A Date for *P.KRU* 105?
L.S.B. MacCoull

You [pl.] are owners of the whole topos of Apa Phoibammon, so as to dwell in it, build on it or pull it down, or receive men to yourselves there, anyone who will walk in the fear of God for the whole time of your life and of the one you shall assign to the topos after you to serve (ΔΙΑΚΟΠΗΣ) it in the work of charity (ἈΓΑΠΗΣ [sic]) to the poor. And no man is to be able to [transgress this] ... And we all together have established this document (ΧΑΡΤΗΣ).

So proclaim lines 3–9 and 21–22 of *P.KRU* 105 (= *P.RevilloutCopt.* 4 ['Boulaq 5']), a document long regarded as the foundation charter (or confirmation of rights) for the famous monastery of St. Phoibammon, the one that was built into the Pharaonic temple of Deir el-Bahri in late antiquity.¹ The "we" framing the document in the first person plural designate themselves as "the whole village" (l. 24) acting through (ἡγούμενοι) their most pious priests and Papnoute the most honorable (τιμωτάτος) lashane or village headman (= πρωτοκωμιής) (l. 25). This corporate entity, the entire village² we know as Jeme, is confirming the St. Phoibammon community as collective owners (with specified ownership rights familiar from Roman law) of the complex of "footprint" and built structures, on the basis of that community's priority in time and investment of labor. "We find," they state, "that you [pl.] are the ones who took trouble for the topos from the first; you established [same verb] it from its being [having been] a desert (ἘΡΗΜΟΓ)" (ll. 15–16). Fixing a foundation date for this well-known and influential establishment is important.³

The broken papyrus, kept in the Coptic Museum in Cairo (no. 3795),⁴ is a long transversa charta strip-roll of nearly a meter's length, inscribed across the fibers parallel to the short edge. It was unearthed like so many of the *P.KRU* in the mid-nineteenth century – this is before purpose-driven papyrological excavations! – and found its way on to the antiquities market and eventually (thanks to Gaston Maspero) to what was then the Bulaq Museum, not being passed on to England or Germany.⁵ Its beginning, which might have contained an invocation and/or a Byzantine regnal year with an indiction number, has not been preserved. At the end

---


⁴ I am grateful to Eugene Cruz-Uribe and Hisham el-Leithy for photographs – which reveal to one's horror that the mounting glass is smashed and has had a clumsy attempt at mending with scotch tape.

⁵ Godlewski, *op.cit.* (above, n. 1) 53–55.
there are seventeen signatories, including the notary, Damianos the *grammatikos*, who stood in as *hypographeus* signing for the aforementioned Papnoute. One signatory is an archpriest (*ἀρχιερεύς*); six are priests (and one priest subscribes for another who made three signs of the cross), three are deacons, and six are laymen otherwise undesignated. Three of the priests are from known Jeme churches: the Apostles, St. Victor’s, and St. Mary’s.

Crum, co-editor of *P.KRU*, originally and commonsensically placed this papyrus in the late sixth century, and in this he was followed by the Austrian jurist Artur Steinwenter in 1930. However, by 1935 Steinwenter changed his mind and placed it after the conquest, late in the seventh century, in which opinion he was followed by Till in his German-translation volume of 1964. However, there is in fact a strong obstacle to the post-conquest date, readable in the penalty clause in lines 10–13: "Anyone daring to do that [sc. transgress or dispute or contravene the validity of the monastic community’s ownership] will [be liable to] the judgement (*τῆς θεοῦ*) of God and will pay to account (*τοῦ*) of fine (*κόσμου*) and the damages (*ταλαντα* or *ταλαντοειδή*) that our lords the Christ-loving kings have defined (*ὅπως*) six ounces of gold" – *mai-pé-Christo* here being a direct calque of *Philoxrieto* (as an imperial epithet). It is hard to understand why the later Steinwenter thought that "Christ-loving" – an epithet of the city of Alexandria too – could have been just a fossilized carryover from Byzantine times, repeated out of frozen, rote notarial habit under Umayyad rule. It seems clear from the text as it stands that we are in a world where pious Byzantine rulers define legal norms and practices – and this was even admitted by Krause in 1998.

Those are, notice, rulers in plural: "lords," *ἱεραχαῖς* (plural of *Χριστιανὸς*); "kings," *ἐπάρχοι* (plural of *Πρωτοχριστος*).
We should be looking at a time when plural authority on the Constantinopolitan throne was being recognized in the phraseology of legal documents written in Egypt. We are also time-constrained by the sequence and chronology of the known superiors of the St. Phoibammon monastery as inferred from their wills, in that the confirmation of the early foundation must precede the terms in office of subsequent abbots (those who "came after" [l. 1] in the succession to pious works): i.e., we are before the *floruit* of Abraham of Hermouthis ca. 600 (pace Krause who sees him as involved with our document). The mention of plural Byzantine rulers can be seen especially in documentary oath clauses, which from Justin II (565–) regularly register oaths by plural rulers, often the emperor and empress, then sometimes including co-emperors such as Tiberius II and Heraclius the New Constantine. Which Byzantine imperial pair – not just a sole emperor – is given the epithet φιλόχριστος/-οι?

Close to home, *IGLSyr VI* 2984 proclaims the right of asylum of the ευκτέρια of our Lady, the most glorious Mother of God Mary ever-virgin, in Beqa (Syria), conferred ἐκ τῶν εὐσεβεστάτων καὶ φιλοχριστῶν ἡμῶν δεσποτῶν (ll. 8–11) – names unfortunately not specified. Closer to home is the petition *P.Cair.Masp. I 67005* (567/568), addressed to Athanasius, duke of the Thebaid. Lines 5ff. have the petitioner, the twice-widowed Sophia, stating (through Dioscorus, the notary-composer of the text) that "Divine Providence and the [φιλόχριστοι] masters of the scepters have ordained your highness to rule this poor Thebaid": here the epithet that would be applied to Justin II and his empress is restored.

Surely, though, we are in the right time frame, the last third of the sixth century, for our monastic enterprise in the upper Thebaid to have got off the ground, so to speak. These were times of tumult and shake-up for the Miaphysite church in Egypt: an ecclesial body that had only comparatively recently, in the wake of the "dark skies" of 535/6, the Constantinople captivity of its head, Theodosius, the death of Severus of Antioch in Egypt (in 538), and the plague pandemic, really started to constitute itself on the ground with clergy, buildings, and liturgies to enact in them – though its exegesis and distinctive cognitive approach were

---

20 K.A. Worp, "Byzantine Imperial Titulature in the Greek Documentary Papyri: The Oath Formulas," *ZPE* 45 (1982) 199–223; updated in R.S. Bagnall and *id.* (above, n. 20) 226–271 passim). Earlier oaths by plural rulers such as Valentinian III and Marcian come from too early a time for our foundation and its stratigraphy.
21 Of course the regnal-year dating clauses (one is missing here) register plural rulers from 286 on (Bagnall and Worp, *op.cit.* [above, n. 20] 226–271 passim). Earlier oaths by plural rulers such as Valentinian III and Marcian come from too early a time for our foundation and its stratigraphy.
23 Here I would like to thank Kent Rigsby in Chicago for helping me with a search in both the TLG and the Packard epigraphy database.
long in place. The death of Theodosius in 566, early in Justin II's reign, sparked a complicated and at times violent decade-long struggle over who would succeed him as head of Egypt's Miaphysites. Until Peter IV managed to take power in 576, the rivals Paul "the Black" of Antioch – Egyptian-born and once Theodosius's syncellus –, his Syrian protégé from Scetis Theodore, and Dorotheus the Gaianite battled for supremacy while the Chalcedonians Apollinaris (551–570) and John (570–581) watched from their enclave to see who would win out. Paul himself had tried to effect a compromise with the emperor Justin in 571, but to no avail and to the detriment of his own reputation among the Miaphysites. Finally the monk Peter (IV) received Jacob Baradaeus's support in 576, and made his seat at the Ennaton (burial place of the great Severus) firm, according to John of Ephesus, by appointing bishops to sees throughout the Nile Valley. Peter IV would be succeeded in turn by the Syrian-born Damian in 578, and events would come to turn on conflict between the two great Miaphysite communities of Alexandria and Antioch. But Peter's patriarchate in 576–578, while Tiberios was Justin's co-ruler in the capital (thus definitely in a time of plural emperors), looks like a promising window of time.31

However, there was more than one Monastery (or topos) of St. (or Apa) Phoibammon in the Theban region, and their identities and succession have been studied. Which foundation is the subject of P.KRU 105? It has always been taken to be the one second in time, the great reconfiguration of the Hatshepsut temple into which Bishop Abraham of Hermonthis was constrained by Damian of Alexandria to transfer, and in this assumption I have earlier followed Krause's conclusions. It may, however, be time for a reshuffle of the evidence, seeing that it makes more sense to place P.KRU 105, which does not mention Bishop Abraham, prior to Damian's election to the patriarchate.

I now think that the Coptic Museum papyrus documents – confirms – the foundation of the first, earlier (and smaller), topos of St. Phoibammon further to the west.35 What remained of this establishment, 8 km from the cultivated area, was excavated after a fashion in the 1940s, with piecemeal publication of some results, including ostraca (vol. 2 [published 1965]). In addition to this evidence, more Theban material in museum collections has recently been published, and our prosopographical database for the late antique

29 Davis, op.cit. (above, n. 24) 108. This is where a careful look at the lists in K.A. Worp, "A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt (325–750)," ZPE 100 (1994) 283–318, esp. 295–309, shows breaks in successions time after time, seemingly reflecting re-placement of Chalcedonians with Miaphysites.
30 Who would rule until 607, thus until Abraham of Hermonthis's time.
31 So Krause, op.cit. (above, n. 18) 227 calling our document a typikon; also Richter, op.cit. (above, n. 16) 24 with n. 100.
37 Unfortunately, in the personal-names index of that volume none of our signatories' names occur (I again thank Kent Rigsby for checking this).
Thebaid keeps growing. It is useful to look for overlaps. Finally, the use of the word "desert," *GΦΜΟC* (l. 16), rhetorically to describe what the monks started from to bring their construct into being more or less ex *nihilo* hardly seems consistent with the massive presence of an ancient temple into the disused spaces of which monks were importing what they needed to get a community going and sustain it (as seen in the plans in Godlewski, *Phoibammon*). The plurality of persons being addressed by the "whole village" of Jerne as pioneers began with a "desert," not a huge, imposing structure already there. Of course, this is documentary rhetoric, and one must always try to ask: how rhetorical was it? Here the "desert" is a pre-existing bad thing, transformed into a good "holy city" by monastic labor.

So I look to the time of Peter IV of Alexandria, 576–578, as the time when Jeme's villagers collectively, through their headman and clerics, formally recognized the first Phoibammon community as owners of property in the west of the Hermontite nome. We may never be able to pinpoint the exact place where someone in the "pre-scientific" era came across this papyrus roll – was it at or near the piece of ground where some well-meaning, nationalistic amateurs later tried to prove that they too could carry out an excavation of not a Pharaonic but a Christian settlement, a settlement dating from the time when Egypt was Christian? Also, the beginning of this document may have been torn off and languish as a fragment somewhere, containing the all-important regnal year, or at least an indication (an invocation would not be expected as early as I am hypothesizing). In any case, Papnoute (in Coptic; "Papnouthios" in Greek) must have served as Jeme's *lashane/protocometes* earlier than had been thought.

I have drawn three inferences. One, in the absence of absolute dating material, is chronological: placing *P.KRU 105* in the context of Peter IV's consolidation activities at the end of Justin II's reign. The second is also chronological: linking the formula "our lords the Christ-loving kings" to Byzantine emperors, not thinking it possible usage under Umayyad caliphs. The third is locational: connecting *P.KRU 105* to the earlier and smaller, not the later and greater, "topos of Apa Phoebammon" in the Theban Hermontite, and seeing it as that house's "foundation charter" or confirmation of rights. Further debate is welcome.

---

41 Cf. Lajtar, *op.cit.* (above, n. 1) 38 n. 144, 103.
44 Possibly during the bishopric of Ananias (Behlmer, *op.cit.* [above, n. 43] 167).
45 Damianos' hand in the body of the document, with its deeply flourished *horis*, is striking and recognizable: it should not be too hard to spot in another fragment. (He should be added to the Hermontite listings in *Byz.Not.*)
46 Till's list in *op.cit.* (above, n. 19) 234–235 does not go earlier than 601.
47 I thank Terry Wilfong for helpful discussion. – In loving memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali (Isaiah 19:7), and of John F. Oates who shared a happy day at Mirrit Bey's country house.
P.KRU 105

Plate I