

Lincoln H. Blumell

P. Birmingham inv. 317: An addendum to the fourth-century bishops of Oxyrhynchus?

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Lincoln H. Blumell

**P. BIRMINGHAM INV. 317:
AN ADDENDUM TO THE FOURTH-CENTURY
BISHOPS OF OXYRHYNCHUS?***

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES there has been a burgeoning interest in the bishopric of Oxyrhynchus.¹ This increased interest has stemmed primarily from two developments: (1) the publication of new papyri that have helped to fill out and enrich the picture of the bishopric of

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¹ L. H. BLUMELL, 'PSI IV 311: Early evidence for Arianism at Oxyrhynchus?', *BASP* 49 (2012), pp. 279–299; IDEM, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* [= *New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents* 39], Leiden 2012, pp. 149–154; A. M. NOBBS, 'Some duties and responsibilities of a bishop(?) in late antique Egypt', [in:] Carole M. CUSACK & C. HARTNEY (eds.), *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Garry W. Trompf* [= *Studies in the History of Religions* 126], Leiden 2010, pp. 159–166; AnneMarie LUIJENDIJK, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* [= *Harvard Theological Studies* 60], Cambridge 2008, pp. 81–112; A. BENAÏSSA, 'New light on the episcopal church of Oxyrhynchus', *ZPE* 161 (2007), pp. 199–206; N. GONIS, 'Dionysius, bishop of Oxyrhynchus', *JJurP* 36 (2006), pp. 63–65; Arietta PAPACONSTANTINO, 'Sur les évêques byzantins d'Oxyrhynchus', *ZPE* 111 (1996), pp. 171–173; cf. K. A. WORB, 'A checklist of Byzantine bishops (AD 325 – c. 750)', *ZPE* 100 (1994), pp. 283–318; R. L. B. MORRIS, 'Bishops in the papyri', [in:] *PapCongr* XX, pp. 582–587.

Oxyrhynchus in late antiquity and (2) recent reassessments of previously published papyri that have led to new insights.² Consequently, a clearer picture of the bishopric of Oxyrhynchus in the later third and fourth century is beginning to emerge even if there are still a number of lingering questions and uncertainties.

The nineteenth *Festal Letter* of Athanasius, written in the year 347, shortly after Athanasius returned from his second exile, mentions in passing the deposition of a bishop of Oxyrhynchus named Pelagius and the ordination of his replacement, a man named Theodorus.³ Presumably this is the same bishop Theodorus who appears a short time later in *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2729 (*ca.* 352–359),⁴ and who was involved in episcopal

² LUIJENDIJK, *Greetings in the Lord* (cit. n. 1), pp. 95–102, makes a compelling, albeit circumstantial case, that a certain Sotas who appears in a dossier of mid-third-century letters (*P. Alex.* 29; *PSI* III 208; *PSI* IX 1041; *P. Oxy.* XXXVI 2785; *P. Oxy.* XII 1492) was the metropolitan bishop of Oxyrhynchus. A recently discovered Ethiopic manuscript that dates to the Aksumite age (4th–7th century) and contains fragments of some thirty-six different treatises includes a work that has come to be identified as the *History of the Alexandrian Patriarchate* (not to be confused with either the *Coptic History of the Church* or the *Arabic History of the Patriarchs*): see A. BAUSI, ‘La collezione aksumita canonico-liturgica’, *Adamantius* 12 (2006), pp. 54–70. This document is especially important because it renders accounts of various early Alexandrian patriarchs that were previously unknown. For the episcopates of Maximus (*ca.* 262–282), Theon (*ca.* 282–300), and Peter I (*ca.* 300–311) the document is particularly insightful since it reports that under these patriarchs a number of bishops were ordained in the *chora*. Remarkably, under the episcopate of Theon it specifically reports that he ordained a man by the name of Sotas as bishop of Oxyrhynchus. This text is currently being edited by A. Camplani and A. Bausi and is not yet published and the author gratefully acknowledges Camplani’s and Bausi’s permission to mention this detail. On another note, as the result of a recent reassessment of *PSI* IV 311 it is now evident that bishop Theodotus of Laodicea had strong theological ties with a prominent Christian from Oxyrhynchus, likely a bishop, in the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea: see BLUMELL, ‘Evidence for Arianism at Oxyrhynchus?’ (cit. n. 1), pp. 279–299.

³ Ath., *Ep. fest.* 19, 10. This letter is no longer extant in Greek but survives only via a Syriac translation. See W. CURETON, *The Festal Letters of St. Athanasius, Discovered in an Ancient Syriac Version*, London 1848, p. lv: ‘In Oxyrhynchus, Theodorus, in the room of Pelagius’. Elsewhere Athanasius mentions Pelagius: *Apol. sec.* 71, 6; 78, 7.

⁴ *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2729, ll. 7–8: δι(ὰ) τοῦ πλοίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ ἐπισκόπου ἡμῶν, ‘through the ship of Theodorus our bishop’.

factionalism in Oxyrhynchus in the late 350s that is described in a *Libellus Precum* that is directed to the emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius in *ca.* 383 by two Luciferian priests Marcellinus and Faustinus.⁵ At this time the episcopal picture is further complicated: *P. Oxy.* XXII 2344 (*ca.* 351–352) attests to yet another bishop of Oxyrhynchus, by the name of Dionysius.⁶ The *Libellus Precum* of Marcellinus and Faustinus further alleges that sometime between 357–361 there was secession from the communion of the metropolitan bishop Theodorus because of his close ties with the Arian patriarch Georgios. In the ensuing chaos an orthodox anti-bishop named Herakleidas was ordained and the petition goes on to relate how his church was then demolished by the partisans

⁵ CSEL LXIX, pp. 361–392.

⁶ *P. Oxy.* XXII 2344, l. 1: Φλα[ουί]ω Παϊανίω στρατη[γῶ] Ὀξυρυ[γχι]το[υ] παρὰ Διον[υσίου] ἐπισκόπου καθολικῆ[ς] ἐκκλη[σί]ας τῆς αὐ[τ]η[ς] πόλε[ως], ‘To Flavius Paianius *strategus* of the Oxyrhynchite from Dionysius bishop of the catholic church of the same city’. While there is no mention of this bishop in patristic literature it is possible that he could be referenced in two other papyri. *P. Harr.* I 94 (mid-4th c.), an account of freights that contains a list of ship-owners, ll. 12–13 reads: πλ(οῖον) Ἀπολλωνίου υἱοῦ Διονυσίου ἐπισκόπου, ‘ship of Apollonius, son of Dionysus the bishop ...’. As this text might have come from the Oxyrhynchite (N. GONIS, ‘Ship-owners and skippers in fourth-century Oxyrhynchus’, *ZPE* 143 [2003], pp. 164–165) there is a possibility it could be the same individual; cf. BENAÏSSA, ‘New light’ (cit. n. 1); p. 199. If it is, it may be wondered whether his son Apollonius is the same Apollonius who signs as bishop of Oxyrhynchus at the Council of Seleucia in 359 (Ephraïm, *Pan.* 73 [PG 42, col. 453]: Ἀπολλώνιος ἐπίσκοπος Ὀξυρύγχου, ‘Apollonios, bishop of Oxyrhynchus’) and who appears in Marcellinus and Faustinus, *Libellus Precum* 100–101 (CSEL LXIX, pp. 384–385). On hereditary episcopal succession see Claudia RAPP, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* [= *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 37], Berkeley 2005, pp. 195–199. It may even be possible that this same Apollonius, or Dionysius, appears in *P. CtYBR* inv. 4623, l. 3 (17 October 377) as ‘bishop of the catholic Church’; BENAÏSSA, ‘New light’ (cit. n. 1), pp. 200–201. Returning to Dionysius, a potential reference might also occur in *P. Mich.* XVIII 767 (IV), a letter titled ‘An original document from the Arian controversy?’. The letter appears to deal with ecclesiastical politics and a dispute over episcopal authority and mentions a bishop named Dionysius in l. 1: ἐπίσκ[οπον] [[Μα]ξιμ[ε]ῖνον] Διο[ύ]σιον, ‘bishop Maximinus Dionysius’. Though some have questioned the legitimacy of Dionysius’ episcopacy since he is not known in any patristic source the evidence provided by *P. Oxy.* XXII 2344 surely establishes that he was a bishop of Oxyrhynchus. See GONIS, ‘Dionysius, bishop of Oxyrhynchus’ (cit. n. 1), pp. 63–65.

of Theodorus.⁷ To further complicate matters the *Libellus Precum* introduces yet another bishop of Oxyrhynchus named Apollonius who was a Melitian.⁸

In a seminal article on the bishopric of Oxyrhynchus Arietta Papaconstantinou attempted to assemble a *fasti* of the known bishops and proposed that the aforementioned Theodorus must have remained bishop until sometime in the 380s.⁹ While she also acknowledged that there were two passing references in patristic texts from the early 370s and 380s that mentioned additional bishops of Oxyrhynchus, a certain ‘Theodoulus’¹⁰ and ‘Dorotheus’,¹¹ Papaconstantinou suggested that these were likely corruptions of the name Theodorus: ‘Il semble raisonnable (...) considerer ces deux mentions comme des corruptions de Theodorus’.¹² She therefore contended that Theodorus emerged from the episcopal

⁷ *Libellus Precum* 94, 96.

⁸ *Libellus Precum* 100: *sedens et communicans in una eademque ciuitate cum Apollonio melitianorum episcopo consentienti impietatibus Georgii et cum ipso item Apollonio idem Theodorus persequens beatum Heraclidam catholicae fidei uindicem!* This is almost certainly the same Apollonius who attended the Council of Seleucia and who subscribed as ‘bishop of Oxyrhynchus’ and perhaps the same individual mentioned in *P. Harr.* I 94 (see n. 6 above).

⁹ PAPACONSTANTINO, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchos’ (cit. n. 1), p. 173. She argued this based on *Libellus Precum* 100–101, where a passing remark seems to imply that Theodorus was still a bishop of Oxyrhynchus during the time the petition was written.

¹⁰ A ‘Theodoulus, bishop of Oxyrhynchus’ (Θεόδουλος ἐπίσκοπος Ὁξυρύγχου) subscribes as a witness to a statement of faith presented to Athanasius by a deacon named Eugenius (of Ancyra) who was representing the followers of Marcellus of Ancyra (*Expositio fidei ad Athanasium pro causa Marcelli Ancyrani* 5.2 [CPG 2.2810]). The date of the text is 371: see M. TETZ, ‘Markellianer und Athanasios von Alexandrien. Die markellianische *Expositio fidei ad Athanasium* des Diakons Eugenios von Ankyra’, *ZNTW* 64 (1973), pp. 85–86; cf. T. ZAHN, *Marcellus von Ancyra. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theologie*, Gotha 1867, p. 90.

¹¹ A ‘Dorotheus, bishop of Oxyrhynchus’ is mentioned in various bishop lists as a participant at the Council of Chalcedon in 381. See n. 21–24 below.

¹² PAPACONSTANTINO, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchos’ (cit. n. 1), p. 173. With respect to the reference to the name ‘Theodoulus’ Papaconstantinou was influenced by the suggestion made by M. Tetz who proposed in the notes of his critical edition of the *Expositio fidei ad Athanasium pro causa Marcelli Ancyrani* that ‘Theodoulus’ was likely a corruption of ‘Theodorus’ (TETZ, ‘Markellianer und Athanasios von Alexandrien’ [cit. n. 10], p. 84, n. 84; cf. WORP, ‘A checklist’ [cit. n. 1], p. 304). It is worth pointing out that while

confusion of the 350s and remained bishop until at least the early 380s and perhaps even later.¹³

While there is reason to believe that Theodorus retained the office of bishop until at least the early 380s it is now becoming evident that the episcopal confusion that plagued the city in the 350s and is described in the *Libellus Precum* seems to have continued for the next couple of decades and that there were indeed other (rival?) bishops in the city. In a recently published fragment from the Yale Collection (P. CtYBR inv. 4623) that carries the date 17 October 377, a bishop of Oxyrhynchus is attested who cannot be Theodorus.¹⁴ Though the text is fragmentary and is partially lost where it mentions the name of the bishop, in lines 4–5 it reads as follows:]ίου ἐπισκόπου καθολικῆς | [ἐκκλησίας τῆς λαμπρᾶς καὶ λα]μ[προτάτης] Ὁξυρρυγιτῶν πόλεως, ‘-ius bishop of the catholic church of the glorious and most glorious city of the Oxyrhynchites’. As noted in the edition the -ιον termination has to be the name of the bishop and the editor suggests either ‘Dionysius’ (Διονύσιος) or ‘Apollonius’ (Ἀπολλώνιος) as distinct possibilities since both are attested as bishops in the 350s.¹⁵ Therefore, whatever uncertainties remain about the bishopric of Oxyrhynchus at this time it is clear that Theodorus was not the only bishop in the city.

the name Theodoulos (Θεόδουλος) only appears a handful of times (less than twenty) in the papyri almost three quarters of these attestations appear in documents from Oxyrhynchus and about half of these appear in texts from the second half of the fourth century: P. Oxy. XLVIII 3428, ll. 7, 21 (ca. 330–385); XIX 2233, l. 2 (7 June 350); LI 3623, l. 2 (359); LXVII 4607, ll. 2, 10 (362/3); LXIII 4381, l. 9 (3 August 375).

¹³ PAPACONSTANTINOU, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchos’ (cit. n. 1), p. 173. A bishop Hierakion of Oxyrhynchus is the next attested bishop of Oxyrhynchus ca. 395 and is mentioned in two manuscripts of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, Sinai 432 and Bodleian Cromwell 18, fol. 26v; cf. D. CHITTY, review of *Historia monachorum in Aegypto, édition critique de texte grec et traduction*, ed. and trans. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, Brussels 1971, *JTS* 13 (1962), p. 174: πλὴν ὅσον παρὰ τοῦ ἐκεῖ ἁγίου ἐπισκόπου Ἱερακίονος ἠκριβευσάμεθα ἐδηλώσαμεν, μυρίους μὲν μοναχοὺς ὑπ’ αὐτόν, δισμυρίας δὲ παρθένους ἔχοντος, ‘However, as far as we could ascertain from the holy bishop of that place, Hieracion, we would say that he had under his jurisdiction ten thousand monks and twenty thousand nuns’. Neither of these manuscripts were utilised in Festugière’s edition.

¹⁴ BENAÏSSA, ‘New light’ (cit. n. 1), pp. 199–202.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

Keeping this in mind it is now time to consider P. Birmingham inv. 317. This papyrus is a small fragment that is housed in the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham. It measures 7.0 × 7.5 cm (H × W) and contains the remains of four lines of text, only two of which are completely legible. The extant text is written with a dark brown ink along the fibers and is well spaced; there is no writing on the back. While the hand is at times rapid, with ligatures, it is nevertheless fairly clear and it may be described as an upright cursive script that can confidently be assigned to the fourth century and may probably even be dated to the second half of the fourth century given that it shares distinct palaeographic parallels with the following texts: *P. Oxy.* LXI 4129 (11 May 358); *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3392 (14 June 360); *P. Oxy.* LV 3803 (16 August 411).¹⁶ While the fragment is on the whole rather unremarkable it warrants attention because it contains a reference to a bishop of Oxyrhynchus that is not Theodorus and cannot be either Dionysius or Apollonius. The text reads as follows:

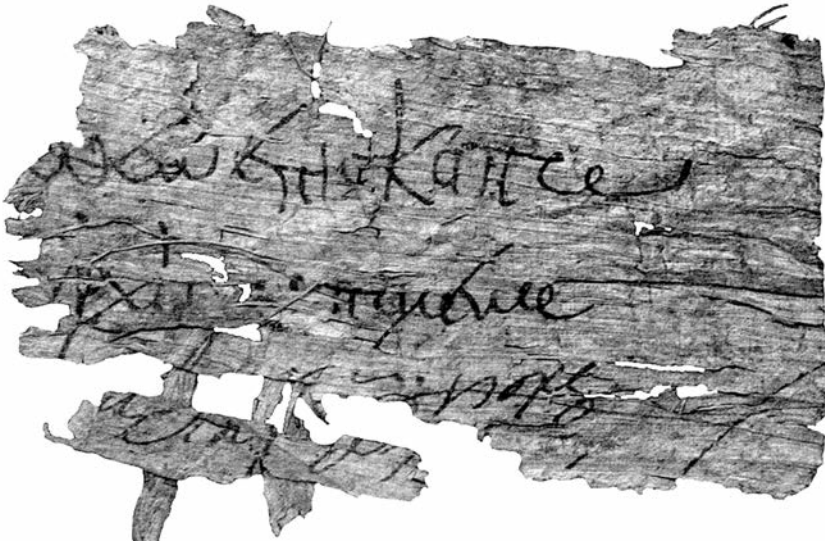
→]οθέω ἐπισκόπω
 Ὁξυ]ρυγχιτῶν πόλεως
]...].ονομου
 4]...α.[

Based on the reconstruction given in P. CtYBR inv. 4623 the present fragment could perhaps be reconstructed as follows:]οθέω ἐπισκόπω | [καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς λαμπρᾶς καὶ λαμπροτάτης Ὁξυ]ρυγχιτῶν πόλεως, ‘otheus bishop of the catholic church of the glorious and most glorious city of the Oxyrhynchites’.¹⁷ The letter combination οθεω that precedes ἐπισκόπω cannot be an epithet but must be the termination of the name of the bishop in the dative case.¹⁸ There are effectively only two

¹⁶ Of particular note is the two stroke *epsilon* where the bottom half is written with a single lunate shaped stroke and the upper half is written with a single horizontal ascender that is characteristic of the fourth century.

¹⁷ BENAÏSSA, ‘New light’ (cit. n. 1), p. 201, ll. 3–4.

¹⁸ The fragment appears to preserve the first line of text, as there are no traces of ink



P. Birmingham inv. 317
(photo by L. H. Blumell)

possibilities for the name of the bishop ending in the dative case with *-οθέω*: Timotheus (*Τιμόθεος* > *Τιμοθέω*) or Dorotheus (*Δωρόθεος* > *Δωροθέω*).¹⁹ At the beginning of the sixth century there is evidence for a bishop of Oxyrhynchus bearing the name Timotheus but at present there is no other evidence for a bishop of Oxyrhynchus bearing this name before this

above the first extant line; it may be that the fragment represents a letter. The only epithets that could conceivably fit are *φιλόθεος*, *ισόθεος*, and *ἀξιόθεος*, but they are not used as titles of address for bishops. The epithet *φιλοθεΐα* is used abstractly to refer to bishops by Christian writers of later antiquity but it would not fit the present case and the dative termination of this noun here. On the use of this epithet for bishops, see Lucilla DINEEN, *Titles of Address in Christian Greek Epistolography to 527 A.D.*, Washington 1929, p. 13.

¹⁹ A search on the DDbDP reveals that of the 87 attested names ending with *-οθεω* in only two instances is the name not either Timotheus or Dorotheus. In both cases it is the name Philotheus (*Φιλόθεος*): *P. Apoll.* 92, l. 4 (Apollonopolites, 651-700); *Stud. Pal.* VIII 904, l. 1 (Ariston Polis, 6th/7th c.).

time.²⁰ On the other hand, the name Dorotheus emerges as a very attractive possibility; not least because a bishop of Oxyrhynchus named Dorotheus purportedly attended the Council of Constantinople in 381. While Arietta Papaconstantinou has dismissed this patristic evidence, arguing that it was likely a corruption of Theodorus, this remains to be proven. The two oldest Greek manuscripts that contain a list of the bishops who attended the Council of Constantinople, both from the early ninth century, mention that a ‘Dorotheus [bishop] of the city of Oxyrhynchus’ was in attendance.²¹ Similarly, a bilingual Syriac/Greek manuscript of the eighth or ninth century that contains an episcopal list for the Council of Constantinople similarly lists Dorotheus in attendance.²² Furthermore, the extant Latin lists for the Council of Constantinople also note that a bishop named Dorotheus from Oxyrhynchus was in attendance;²³ given that there are differences between the Greek and Latin recensions it is surely significant that the name Dorotheus remains a constant in both. Therefore, any notion that Dorotheus is simply a corruption of Theodorus needs to be seriously reconsidered,²⁴ and the evidence

²⁰ SB XII 10939, ll. 1–4: τῇ ἀγίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ καθολικῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν | ἀγιώτατον κ(αί) θεοφιλέστατον πατέρα ἡμῶν | ἅπα Τιμόθεον, ἐπίσκοπον τῆς λαμπρᾶς Ὁξυρυγχιτῶν | πόλεως ... J. O’CALLAGHAN, ‘Dos papiros bizantinos de la Universidad de Yale (New Haven, EE. UU.) (P. Yale inv. 1603 y 1604)’, *StudPap* 11 (1972), pp. 29–39. On the sixth-century date of this papyrus, see A. BENAÏSSA, ‘571. The date of SB XII 10939 and Bishop Timotheus’, *Tyche* 22 (2007), pp. 216–217. On this bishop see also PAPACONSTANTINOY, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchos’ (cit. n. 1), p. 173.

²¹ C. H. TURNER, ‘Canons attributed to the Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381, together with the names of bishops, from two Patmos MSS *POB’ POG’*’, *JTS* 15 (1914), p. 168: Δωρόθεος πόλεως Ὁξυρύνχου. In the apparatus Turner notes that in MS *POB’* that Ὁξυρύνχου reads Ὁξυρύνχου.

²² V. RUGGIERI, ‘The IV century Greek episcopal lists in the *Mardin Syriac*. 7 (olim *Mardin Orth.* 309/9)’, *OCP* 59 (1993), p. 343.

²³ C. H. TURNER, *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*, Oxford 1899–1939, vol. II, pp. 434–435.

²⁴ It is surely significant that in G. FEDALTO, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*, II: *Patriarchatus Alexandrinus, Antiochenus, Hierosolymitanus*, Padova 1988, p. 629, he lists Dorotheus among the known bishops of Oxyrhynchus.

presented by P. Birmingham inv. 317 could well constitute the first papyrological evidence for the episcopacy of Dorotheus of Oxyrhynchus in the late fourth century.²⁵

Lincoln H. Blumell

Department of Ancient Scripture
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
e-mail: lincoln_blumell@byu.edu

²⁵ While there is no other papyrological evidence for a bishop of Oxyrhynchus named Dorotheus the evidence provided by *P. Lond.* VI 1927 is tantalizing and worth mentioning here. This letter was sent by an individual named Dorotheus, who identifies himself as an ‘Oxyrhynchite’, and although the name of the addressee does not appear in the extant portions of the letter it was presumably sent to an individual named Paphnutius since it was found in his archive. The letter sticks out among fourth-century Christian letters because of its overt Christian content, its use of a wide range of *nomina sacra*, and its use of scriptural language throughout where the author even cites Ephesians 5:16, which suggests that the author was no ordinary Christian but a member of the clergy or perhaps a monk. See BLUMELL, *Lettered Christians* (cit. n. 1), pp. 210–211. The letter was judged by Bell to date from about the middle of the fourth century and the opening section is worth citing here (ll. 1–4): τῷ τιμιωτάτῳ ἀδελφῷ καὶ | θε[ο]φιλ[ε]ῖ. Δωρόθεος ὁ Ὁξ[υ]ρρυγχεῖτης ὁ ἄχρ(ε)ῖος δοῦλος προσαγορεύει σε ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἐν ἀγάπῃ Χ(ριστο)ῦ, ‘To my most honored brother and beloved of God, Dorotheus the Oxyrhynchite, the unprofitable servant, salutes you in the spirit and in the love of Christ’. Given the overall tone and content of the letter, as well as the use of the self-referential ἄχρειος δοῦλος, Timm suggested that the Dorotheus who authored the letter may have been a fourth-century bishop of Oxyrhynchus: see S. TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit I [= Beibefte zum TAVO, Reihe B, 41/1]* Wiesbaden 1984, p. 285. But Timm was seemingly unaware of the patristic references to a bishop Dorotheus of Oxyrhynchus being present at the Council of Constantinople in 381 since he never cites them. The meaning of the phrase ὁ ἄχρ(ε)ῖος δοῦλος, which is suggestive for Timm that Dorotheus may have been a bishop, is curious; it is attested in one other papyrus, *SB XXII* 15375, ll. 8–9 (5th/6th c.). While the phrase is ultimately derived from either Matt. 25:30 (τὸν ἄχρειον δοῦλον) or Luke 17:10 (δοῦλοι ἄχρειοί ἐσμεν), and may well constitute a scriptural allusion, it is important to note that it appears as a self-deprecating phrase of humility in patristic authors. PAPACONSTANTINOU, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchus’ (cit. n. 1), p. 172, notes that there is nothing about the phrase ὁ Ὁξ[υ]ρρυγχεῖτης ὁ ἄχρ(ε)ῖος δοῦλος that necessarily implies that the Dorotheus of *P. Lond.* VI 1927 was a bishop.