



TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Herausgegeben von

Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer
Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber

Band 16, 2001

2001

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**Hermann Harrauer
zum 27. 4. 2001**

Herausgegeben von:

Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer, Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber

In Zusammenarbeit mit:

Reinhold Bichler, Herbert Graßl, Sigrid Jalkotzy und Ingomar Weiler

Redaktion:

Wolfgang Hameter, Bernhard Palme
Georg Rehrenböck, Hans Taeuber

Zuschriften und Manuskripte erbeten an:

Redaktion TYCHE, c/o Institut für Alte Geschichte, Universität Wien, Dr. Karl Lueger-Ring 1, A-1010 Wien. Beiträge in deutscher, englischer, französischer, italienischer und lateinischer Sprache werden angenommen. Disketten in MAC- und DOS-Formaten sind willkommen.

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Auslieferung:

Holzhausen Verlag GmbH, Kaiserstraße 84/1/4, A-1070 Wien

Gedruckt auf holz- und säurefreiem Papier.

Umschlag: IG II² 2127 (Ausschnitt) mit freundlicher Genehmigung des Epigraphischen Museums in Athen, Inv.-Nr. 8490, und P.Vindob. Barbara 8.

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Die Deutsche Bibliothek-CIP Einheitsaufnahme Ein Titelsatz dieser Publikation ist bei der Deutschen Bibliothek erhältlich

Eigentümer und Verleger: Holzhausen Verlag GmbH, Kaiserstraße 84/1/4, A-1070 Wien. Herausgeber:
Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer, Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber,
c/o Institut für Alte Geschichte, Universität Wien, Dr. Karl Lueger-Ring 1, A-1010 Wien.
e-mail: hans.taeuber@univie.ac.at oder Bernhard.Palme@oeaw.ac.at
Hersteller: Druckerei A. Holzhausens Nfg. GmbH, Holzhausenplatz 1, A-1140 Wien.
Verlagsort: Wien. — Herstellungsort: Wien. — Printed in Austria.

ISBN 3-900518-03-3

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PETER VAN MINNEN

P.Harrauer 48 and the Problem of *papas* Heraiscus
in P.Lond. VI 1914

P.Harrauer 48 is a tax list from Heracleopolis from the late fourth or early fifth century. In column II, line 16 one of the taxpayers, a landowner called Thecla, pays taxes "in the name of" a bishop "through" another person. As explained by the editor in her commentary, this is administrative language for "the original owner" (from the time the original land register of the Heracleopolite nome was drawn up) and "a later owner." By about 400 yet another owner had taken over the responsibility of paying taxes on the land. The "original owner" (ὄνομα) is a bishop called Heraiscus. The later owner (διὰ) who replaced him before the present owner took over is unknown, because the name cannot be restored. In fact more successive owners (διὰ's) may be lost in the lacuna to the right.

According to the editor the bishop is otherwise unknown. But, as we shall see in a moment, a bishop called Heraiscus was in fact active in about the time the original list of landowners in the Heracleopolite nome was drawn up. To establish the approximate date for this we can take the two Hermopolite land registers as a parallel for the situation in the Heracleopolite nome. The original land register of the Hermopolite nome appears to have been drawn up sometime in the 320s or 330s, because some entries in P.Herm.Landl. G and F refer to landowners known from that period through other sources (e. g. Charite daughter of Amazonius). Various entries in P.Herm.Landl. have undergone revisions in the course of the fourth century, so that landowners from the later fourth century (e. g. Philammon son of Hermes) appear side-by-side with earlier landowners. As often, the lists create an administrative fiction in which time does not play a decisive role (this is particularly annoying when we want to extrapolate the pace of conversion to Christianity from the names in these lists). The two land registers from the Hermopolite nome date palaeographically from the second half or even the end of the fourth century, yet the original list of landowners in the Hermopolite nome was drawn up much earlier in the fourth century. In the case of P.Harrauer 48 we may also put the original list of landowners in the Heracleopolite nome tentatively in the 320s or 330s.

A bishop called Heraiscus was active in that very period. He figures prominently in P.Lond. VI 1914, a letter written from Alexandria to a Melitian monastery in the (south of the) Heracleopolite nome (see the introduction to P.Neph.; P.Lond. VI 1913 puts the monastery in the [north of the] Cynopolite nome, but the responsible priest in that text is from a village in the Heracleopolite nome). The writer himself is a Melitian associated with the monastery. He tells his correspondents about the exciting developments in Alexandria in 335, the date of the letter. The bishop of Alexandria,

Athanasius, is still wavering about his trip to Tyre to face a council. Various Melitian bishops have flocked to Alexandria, apparently to support the case against him. There is a bishop from Letopolis, Isaac, and seven bishops are said to have been sent away from the city. The authorities are apparently anxious to isolate the Melitians from one another as much as possible. Heraiscus seems to be a key figure among them. Is he really that important?

That Heraiscus in P.Lond. VI 1914 is a Melitian bishop seems to follow clearly from the text. Heraiscus is called *papas* and after almost each mention of his name there is a reference to “the bishop.” The editor had already suggested identifying Heraiscus with “the bishop” and H. Hauben confirmed this in an influential article (Proc. XVI Congr. 447-456). The 1996 monograph on Athanasius by Annick Martin, *Athanase d’Alexandrie et l’église d’Égypte au IV^e siècle (328–373)*, (Collection de l’École Française de Rome 216), Rome 1996, 359–361 also accepts the identification.

Both the editor of P.Lond. VI 1914 and Hauben identified Heraiscus not only as “the bishop” mentioned in the letter but more particularly as the Melitian bishop of Alexandria. This is odd, because the Melitians are not otherwise known to have put up an “antipope” in Alexandria (not counting the spurious Theonas of Epiphanius, *Pan.* 68, 7, 3 [cf. 69, 11, 4], who was supposedly consecrated after Athanasius’ predecessor died and before Athanasius himself was consecrated). Neither Athanasius nor any other source mentions Heraiscus, who would have been a key figure on the Melitian side. Yet the idea of an “antipope” has also been accepted by Martin. Putting up an “antipope” to Athanasius would seem a logical step for the Melitians to take. But did they actually take this step? Why did Athanasius disregard Heraiscus completely?

P.Harrauer 48 offers a way out of these difficulties. When the letter was written there was a bishop in Heracleopolis called Heraiscus. As is often the case, the only thing we know about him is that he was once an important landowner in the Heracleopolite nome, whose “name” remained attached to the land long after his death and after others had taken over the responsibility of paying taxes on the land. The letter P.Lond. VI 1914 was presumably written from Alexandria by a Melitian from the Heracleopolite nome to correspondents in the Heracleopolite nome. They would naturally be most interested in the affairs of their own bishop. If he, like several other Melitian bishops in P.Lond. VI 1914, was temporarily in Alexandria to support the Melitian cause, it is small wonder that he would figure prominently in a Heracleopolitan letter. That Heraiscus in P.Lond. VI 1914 is the local Melitian bishop from Heracleopolis and not an “antipope” from Alexandria seems confirmed by the fact that Heraiscus is the only bishop in the letter called *papas*, “(our) father.” This seems at least a likely inference. John Arkhaph, who is also mentioned in P.Lond. VI 1914 and who was the real leader of the Melitians after the death of Melitius, is not referred to in particularly affectionate terms. Heraiscus would be the successor of one Petros, who is mentioned as the Melitian bishop of Heracleopolis in Melitius’ own list of bishops of a decade earlier.

So far, P.Lond. VI 1914 has been read as if it gave “the state of the (Melitian) union.” If my identification of the “hero” in the letter, Heraiscus, with the bishop from Heracleopolis in P.Harrauer 48 is accepted, P.Lond. VI 1914 should be read from a far more parochial, local, perspective. The letter, like so many private letters, was

written from the perspective of the correspondents, who would have been most interested in their own bishop. P.Harrauer 48 has given us a chance to look at P.Lond. VI 1914, one of the most important documents ever published, with fresh eyes.

Peter van Minnen

University of Cincinnati
Department of Classics
410 Blegen Library
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0226
U. S. A.