in fact the ancient village of Kellis, not Trimithis. It followed, as was quickly realized, that ancient Trimithis must have been located at Amheida, and that view has been generally held in the last decade.⁵ What is more,

¹ Excavation and restoration work is currently being carried out by Fred Leemhuis; the information given here is owed to lectures by him on site in January, 2004, and in Cairo in March, 2004.

² See the brief account by G. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte* (Cairo 1987) 189-90 and a more detailed discussion, based on fieldwork, by C. A. Hope, "Egypt and Libya: The excavations at Mut el-Kharab in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis," *The Artefact* 24 (2001) 29-46.

³ The papyrological evidence will be discussed below. Trimithis is mentioned in *Not.Dig.Or.* 31.56 (mistakenly placed in the Small Oasis, as the base of an *ala*) and in garbled form in the list of George of Cyprus 786 (cf. U. Wilcken, *APF* 4 [1908] 478 ff.). George's *Description* of the world survives in a mid-ninth century compilation but itself dates to ca. 591-603, according to E. Honigmann, *Le synekdèmos d'Hiérokhlès et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre* (Brussels 1939) 49. George depends on a source that Honigmann dates to ca. 450. (This is at present the latest indication of Trimithis's existence.) Cf. also the discussion of George (and Hierocles) in A.H.M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford 1937) 502-09. There are basic secondary accounts in S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* 6 (Wiesbaden 1992) 2846 ("Trimouthis"), A. Calderini-S. Daris, *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell'Egitto Greco-Romano* 5 (Milan 1987) 30 (accepting Wagner's erroneous identification as Ismant el-Kharab; further references in Suppl. 2, p. 222 and Suppl. 3, p. 132, where the identification with Amheida is accepted), and *RE* 7A (1939) 157 (H. Kees).

⁴ Wagner (above, n. 2) 190-92. On 191 he includes among Trimithis's attestations one "comme siège d'un évêché, sous le nom aberrant de Θερνοντις," citing an article by Heinrich Gelzer in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 2 (1893) 22 ff., "une liste d'évêchés où *Therenountis* est opposée à la Grande Oasis." Wagner indicates that he had not seen Gelzer's article. The list reproduced by Gelzer (on pp. 24-26) is derived from Richard Pococke's transcription of a MS now in the British Library, which is arranged by provinces. The text is reedited from a photograph by H. Munier, *Recueil des listes épiscopales de l'Eglise Copte* (Cairo 1943) 58-62. In it, the Great Oasis is included in Thebais I, but "Therenountis" is included in Thebais II. Gelzer offered the equation of Therenountis with Trimithis (under the influence of George of Cyprus's form Τριμούθων; Gelzer had recently edited George in *Georgii Cyprii Descriptio orbis Romani* [Leipzig 1890] 28-56) and hesitantly ('vielleicht') located the place in Farafra (presumably considering that part of the Small Oasis, where Trimithis is incorrectly placed by the *Notitia Dignitatum*). But there is no reason to accept this line of connections (the Small Oasis would hardly depend on Koptos in the Upper Thebaid) and to suppose that Therenountis is Trimithis. Nor is it certain that the manuscript actually reflects the seats of bishops, nor at what date (cf. J. Muysier, *BSAC* 10 [1944] 173). There is thus at present no evidence for a bishopric at Trimithis, although it is conceivable that there was a bishop of Trimithis at one time. (We are indebted to Ewa Wipszycka for help with this matter.)

⁵ See *P.Kell.* V C. 50.19n. for the argument that the Egyptian name, rendered in Coptic as τριμιγίτε, "the northern cell (or storehouse)," is the source of the name Amheida, "with elision of the first element." We may add that several of the ostraka found in this winter's excavations speak of deliveries to Trimithis.

a papyrus from Kellis showed that Trimithis had become a city by 304.⁶ This was not really a surprise, because there had already since the early twentieth century been evidence that Trimithis in the fourth century had a role as an administrative center parallel to those of Mothis and of Hibis, modern Kharga, both of which were cities. In 368/9, as we know from a Leipzig papyrus (*P.Lips.* I 64 = *W.Chrest.* 281), Trimithis (with its district) was responsible for a tax liability about three-quarters that of Mothis or Hibis and was treated on the same level as these cities. It would be astonishing if it had been only a village at this time. It should be noted that Mothis itself is not securely attested as a city before 308 (*P.Grenf.* II 75, from the archive of the *nekrotaphoi* of Kysis). We shall come back to the history of the status of these cities later in this paper.

The Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) took a preliminary look at Amheida already in 1979, clearing the upper part of two walls of a single room of a house in the center of the site and finding paintings with Greek mythological figures. These were given a popular description by A. J. Mills in the Royal Ontario Museum's membership magazine *Rotunda* and a much more detailed publication by Lisa Montagno Leahy in an Egyptological journal,⁷ but have been less well-known to classical art historians than their interest warrants. The DOP also cleared some pottery kilns near a major east-west street in the north part of the site.⁸

After survey work beginning in 2001, a team sponsored by Columbia University and working as part of the DOP began excavations at Amheida in February, 2004.⁹ For the first season's work, we concentrated on the house of which the painted room was a part, thus picking up from the earlier work of the Dakhleh Oasis Project. The house has proven to be a rich and fascinating object of study, and we are far from finishing our work on it. In this article we present two ostraka (out of a total of 105) found in the 2004 excavations, which are of considerable interest for the history of Trimithis as a city and of the Great Oasis more generally in the fourth century.

The house in question was a large one, just how large we cannot yet say. Its walls are all visible above the surface, but their excellent state of preservation is in this respect a disadvantage, because they stand to a level above the tops of doorways, the openings of which are therefore mostly not visible at ground level. Only the vaults and domes are gone, and even parts of those are preserved, although often in precarious condition. The result is that we cannot tell without excavation where the doorways were located and thus how the urban blocks that we find were subdivided into houses. The five rooms partly or wholly cleared so far may have been no more than third of the total area of the house.

What has been excavated so far centers on a courtyard (Room 2), from which 6 doors in all give access to rooms in various directions: to the domed painted room (Room 1) on the south, to a staircase to the roof and a kitchen (Room 4) on the north, to a couple of rooms including an intriguing but not yet fully excavated one under the staircase (Room 5) on the west, and to an unexplored area perhaps leading toward a north-south street on the east. (See fig. 1.) South of the painted room but without a direct

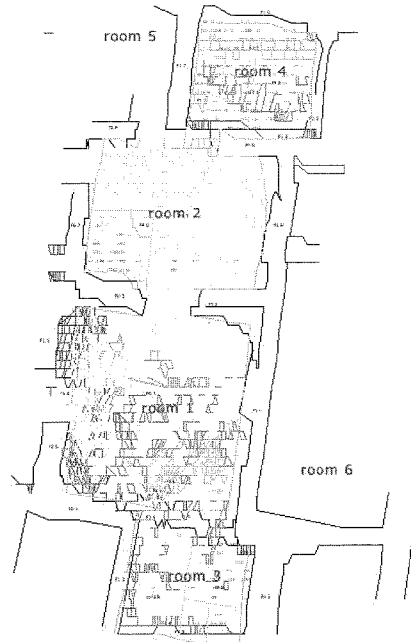
⁶ See *P.Kell.* I G. 49.1-2. There is no reason to take ἡ Τριμιθιῶν πόλις other than as referring to a full-fledged city.

⁷ L. M. Leahy, "Dakhleh Oasis Project: the Roman Wall-Paintings from Amheida," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 10 (1980) 331-78; A. J. Mills, "Lively Paintings: Roman Frescoes in the Dakhleh Oasis," *Rotunda* 13 (1980) 18-25.

⁸ Amheida is registered as DOP site 33/390-L9-1. C. A. Hope discusses Dakhleh pottery and kilns in "Pottery kilns from the Oasis of el-Dakhla," in Dorothea Arnold and J. Bourriau (eds), *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery* (Mainz am Rhein 1993) 121-27.

⁹ A fuller preliminary report on the first season of excavation, as well as on previous survey work, can be found on the Amheida web site (www.learn.columbia.edu/amheida). We take great pleasure in thanking Dr. Zahi Hawass, General Secretary of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and Maher Bashendi and Sayed Yamani, chief inspectors of the Dakhleh Oasis, for their support of our work; A. J. Mills for his constant assistance as director of the DOP; and Eugene Ball (field director 2004), Mirjam Bruineberg, and Olaf E. Kaper for their critical roles in carrying out the work of excavation. Our work at Amheida was supported financially by the Academic Quality Fund, the office of the Vice President for Arts and Sciences, the University Libraries, and the Stanwood Cockey Lodge Foundation of Columbia University, as well as several private donors.

connection to it is another room (Room 3). The details of the house are in general those familiar from the houses of Area A at Kellis, with vaults used in most rooms, many wall niches, extensive whitewashing of some rooms and more limited whitewashing around the niches in others. The original emplacements of wooden lintels over doors and niches, and of shelves inside the niches, are clearly visible, but all usable wood was removed from the house at the time of its abandonment or afterward.



(Fig. 1: Amheida, house excavated in 2004, oriented north-south)

We are obviously more fortunate than most excavators in being able to give a distinct character to each of the rooms excavated so far—a public reception room with rich decoration, a courtyard serving as a traffic circle, a kitchen, and a domestic room perhaps used by the lady of the household (the room on the south).¹⁰ But we can go even beyond this and offer a description of the family's position. Obviously the house was a substantial one, and the impression given by a number of the ostraka of a portfolio of wells suggests considerable wealth, as they were the key to prosperity in the oasis in any period.

In the southwest corner of the courtyard were two wall niches, one set in the west wall, the other in the south wall. The latter niche had a jar embedded in it, on top of which was found an ostrakon (O.Trim. inv. 14). The area on the floor before this wall niche was the find spot of ten ostraka clustered tightly together in a small area in Locus 13.

These ostraka were found in the course of a single day in which workers completed clearing away the wind-blown sand that had filled the courtyard, and began clearing away ceiling collapse and other rubble that had fallen into the courtyard from neighboring rooms. All ten ostraka were found just above the last floor level as this clearing process continued through the courtyard's southwest corner. The location of these ostraka suggests that they had originally been placed on some sort of wooden shelf embedded in the wall niche, and that they fell to their find-spot when that shelf was removed.

The Trimithis ostraka overall included some half dozen personal letters, three of which came from the group of ostraka found before the niche in the courtyard. Two of these letters are from Serenos to his colleague Philippos (κυρίω μου ἀδελφῶ Φιλίππῳ), and the third is from Serenos to his colleague Paesis. Perhaps the same Philippos appears in O.Trim. inv. 24, also from the same find-spot in the

¹⁰ Any such interpretation must be very tentative at present, as much of the floor deposit remains to be excavated. But artifactual and textual material found in 2004 suggests such a use.

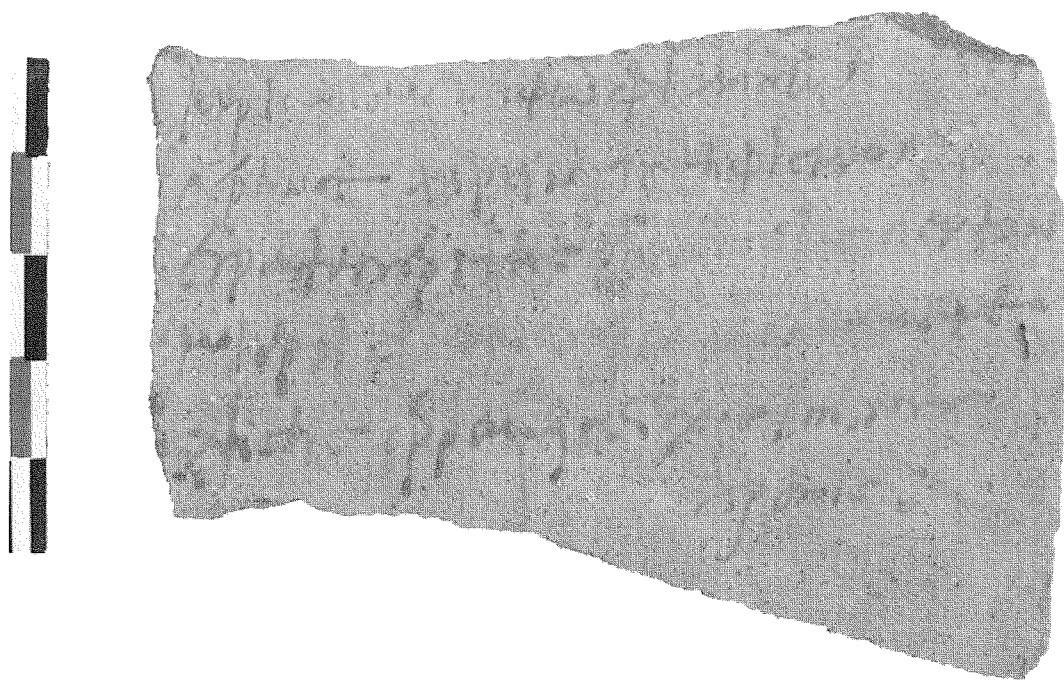
courtyard. Other names, like Psais, occur in multiple places throughout the Trimithis ostraka, but only Serenos and Philippos occur more than once in correspondence. On this evidence we suggest that the house belonged to one of the two. Serenos is the more likely candidate, as in this small body of correspondence he is the more central figure.

The last period of occupation of the house was probably the middle of the fourth century. Most of the numerous coins found in 2004 were badly corroded, but those so far identified all appear to belong to the reign of Constantius II and to come from the years 337-355. These all belong to the last occupation debris. How long the house was inhabited is not yet clear. There is no earlier construction below the house in a deep test trench dug in the kitchen or in shallower trenches in the courtyard and room 3, and nothing found in it in the first season of work is obviously earlier than the fourth century. The wall paintings in the main reception room, to the immediate south of the courtyard, are consistent with such a date. Nothing in the palaeography of the ostraka or the captions to the wall paintings (some of the figures are identified) suggests anything earlier or later than the first half of the fourth century. No ostrakon, as far as we have been able to determine, contains any direct indication of date such as regnal year or indiction. We give here a preliminary edition of the most interesting of these ostraka.

O.Trim. inv. 23

Area 2.1, Room 2, Locus 13, Lot 71, Object 75 = O04-23.

Written on the convex side. Complete. 8.5 x 6.5 cm.



4 κυρίῳ μου ἀδελφῶ Φιλίππῳ
 Σερῆνος χάρειν· τὸ ψήφισμα ὅπερ
 ἔγραψα περὶ τῆς λειτουργίας πέμψον
 μοι ἄρτι δ..... [ἀλλὰ μὴ] ἀμε-
 λήσης. ἐρρώσθαί σε εὐχομαι πολλοῖς
 χρόνοις.

“Serenos to my lord brother Philippos, greetings. Send me right away the decree which I wrote concerning the liturgy . . .¹¹ and do not neglect it. I pray for your health for many years.”

Before the excavations at Amheida, only two personal names in published texts could be identified with fourth-century Trimithis, a Horigenes from the *Kellis Account Book*, and a Serenos from *P.Kell. I G. 27*.¹² That text is a letter addressed to Serenos in his capacity as *praepositus pagi Trimitheos*. Its editor remarked that “it remains mysterious how this document (which was probably sent to Trimithis!) arrived at Ismant-el-Kharab. Did Serenus retire to Kellis and did he take the document with him?” Since the letter tells Serenos that he has wrongly infringed the rights of Mothites, it is likely that this copy belonged to a resident of Kellis, which was part of the territory of Mothis.

Serenos is not a particularly common name for the Oasis in this period: the *Kellis Account Book* gives only two examples, and there is only one other instance in the volumes of Greek and Coptic documents from Kellis.¹³ (Some unpublished evidence will be discussed below.) No date is given in the Kellis papyrus. The editor cites (note to line 2) an unpublished Kellis papyrus dated to 309 which might be addressed to the same Valerius Herculanus who is the author of *P.Kell. 27*. That would give an early date for Serenos. But this is very insecure, as only the end of the name survives in the unpublished text.

The date can, however, hardly be later than 324/5, as the editor observes, because the use of the nomen Valerius for officials disappears, in favor of Flavius, once Constantine gets control of Egypt in 324. Nor could the date be earlier than 307/8, on present evidence, because the pagus system is not known in Egypt before that time.

Before we consider further the possibility of identifying Serenos in our ostrakon with the *praepositus pagi*, we must turn to consider the standing of the author of the ostrakon further. The key to this question is the reference to his authorship of a decree concerning a liturgy. A search of the Duke DataBank produces 74 total instances of *psephisma* in the papyri. Only two papyri on this list are certainly from the fourth century. Three more are dated to the third/fourth centuries. None is later than the fourth.

Two of these examples are not directly relevant to our text. (1) *CPR VII 13* is dated by the editors to the third or fourth century. The text is a legal action by *pastophoroi* against the priests. The reference to *psephismata* appears in a damaged section of the text, and it is not immediately obvious what is being discussed. (2) *P.Oxy. I 41* is also dated by the editors to the late third or early fourth century. It is a partial transcript of a demonstration in honor of the Oxyrhynchite *prytanis*. It records the popular wish that he receive a *psephisma*, which the editors rendered as “vote”, and the acclamation that he is worthy of many such votes: πολλῶν ψηφισμάτων ἄξιος (lines 8 and 20).

The remaining three examples are more directly helpful. (1) *SB XVI 12754* is dated to the fourth century.¹⁴ Although described as being of unknown provenance, it was surely excavated clandestinely at Kellis¹⁵ and is directly relevant to our case in Trimithis. Its first full lines read: Μ]ωθιτῶν πόλεως

¹¹ Most likely either διὰ plus a personal name or an adverbial expression like διὰ τάχους, as Worp remarks.

¹² We (like J. D. Thomas, cf. *BL* 11.100) accept the interpretation of the text by R. P. Salomons quoted in the first edition but not accepted by the editor.

¹³ This is a patronymic on a jar sealing in *O.Kell. 198*. A Serenos in the Kharga Oasis appears in *O.Waqf. 15*, where an identification with a Serenos in *O.Douch 107* is proposed.

¹⁴ First published in *Aegyptus* 63 (1983) 149-50, with discussion of the identification of Mothis.

¹⁵ There are other papyri in the collection of the Università Cattolica di Milano from the Dakhleh Oasis, acquired in 1968 (see *SB XVI 12229* and *XXIV 15903*; cf. also 15902? and K.A. Worp, *Tyche* 15 [2000] 189-90). Around the same time the University of Genova and Duke University also acquired papyri from Kellis on the antiquities market. One of the Duke papyri is published by J. F. Oates in *BASP* 25 (1988) 129-35, and several more are to appear in the memorial volume for P. J. Sijpesteijn as *P.Sijp. 11a-c*. *P.Genova I 20* and *21* are from Kellis; the first of these is republished with one of the Milanese fragments in *P.Genova II Appendix*.

τῆς μεγάλης Ὀάσ[εως |]ς τοῦ βουλευτηρίου ψηφίσμασι οὕτως .¹⁶ (2) *P.Oxy.* XII 1417 is dated by the editors to the early fourth century. It is a report of a trial concerning the attempt of Nilus and others to avoid their duties as eutheniarchs after appointment by *psephisma* of the *boule* of Oxyrhynchos. (3) *P.Oxy.* XLIX 3507 is dated by the editors to the late third or early fourth century. It is a personal letter from Apollonios to Sarapodoros, in which the former asks that the *psephisma* regarding the gymnasiarchy be enforced in the case of Andromachos, who had been compelled to serve additional days in the previous year and now hopes to be credited for that service in the current year.

It is evident that as in the case of the Trimithis ostrakon these decrees often deal with issues of liturgical obligation and exemption. Bowman drew a similar picture in his work on town councils.¹⁷ In his formulation, it “is therefore clear that the task of the *boule* was simply to confirm that the person claiming [liturgical] exemption fulfilled the required conditions, and to grant the exemption.”¹⁸ Our *psephisma* περὶ τῆς λειτοργίας could well be just this sort of decree.

The process through which *psephismata* were drafted, passed, publicized, and enforced remains somewhat unclear. Here, Serenos says he wrote the decree himself. (One may wonder why then he would need it sent to him. The answer may be that he had drafted it in a single copy, now in the possession of Philippos.) Presumably, members of the *boule* would vote yes or no on a *psephisma* once it had been proposed: Bowman points to *P.Oxy.* XLIV 3171 (cited in *Town Councils* as *P.Oxy.ined.* 1), a list of signatures of *boule* members followed by the word ἔδοξε, as evidence of this voting practice from the early third century.¹⁹ According to Bowman, the γραμματεὺς of the *boule* was “responsible for the publication of the ψήφισμα.”²⁰ Could this have been why Philippos was involved in this exchange?

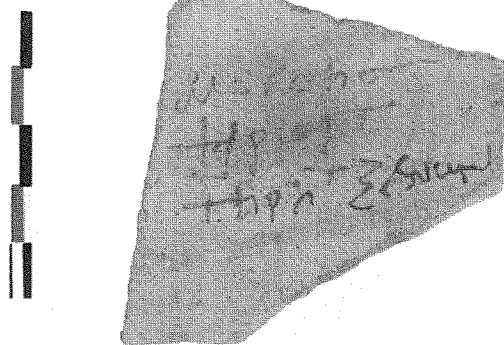
Faced at Trimithis with a house abandoned in the mid-fourth century, evidently belonging to a member of the city council named Serenos, who was concerned with liturgical appointment, is it plausible to propose an identification with the man in *P.Kell.* I G. 27? The likelihood of this identification is strengthened by the nature of the role of the *praepositus pagi*. In the early fourth century, the traditional role of the *strategos* in the appointive process for liturgies had been largely transferred to the *praepositus*.²¹ And the same group of ostraka from the courtyard has yielded another piece of evidence perhaps linked to the same role.

O.Trim.inv. 22

Area 2.1, Room 2, Locus 13, Lot 71, Object 74 = O04-22.

Written on the convex side. Complete. 6 x 6 cm.

Μουσῆς
Ψιράιτ(ος)
τηρητ(ῆς) ξένων



We might first ask what this text is. A number of the ostraka unearthed in this house appear to be tags or labels. Some bear a personal name, others the name of a product. We may imagine these tags as

¹⁶ Restore perhaps ἐν τοῖ]ς (suggestion of Klaas Worp).

¹⁷ A. K. Bowman, *Town Councils of Roman Egypt* (Toronto 1971) 83-87, 110, 112, 114.

¹⁸ Bowman (above, n. 17) 86.

¹⁹ Bowman (above, n. 17) 37.

²⁰ Bowman (above, n. 17) 12.

²¹ N. Lewis, *The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt*² (Pap.Flor. 28, 1997) 86. For bibliography on the office, Lewis (p. 42) cites his article in *JJP* 2 (1948) 53-57 and J. Lallemand, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte* (Brussels 1964) 131-34.

accompanying deliveries or payments of various kinds, either incoming or outgoing. But it is not obvious what it would have been attached to. More likely, it is a note about a liturgical nomination, the author scribbling a name followed by the office for which the person was being nominated. This may help explain why the author of the text felt obliged to include the name of the office in question. Whether it is the answer to a question or the offering of a suggestion, however, we cannot guess.

The writer has been economical with information, giving us a name, a patronymic, and an office. The name is a combination of a biblical name, one of the spellings found for Moses in the papyri, with an otherwise unknown but evidently Egyptian patronymic, for which we cannot as yet offer a derivation. The office of τηρητής ξένων is not elsewhere attested, and it is not easy to interpret. In contrast to the compound ἐπιτηρητής, attested by the hundreds as a supervisory official in the tax-collection process,²² the simplex τηρητής is relatively rare. LSJ gives “keeper, observer” as a primary definition for τηρητής, citing Diodorus 3.4. As a secondary definition, it gives “guard, warden,” citing *P.Mich.Zen.* 84.10, *P.Lond.* III 1171.57, and *P.Amh.* II 126.22. Other occurrences of the term are *P.Mert.* I 42.3, *P.Oxy.* XII 1507, *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2714, *PSI* III 165, five instances in the second century Hermopolite *P.Sarap.*, *O.Cair.* 126.6, and *O.Stras.* 649.1.

P.Mich. 84 is a memorandum from Herakleides to Zenon (third century BC) in which the author writes καταστήσω δὲ τηρητήν καὶ ἐρευνητήν, “I shall appoint a guard and inspector.” *P.Lond.* III 1171.57 is a Hermopolite farm account from 8 BC.²³ The *teretes* in this case is overseeing the sowing of grass-seed. *P.Amh.* II 126.22 is also Hermopolite, from the early second century CE. The *teretes* in this case is guarding a threshing floor (ἄλωζ). *PSI* III 165 is a sixth-century Oxyrhynchite text which mentions the guarding of two places for a five-day period in connection with some vine-land in Ision Panga. The second century Hermopolite archive of Sarapion, *P.Sarap.*, has a number of references to *teretai*: 52.35 (as an occupation specified for a person in an account), 55.22 (to a guardian of a threshing-floor in an account), 57.15 (to a cattle guard in an account), 59.2.9 (as 52), 68.4.5 (to a guard of threshing floors, in an account), 68.5.2 (proposed abbreviated restoration). *O.Cair.* 126.6 is a second century account containing a payment to Ἐπώνυχο(ς) Τηρητ(ι). *O.Stras.* 649.1, a third century CE ostrakon incomplete on the right side, starts with the word *teretes* and in following lines includes a number of personal names. *P.Mert.* I 42.3 is a grain account of unknown provenance but “probably made on some large estate,” assigned to the fifth century on palaeographical grounds, and includes a payment of 15 artabas to a *teretes*.

In general, then, these references show *teretai* acting as private watchmen. Only two of our references appear to concern a *teretes* acting in a public capacity. The first is *P.Oxy.* XII 1507, a third century CE order from the nome irenarchs to send the *teretai* of the village of Teruthis. The second is *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2714, which its editors describe as a “straightforward document... submitting to the *strategus* the names of the liturgists designated by the villagers for the year just beginning.” Included among those liturgists are the τηρηταὶ κώμης καὶ καρπῶν (“Watchmen for village and crops”), four men for the hamlet of Paneui. Their role is thus public, but in other respects closely analogous to the private watchman’s role attested in other papyri.

Nothing in these texts thus provides an obvious parallel to the mention of ξένων. It is not immediately evident who is meant by *xenoi* in this context, or why they would have needed a warden. Presumably these are people currently at Trimithis but domiciled elsewhere. In the municipal structure of the fourth century, that should mean people whose *idia* was in another city or its territory. Of course that might mean people whose registered domicile was no more than a few hours away, in another part of the oasis that was part of the Mothite nome.

²² For a brief survey of *epiteretai*, see Lewis (above, n. 21) s.v. Against the remarks of C. Drecoll, *Die Liturgien im römischen Kaiserreich des 3. und 4. Jh. n. Chr.* (Stuttgart 1997) 115-19 on *epiteretai* see R. S. Bagnall, *Gnomon* 73 (2001) 460.

²³ The first edition’s Περητητῆ was corrected to τηρητητῆ in *BL* 1.287.

The crucial question is whether the role of the *teretes* was to protect the *xenoi* and their interests, or to protect the state's interest in keeping track of them and making sure that they fulfilled their obligations. Anyone familiar with the administration of the later Roman Empire, certainly of the Egypt we know from the papyri of the period of Diocletian and Constantine, will instinctively suppose the latter to be more likely, even though the instances of *teretes* cited above would incline one more to think of protection. It is worth looking at the contemporary evidence in the papyrological corpus concerning "foreigners." There is not much from an explicitly official, civic context. One exception is *P.Oxy.* XVII 2106, an early fourth century letter from a prefect to the Oxyrhynchite civic officials. The letter outlines the provisions for a compulsory purchase of gold, but specifies that "no burden be laid on strangers unless they have established homes and have not yet been councillors and happen to be well-to-do." The prefect did not find it necessary to explain what strangers he meant.

Some strangers were fugitives, and apprehending these was a perennial preoccupation, as we see in the archive of Aurelius Isidoros. In *P.Cair.Isid.* 128, a group of village officials from the Memphite nome declare that they have apprehended some fugitives (ἀνθρώπους ἐν φυγῇ) from their village who were staying in Karanis. "We may safely assume," the editors wrote, that these fugitives "were impelled by the desire to escape from the burden of taxation or liturgies." *P.Cair.Isid.* 126 provides a still more direct comparison. It is addressed from Herakleides, *praepositus pagi* of the fifth pagus of the Arsinoite nome, to another *praepositus pagi*, and refers to "the order... to turn over to the most sacred fiscus at the rate of five folles per head all strangers [τοὺς ξένους] who are found in the villages."²⁴ The editors date the text, and the otherwise unknown imperial edict to which it refers, to c. 308/309. It is not difficult to imagine that such persons might need a watchman, especially if financial gain were at stake. With Herakleides the *praepositus* in mind, the possible identification of Serenos with the *praepositus pagi* of the same name seems even more plausible. But we may wonder if *xenoi* in our ostrakon would be likely to refer to such fugitives in the absence of any qualification.

Another possibility is that the *xenoi* are visitors to Trimitis with some official standing. This is how Roberta Mazza has interpreted the word in a letter she dates to the fourth century, *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4628. The writer is concerned with illegitimate billeting of soldiers and complains ἄτοπον γὰρ ἔστιν ὕβρισθῆναι ἡμᾶς οὐδέποτε ὕβρισθέντας ἐπὶ τῶν ξένων (lines 28-31), which the editor translates "for it is absurd for us to be harassed when we have never been harassed over visiting troops (before)." She comments (note to line 31), "These ξένοι seem to be the same as, or at least include, the soldiers mentioned before, who had been billeted in houses belonging to the writer or his associates." She cites a pair of inscriptions from Upper Egypt, occupying the two sides of a plaque, most recently republished by Jean Gascou in *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994) 323-42 (texts reprinted as *SEG* 44 (1994) 1505). The first inscription commemorates the construction of an *apanterion* for visiting "soldiers" (*stratiotai*, undoubtedly including civil administrators), the second the complete reconstruction of presumably the same building εἰς οἰκη[τ]ήρ[ι]ον τῶν ξένων καὶ τῶν παρερχομένων ἄνευ δημοσίας συνόψεως. Mazza, citing the phrase without the last three words, says "There can hardly be any doubt that these are persons entitled to official accommodations, in other words troops, officials, and civilians whose business has been judged to be important enough to the government to justify the issue to them of an official travel warrant." The force of the last phrase, however, is undoubtedly exactly the opposite of this; it covers persons who were not travelling at public expense. As Gascou remarks (p. 327), "Le mot de σύνοψις paraît donc désigner ici un droit au logement ou un document constitutif de ce droit."

²⁴ Lines 3-8, trans. by eds.: τὸ κελευσ[θ]ῆν | ὑπὸ τῆς θείας κ[αὶ] οὐρανίου αὐτ[ῶν] τύχης τῶν | δεσποτῶν ἡμ[ῶν] βασιλέων πάντ[α]ς τοὺς ξένους | τοὺς εὐρισκωμένους ἐν ταῖς κώμαις . ρισ[.]. υφες κατὰ | [ἀ]νδρεῖ[ον] λόγον πρὸ σ[ε]ισμοῦ ἐπανεγκῖν τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ | ταμ[ε]ίῳ πρὸς φόλλις πέντε. The editors cite *P.Apoll.Ano* 9 for an 8th century parallel to the use of *xenoi* to refer to fugitives.

If that is correct, the *xenoi* contrasted to the private wayfarers are those persons who are travelling at public expense, those on official business. It is possible that the warden of Trimithis was responsible for such persons. In the present state of our knowledge, it is probably best to leave the question open.

It is now time to return to a striking aspect of *P.Kell.* G. 27, namely the fact that it is addressed to a *praepositus pagi* of Trimithis. What can this mean? The *pagi* were, as far as we know the system elsewhere, numbered rather than named (as the toparchies had been). It is of course conceivable that we have the name of the old toparchy transferred to the new *pagus* through custom (in the way that the new *pagi* were sometimes called toparchies in the Hermopolite nome, see *P.Herm.Land.*, pp. 9-10). But this curt message²⁵ to the *praepositus pagi* certainly comes from a high official, most likely the *praeses*, and such informality is not as likely in this context as it would be in a text generated locally. Moreover, the notion of Trimithis as only the chief village of a *pagus* at a date that is perhaps most likely ca. 309 (and is certainly not before 307/8) runs into the fact that Trimithis was a polis by 304, as discussed above. Cities, in our experience elsewhere, do not have *praepositi*, they have a civic government and a *logistes*.

And yet it must be said that so far we have no evidence of a *logistes* for Hibis, Mothis, or Trimithis. Rather, there is a *logistes* "of the Great Oasis" mentioned in *P.Kell.* I G. 25. This document, unfortunately, lacks a date, but it certainly cannot be earlier than the introduction of the office of *logistes* into the Egyptian metropoleis (303, on present evidence). In his notes to the edition, the editor pointed to the appearance of an Aurelius Kleoboulos, the same name as the *logistes* here, as a *politeuomenos* in *M.Chrest.* 78, a communication from this Kleoboulos to the *praeses Thebaidis* in 376-378. It is worth quoting the full prescript of *P.Kell.* 25, because the distinctions embedded in it are important for our purposes:

[A]ὐρηλίοις Κλεοβο[ύλ]ω λογιστῆ ᾽Οάσεως
 [Με]γάλης καὶ Φιλοσαρά[πι]δι τῶ καὶ Μικκάλω
 ἄρ]ξαντι προέδρω Μω[θι]τῶν πόλεως καὶ
 Ἄν]δρομάχῳ Ἀπόλλων[ο]ς ἄρξ[αντι] συνδίκο[ις].

One notices immediately that the circumscription of the *logistes* is the entire Great Oasis, not one of its cities. The ex-magistrate and current *proedros*, by contrast, has only Mothis as his circumscription. Unfortunately, the papyrus breaks off with only the tops of the letters of line 5 visible, and we cannot tell what the circumscription of the *syndikoi* was. It looks, in other words, as if there was a *logistes* for the Great Oasis as a whole, consisting of three cities, but each city had its own municipal officials and presumably council. In a structure of this sort, it could well be that each city also constituted a *pagus* with a *praepositus*. Exactly what his relationship to the civic officials was, we cannot say, but he may have functioned as a kind of mini-*logistes* on the spot.²⁶

It is a natural assumption that the ostraka found in the courtyard and, as we suppose, fallen from the shelf in the niche, belong to the last phase of occupation of the house, which should belong roughly in the 350s. There is additional, although inexact, support for placing this Serenos in the middle of the century in two unpublished Kellis papyri, one from Serenos to Alexandros and one from Alexandros to Serenos. The first of these refers to a payment formerly made "to the deceased Philippos." Given the connection with Serenos, it is very likely that this is the Philippos of our first ostrakon. The archaeological context of these letters, like that of most of the published Kellis letters, is to be assigned to the middle or third quarter of the fourth century.

²⁵ It is to be translated, "Valerius Herculanus to Serenos, *praepositus pagi* of Trimithis, greetings. You require without good reason that people coming from the city of the Mothites be made subject against their will to provision of camels and beasts." As J. D. Thomas remarks (*JEA* 84 [1998] 262), it is a reprimand.

²⁶ It may be added that there is one published mention of a Mothite nome, in *P.Sijp.* 11b, dated to 350 or 351, and presumably coming from Kellis (cf. above, n. 15; the village name is only partly preserved). In that instance, however, [τῆς μεγάλης] ᾽Οάσεως is added after the nome name. Another instance occurs in an unpublished papyrus from Kellis.

It is not impossible that the Serenos of *P.Kell.* 27, dated ca. 309-324, could be the same as that of the other texts, particularly if the identification of Valerius Herculanus as a *praeses* of ca. 309 is discarded. Equally, however, a homonymous son or grandson could be at stake. It may also be noted that the Serenos known from the *KAB* (line 801) was an *officialis*. One could imagine that Serenos, after a civic career in Trimithis, had entered the imperial civil service. But this speculation would take us well beyond the evidence. In any event, these ostraka give us a sense of the operations of the civic government of Trimithis as a polis, a status that it and Mothis may well have acquired at the same time under Diocletian, probably ca. 303 as part of a general restructuring of the Great Oasis into the domain of a single *logistes* presiding over three cities, each with a council and under the supervision of a *praepositus pagi*. We do not mean to minimize the thinness of the evidence on the basis of which we propose this reconstruction, but it makes sense of several features otherwise difficult to explain. Fortunately there is every reason to hope that the Great Oasis will yet provide further evidence to clarify matters further.²⁷

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²⁷ We are indebted throughout to Klaas Worp for generously making available information from the unpublished papyri planned to appear in the next Greek volume of *P.Kell.* and for extended discussion of the arguments put forward here, for which we are of course solely responsible. Olaf Kaper also read a draft and offered several valuable suggestions.

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