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Inspectors' Annotations in Episkepsis Registers

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This research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [10.55776/I4674]. I am grateful to the reviewers for their comments and suggestions. In the article, I examine inspectors' annotations in registers of state property, proposing corrections to six of those (☒ SB 24 15930 and☒ 15934, ☒ P.Ross.Georg. 2 28 and☒ 42, ☒ P. Bodl. 1 99 and☒ 110 R) and offering a new interpretation based on the revised readings.

Introduction

§1 Episkepsis was a Roman administrative practice of inspecting immovable property to determine or update its condition and value.¹ Among its various functions, this procedure was necessary to establish the rent for future tenants of state-owned property (land and real estate).² The glossary of administrative terminology ☒ P.Oxy. 38 2847 R (1st half of 3rd c.) reports that a type of episkepsis, called ὄρισμός, assessed the rent (ὁ φόρος) based on the annual yield of the land. This practice is also reflected in episkepsis registers, in which years of draught were exempt from rent payments (see below ☒ P.Pher. 1, 196/7). Additionally, the episkepsis commission³ took into account the presence or absence of the tenant for a particular plot – if there was no tenant, the land was declared ἐν χέρσῳ ('fallow')⁴, meaning uncultivated, and thus generating no income, ἐξ ἣς μηδὲν δύνασθαι περιγίνεσθαι, cf. ☒ P.Thmouis 1 1 Col. 69.1–15 (170/71).

§2 In preparation for the upcoming revision, local officials compiled preliminary land surveys or 'road-maps', πορεία πρὸς ἐπίσκεψιν. Examples of such surveys include ☒ P.Giss.Univ. 6 52.3 (222/3, Arsinoite), ☒ SB 26 16414.3 (219/20, Arsinoite), ☒ PSI 7 796.3 (222/3, Arsinoite), ☒ P.Iand. 7 136.3 (135/6, Oxyrhynchite). See also a report on submission of such a survey in ☒ P.Congr. 15 15.17–18 (80, Karanis), a promise to submit it as part of the preparation in P.Congr. 15 15.60, and references to it in official correspondence, e.g. ☒ P.Laur. 3 63.8 (159, Oxyrhynchite). Following the revision, the commission produced finalised registers that recorded the results of the episkepsis. These registers often contain special notes added against each entry in a different hand. The main formula used in these inspector's annotations is ἐπεσκέφθη, usually abbreviated to the first two letters, with pi taking its abbreviated, lunate form: ε).⁵ In what follows, I discuss the various expressions that may follow this verb in the formula, their interpretation, and their implications for the process of episkepsis.

☒ P.Pher. 1

§3 One of the most prominent examples of episkepsis registers is ☒ P.Pher. 1.⁶ It is a survey (όρισμός) of property, both buildings and plots of land, that were sequestered or confiscated from individuals for various reasons. Each entry includes the name of the previous owner, the size and physical description of the parcel, its neighbours, and the annual rent that was assessed for (and presumably collected from) the property during a five-year period from 32nd year of Commodus till 4th year of Septimius Severus: λβ (ἔτους) ἔως δ (ἔτους) ὥρ(ισθη), followed by the amount of rent – given in drachmas for buildings or in grain for land.⁷ When the poor condition of the property or the absence of tenants rendered it unprofitable, these circumstances were noted instead of the rent amount, using terms such as ἐν συμπ(τώσει), ἀοίκ(ητος), or ἐν διαψύλ(ω).

¹ ☒ Bonneau 1964, ☒ Bonneau 1972: 89–95; ☒ Bonneau 1983; ☒ Kruse 2002: 281–306; ☒ Jördens 2009: 103–20.

² On the lease of state land, see ☒ Jördens 2009: 468–77.

³ On the members of the commission, see ☒ Kruse 2002: 284–306.

⁴ On this term, see ☒ Kruse 2015, 155 with n.6.

⁵ On this abbreviation, see ☒ Sijpesteijn and Worp 1993: 11.

⁶ With the correct interpretation in ☒ Hagedorn 1997 and ☒ Rathbone 1995.

⁷ On the structure of the entries, see ☒ Alessandri 2015: 13, 105–106. On the five-year period of lease, op. cit.: 115–122

§4 In almost all entries assessing land (as opposed to houses), the five-year period is interrupted in the third year, when the plots were not inundated ($\delta\beta\rho\chi\omega$), and thus no rent was payable to the fiscus that year. In the fourth year, rent resumed as before, with the formula: δ ($\varepsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$) $\tau\omega\nu\pi\tau\omega\lambda$ ($\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\omega\varsigma$). The genitive here is best understood as a genitivus pretii, i.e., ‘in the year 4 – the rent is as previously paid’. The same principle applies to other genitive phrases in this formula, such as: ($\delta\rho\chi\mu\omega\varsigma$) η , ‘at the rate of 8 dr.’; $\tau\omega\nu\delta\eta\mu$ ($\omega\sigma\iota\omega\varsigma$), ‘for (payment of) taxes,’ etc.

§5 At the end of each entry, there is an inspector’s annotation that verifies the rent rate and confirms its validity for the next lease period.⁸ This annotation always matches the rate stated in the main entry for the current period. The only exception occurs in ll. 283–6, where $\dot{\epsilon}\pi$ ($\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta$) ($\delta\rho\chi\mu\omega\varsigma$) $\iota\beta$ appears instead of ($\delta\rho\chi\mu\omega\varsigma$) β in the main entry. This is likely a scribal slip; see ↗ Alessandri 2015: 57 n.227. Another case offers insight into the practices behind episkepsis registers. In ll. 87–91, the main entry states that no revenue was to be collected from the property from year 32 until year 4. However, it then adds that, in year 4, the rate was assessed at 3 drachmas. This rate is confirmed in the inspector’s annotation. The discrepancy can be explained as follows: the previous inspection had assessed the property as unproductive (i.e. without a tenant during that five-year period), whereas the current inspection reassessed it as rentable for 3 drachmas annually. This likely indicates that a tenant volunteered to lease the property for the upcoming five-year lease. I believe a similar interpretation should be applied to ↗ P.Bodl. 1 110 R. This entry also implies that the current episkepsis took place in year 4, i.e., during the final year of the ongoing lease.

↗ **AnalPap 33 (2021) S 41 Nr 2 R. 4, 7, 10 (after 216, Arsinoite)**

§6 In this survey, the inspector’s annotation appears three times, each time confirming the status of the plots under revision as unsown land:

κα ($\varepsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$) $\dot{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$ κγ ($\varepsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$) $\dot{\epsilon}\nu$ $\dot{\alpha}\sigma$ ($\pi\omega\varphi$) $\kappa\delta$ ($\varepsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$) $\dot{\delta}\mu\omega\iota$ ($\omega\varsigma$) [--]

¹⁰ [--] (m. 2) $\dot{\epsilon}\pi$ ($\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta$) $\dot{\delta}\mu$ ($\omega\iota\omega\varsigma$) $\dot{\omega}\varsigma$ π ($\rho\omega\kappa\epsilon\tau\omega\iota$)

§7 The annotation can be translated as: “Upon revision: the same as above.”

↗ **P.Pher.Anhang 1 and 7 (3rd c., Arsinoite)**

§8 In this fragment of a register of houses, the annotation refers to the assessment from the 8th year, which was likely the year of the ongoing revision:

$\dot{\epsilon}\pi$ ($\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta$) $\dot{\omega}\varsigma$ $\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ $\tau\omega\eta$ ($\varepsilon\tau\omega\varsigma$), “Upon revision: as in the 8th year.”

§9 In the second annotation preserved on this papyrus, the inspector confirms the amount of 8 drachmas recorded in the main entry, which was also assessed in the 8th year, using the following phrase:

$\dot{\epsilon}\pi$ ($\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta$) $\tau\omega\nu$ $\dot{\iota}\sigma\omega\varsigma$, “Upon revision: of equal amount.”

§10 These attestations show that the inspector’s annotations confirm the rent assessment recorded in the main entry – whether it reflects the rate established earlier for the ongoing five-year period or, more rarely, results from an update during the ongoing episkepsis. In three further registers, inspectors’

⁸ For this structure, see ↗ Alessandri 2015: 19.

annotations follow this pattern as well: BGU 3 734 (re-edited in [Messeri 2022](#));⁹ BGU 3 735 (re-edited in [Messeri 2023](#)); and SB 12 10892 (re-edited in [Messeri 2024](#)).

[SB 24 15930 and 15934 \(before 264, Arsinoite\)](#)

§11 At first glance, these two registers of sequestered or confiscated houses appear to deviate from the usual pattern, in which the inspector's annotations always confirm the rent recorded in the main entry. However, I will show that the opposite is in fact the case.

§12 In [SB 24 15930](#), the editors read the inspector's annotations for the first seven entries as $\dot{\epsilon}\pi(\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta) \varsigma/$, “é stato ispezionato 6” (ll. 2, 4, 7, 10, 14, 17 and 21), and interpret this number as the amount in drachmas to be collected as rent from each property. However, this interpretation contradicts the descriptions of these properties: five of them are described as vacant, unbuilt plots ($\psi\iota\lambda\dot{\omega}\tau\dot{\omega}\pi\omega\varsigma$) from which nothing is collected ($\dot{\epsilon}\dot{\xi}\text{ o}\ddot{\nu}\text{ m}\eta\delta\dot{\epsilon}\nu\pi\epsilon\gamma\iota\text{v}\eta\tau\omega\varsigma$). Moreover, the sigma written with a diagonal stroke above does not conform to the standard practice of indicating sums in drachmas. Instead, it should be corrected to $\sigma(\nu\mu\phi\omega\varsigma)$, meaning ‘accordingly’. This abbreviation is attested in several second-century documents, e.g. [P.Prag. 1 21.22–23](#) (181, Soknopaiou Nesos), [ZPE 190 \(2014\) p. 215.19–21](#) (158, Soknopaiou Nesos). This expression is a standard administrative term in the context of episkepsis, as can be seen from the following examples:

[P.Thmouis 1 1](#)

Col. 139.17–18: $\dot{\epsilon}[\delta\eta\lambda(\dot{\omega}\theta\eta) \chi\epsilon]\rho\sigma\epsilon\eta\epsilon\eta\varsigma$ | $\kappa\dot{\alpha}\text{ s}\nu\mu\phi\omega\varsigma \dot{\epsilon}[\pi\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta]$, “... fut déclaré comme terre ‘sèche’ et fut trouvé lors de l’inspection dans un état conforme.”

Col. 140.21: $\tau\dot{\omega}\tau\omega\eta\delta\dot{\epsilon}\text{ s}\nu\mu\phi\omega\varsigma \dot{\epsilon}\pi[\iota\sigma\kappa(\epsilon\phi\theta\eta\tau\omega\eta)]$, “du fait que ces terrains avaient été trouvés dans un état conforme lors de l’inspection...”.

[P.Congr. 15 15](#)

Col. 3.47: $\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\kappa(\dot{\epsilon}\psi\epsilon\varsigma) \sigma\mu\phi\omega\eta\eta\varsigma$, “inspections in accord.”

Col. 2.39–40: $\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\kappa(\dot{\epsilon}\psi\epsilon\varsigma) \chi\epsilon\eta\sigma\mu\text{ m}\eta\delta\dot{\epsilon}\nu\pi\epsilon\gamma\iota\text{v}\eta\tau\omega\varsigma$.

[P.Hamb. 1 12 \(209/10\)](#)

Line 15: $\sigma\mu\phi\omega\varsigma \dot{\epsilon}\pi[\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta\eta\varsigma]$.

§13 An example of identical annotation can be found in the land register [P.Ross.Georg. 2 42](#) (2nd c., Memphite), where $\sigma(\nu\mu\phi\omega\varsigma)$ should be read after $\dot{\epsilon}\pi(\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta)$ in col. 3.7, 11 and 15. In this papyrus, the annotations are written in the same hand as the rest of the text, suggesting that they were likely copied together with the main entries from an earlier episkepsis register.

Fig. 1: [P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.7](#).

Fig. 2: [P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.11](#).

Fig. 3: [P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.15](#).

§14 Therefore, at [SB 24 15930.2, 4, 7, 10, 14 and 21](#), the inspector confirmed that the buildings were to remain without generating income. The same corrections apply to [SB 24 15934](#). In the inspector's annotation in l. 3, the editors printed $\dot{\epsilon}\pi(\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta) \varsigma/$, whereas it should read $\dot{\epsilon}\pi(\epsilon\sigma\kappa\epsilon\phi\theta\eta) \sigma(\nu\mu\phi\omega\varsigma)$.

⁹ See also corrections to the text in [Sijpesteijn and Worp 1993](#): 6 n.8 and p. 11, and accepted in [Alessandri 2015](#): 117, with n.159 (BL 10.16).

☒ P.Ross.Georg. 2 28 (after 163/4, Arsinoite)

§15 This is another register of state property (land and buildings) that contains inspector's annotations beginning with the abbreviation ἐπ(εσκέφθη) in ll. 6, 14, 18, 23, 28 and 33. The sign following it in ll. 14, 18, 23, and 28 cannot represent the amount of rent in drachmas. First, three of four corresponding entries (except for the one in ll. 24–27) describe vineyards and olive groves. Therefore, it is to be expected that the revenue from these agricultural properties would be collected, at least in part, in kind; cf. ☒ P.Marm. R Col. 7.8–12; ☒ P.Iand. 7.142 Col. 1.23–29 (164/5, Kysis).

§16 Second, the two of the plots are explicitly stated to yield no revenue. In l. 12, the vineyard appears to be uncultivated, ἐν χέρσῳ. In l. 26, the revision confirms the absence of income: ἐξ οὐδὲν ἐδηλ(ώθη) μηδὲν δύνασθαι περ[ιγίν]εσθαι.

§17 After consulting a photograph of the papyrus, I suggest reading ἐπ(εσκέφθη) συ(μφώνως) in all four cases. A similar form of abbreviation, reducing the latter word to two letters, followed by a stroke, is attested in ☒ BGU 1 192.5–7 (163, Soknopaiou Nesos).

☒ P.Bodl. 1 110 R (2nd c., Karanis)

§18 The fragment preserves the right half of a column from a register of land. In l. 6, the editor printed:
(m.2) [--- ἐπ]εσ(κέφθησαν) ἐν ἀβρόχ(ῳ) (m. 1) φό(ρου) (πυροῦ ἀρταβῶν) ε

§19 However, the abbreviation before ἐν ἀβρόχ(ῳ) features a tau written above the line, not a sigma. I suggest reading π]έντ(ε) ἐν ἀβρόχ(ῳ), where the number five corresponds to the number of arouras in the main entry, l. 5: τό(που) Βωμοῦ (ἀρουρῶν) ε. The same structure can be seen in other entries. In l. 9, instead of [--- ἐπ]εσ(κέφθη), the line repeats the number of arouras repeated from the preceding line:
(ἀρούρας) α δ'] η' λβ' ἐν ἀβρόχ(ῳ)

§20 In l.12, only the horizontal stroke above the line of the fraction is visible:
(ἀρούρας) α ιη' ιβ] ἐν ἀβρόχ(ῳ)

§21 Thus, there are no inspector's annotations preserved in this fragment, although they may have been present in the missing left portion of the vacant lines between the entries, i.e., between ll. 6 and 7, 9 and 10. The structure of the document can be reconstructed as follows: the main entry contains a description of the parcel, including its size, followed by a statement that the entire parcel was not inundated (for a specified period of time, now lost). Subsequently, an assessment is made regarding the revenue to be collected from it (e.g. φόρου πυροῦ ἀρταβῶν ε). This assessment was the result of the ongoing episkepsis.

☒ P.Bodl. 1 99 (2nd c., Arsinoite)

§22 The editor prints ὑπό after ἐπ(εσκέφθησαν) in ll. 5, 7, 9, 12, and 14, assuming that it is followed by a personal name identifying a member of the episkepsis commission responsible for the assessment. However, I propose ὑπόλογον or ὑπόλογος should be read in all five annotations. In l. 12, the word is abbreviated to the first letter, while in l. 14, it is abbreviated to the first three letters. The structure of the text and the precise function of the annotations remain uncertain due to the fragmentary state of the document. In l. 14, ὑπο() is followed by δη which may be resolved as δη(μοσίων), potentially referring to a specific type of episkepsis targeting unproductive land: ἐπ(ίσκεψις) ὑπό(λογος) δημοσίων

ἐδαφῶν. For parallels, see ↗ *P.Brem* 12.8–10 (2nd c., Hermopolis), ↗ *P.Berl.Leihg.* 1 14.45 (2nd c., Arsinoite), ↗ *P.Giss.* 1 60 Col. 2.20 (118, Apollonopolis Heptakomias), and ↗ *P.Oxy.* 38 2847.12–13.

Conclusion

§23 The verb ἐπ(εσκέφθη) in inspectors' annotations is always followed by a phrase that confirms the information provided in the main entry of the register. This phrase may either repeat the amount of rent – whether in money or kind, report the unprofitable status of the property (implying that no revenue could be collected from it), or express general agreement with the data in the entry (e.g. συμφώνως). In cases where the rent amount was updated as a result of the revision, these changes were recorded to the main entry, as in ↗ *P.Pher.* 1.283–286 or ↗ *P.Bodl.* 1 110 R. The inspector's annotation served as final validation of the assessment, extending it for the next five-year period of lease for future tenants.

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Fig. 1: P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.7.

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Fig. 2: P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.11.

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Fig. 3: P.Ross.Georg. 2 42 Col. 3.15.

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