

## Oath of an Estate Farmer

W. Graham Claytor

Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48631/pylon.2025.8.114586>

### Citation

W.G. Claytor, "Oath of an Estate Farmer," Pylon 8 (2025) Article 8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48631/pylon.20225.8.114586>.

- §1 The main interest of this oath is the earliest mention of the estate of Dionysodoros, the longtime Arsinoite *strategos* under Tiberius and a major local landowner.<sup>1</sup> Both his landholdings and lengthy tenure in office mark him out as a unique figure in the administration and economic development of the early Roman Fayum.<sup>2</sup> We learn here that his property was in imperial hands by 40 CE at the latest. The manager of this newly-acquired imperial estate was a *servus vicarius* named Probus, who is also addressed in a petition from an estate farmer the previous year (☞ [P.Athen. 32](#), Karanis, 39).
- §2 The oath was prompted by the assumption of a new leasehold comprising three arouras around the village of Herakleia. For oaths of this type, common to both imperial and public land, cf. ☞ [BGU 13 2245](#)<sup>3</sup> (Soknopaïou Nesos, 14–37), ☞ [SB 30 17666](#) (Ptolemais Melissourgon, 54), and ☞ [P.Mich. 9 545](#) (Karanis, 88/89).<sup>4</sup> As usual, the oath was written by the local notary.
- §3 The papyrus was presumably found in Soknopaïou Nesos, the origin of most documents related to Herakleia and of many papyri that came to London (and elsewhere) in the 1890s.

---

<sup>1</sup> ☞ [TM Per 34687](#). On his office, see ☞ [Str.R.Scr.2](#), pp. 10–11; ☞ [Kruse 2002](#): 34–38; ☞ [Derda 2006](#): 91–92 and 95. On his estate, see ☞ [Parássoglou 1978](#): 19; ☞ [Broux 2024](#): 17. New attestations from Karanis in 26 CE are found in ☞ [Borrelli and Claytor 2024](#).

<sup>2</sup> The *Gnomon* of the *Idios Logos* §70 (☞ [BGU 5 1210](#).viii.174–180) prohibits officials from buying or lending in the regions in which they serve, although it is not known when this regulation was laid down. Cf. ☞ [Kruse 2002](#): 44–46. A contemporary large landowner who probably held a high nome office was Asklepiades in the Herakleopolite: see ☞ [Armoni 2018](#), ll. 1–2 n. in the reedition of ☞ [BGU 16 2601](#).

<sup>3</sup> On this text and the estate in question, cf. ☞ [CPR 23 1](#) with commentary.

<sup>4</sup> Oaths were also made by public and estate farmers upon the receipt of seed loans: see now ☞ [Borrelli and Claytor 2024](#).



Fig. 1: British Library Board: Papyrus 278.

P.Lond. 2 278 descr.<sup>5</sup>

21 (h) × 11.5 (w)

☞ Herakleia (Arsinoite Nome)

☞ TM 19977

26 Feb. – 26 March, 40 CE

§4 The sheet is nearly complete in its outer dimensions, missing only a presumed left margin. Margins remain at the top and bottom, while the preserved line ends usually reach the right edge with the help

<sup>5</sup> Acquired in 1893: Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCCLXXXVIII–MDCCCXCIII (London 1894): 412–450 at ☞ 423. This edition has been made from an image of the papyrus (enhanced with ☞ Hierax for legibility), and the measurements are taken from the descriptum.

of extended final strokes or space fillers. The papyrus is framed on paper, so the back has not been seen. The document is written by the anonymous notary of Herakleia in a quick, professional hand with unexceptional orthography.

..... εος ὥς (ἐτῶν) ν οὐ(λή) ἀντικ(νημίῳ) ἀριστερῶ

*vac. 1 line(s)*

Πανεύς Π... εος τῶν ἀπὸ Ἡρακλείας τοῖς παρὰ

Πρόβου Τυράννου Γαίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ Γερμ[ανικοῦ]

ὁμνύ[ω] Γ[ά]ιον Καίσαρα Σεβαστὸν Γερμανικὸν εἰ μὴν

5 [γεωρ]γῆσι(ν) ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνεστῶ[τος] τετάρτου ἔ[τ]ους Γαίου

Καίσαρο[ς] Σ[εβ]αστοῦ Γερμανικοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν περὶ τὴν

προγεγρα[μ]μένην κώμην τῆς Γαίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ

Γερμανικοῦ οὐσίας πρότερον Διονυσοδώρου ἐδαφῶν

ἀρούρας τρεῖς ὑπὲρ ὧν ποιήσομαι τὰ καθήκοντα

10 γεωργικὰ ἔργα πάντα ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου κα(ὶ) λήμψομαι τὰ ὑ-

πὲρ αὐτῶν σπέρματα καὶ μετρήσωι τὰ ἡθισμένα

ὑπὲρ αὐτῶ[ν] ἐκφόρια καὶ προσμετρούμενα κα [ -ca.5- ]

[ . . . ] ..... [ . . . ] τὴν γεωργίαν. εὐορκοῦντ[ι] μὲν μοι

εὐ εἴη, ἐφιορκοῦντι δὲ τὰ ἐναντία. ἔγραψε [ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ]

15 ὁ [τῆ]ς Ἡρακλείας νομογράφος [διὰ] τὸ [μὴ εἰδέναι]

αὐτὸν γράμματα. (ἔτους) δ Γαίου Καίσαρο[ς] Σεβαστοῦ]

[Γερμανικοῦ] μηνὸ(ς) Γαίου Σεβαστοῦ [ . . . ]

5 *l. γεωργήσιν* 11 *l. μετρήσω* *l. εἰθισμένα* 13 *l. γεωργίαν*

“... about 50 years old, mark on his left shin. Paneus son of ... from Herakleia to the agents of Probus, (slave) of Tyrannos, (slave) of Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. I swear by Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus that I will farm from the present fourth year of Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus three arouras of the fields around the said village, which belong to the estate of Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, previously belonging to Dionysodoros, on behalf of which I will perform all requisite agricultural tasks at my own expense and I will receive seed for the fields and I will measure out the customary rents on the fields with surcharges ... the leasehold. If [I] keep the oath, may it be to my benefit, but if I break the oath, the opposite. The notary of Herakleia wrote [for him because] he [does not know] letters. Year 4 of Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, *n*th of the month Gaius Augustus.”

§5 1 The personal description of the oath-taker, with only traces remaining of his name. Personal descriptions are commonly found above oaths in this period: [Borrelli and Claytor 2024](#): 27.

§6 2 Πανεύς Π... εος. Possibly Πανέος, though not an attested genitive of the name Πανεύς ([TM NamVar 12242](#)).

- §7 3 Πρόβου Τυράννου Γαίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ Γερμ[ανικοῦ]. On this identification pattern for slaves of slaves (known as *vicarii*), see [Straus 1978](#): 259–260 and Mitthof, [CPR 23 1.11–13 n.](#), including discussion of other relationships expressed by the bare genitive. As mentioned above, Probus is also addressed in [P.Athen. 32](#) (Karanis, 39, with Mitthof, [Korr.Tyche 416](#) for the correct understanding of his identification pattern).
- §8 7–8 Explicit reference to the estate of the emperor Caligula ([TM Ousia 17](#)) is found in two other texts, the aforementioned [P.Athen. 32](#) (Karanis, 39) and [P.Ryl. 2 148](#) (40), a petition from a *προεστὸς* of the estate holdings around Euhemeria. He owned much more property in Egypt, of course, both as the heir of Tiberius, and from his earlier inheritance from his father Germanicus (TM Ousia [145](#) and [146](#)).
- §9 8 Dionysodoros served as *strategos* for about two decades, from the end of Augustus’ reign well into Tiberius’ (14–33; cf. fn. 1). [Parássoglou 1978](#): 19 convincingly identified him as the landowner behind the later Διονυσοδοριανὴ οὐσία on the strength of his known landholdings in the nome ([P.Ryl. 2 129](#), 30 CE) and the local toponym Στρατηγοῦ attached to a palm orchard on this estate ([P.Gen. 1<sup>2</sup> 38 = W.Chr. 366.5–6](#), 208/209). The imperial estate ([TM Ousia 14](#)) was previously known only from the Flavian period on, so the chronological gap is now closed: the estate went immediately into imperial hands upon his death between 33–40. Due to this narrowed range, we can now also conclude that the Dionysodoros ([TM Per 34690](#)) who authored the letter [SB 4 7461](#) (45) to a Herakleopolite *strategos* was indeed not the same man (cf. [Derda 2006](#): 92 n. 91 and 95 n. 99).
- §10 10–11 κα(ὶ) λήμψομαι τὰ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν σπέρματα. Usually one artaba per aroua.
- §11 12 προσμετρούμενα. In [P.Ryl. 2 166.16–17](#) (Karanis, 26), defined as an additional 2% of the rent.
- §12 12–13 There does not appear to be a precise parallel for the conclusion of the oath. At the end of l. 12 perhaps καὶ [, καθ[αρά, or καθ’ [ἔτος (for κατ’ ἔτος).
- §13 15 ὁ [τῆς, Ἡρακλείας νομογράφος. Though not in doubt, the title is difficult to follow after the initial nu; it may have been abbreviated or written in *Verschleifung*. For other anonymous notarial subscriptions in first-century oaths, cf. [SB 30 17666.16–17](#) (Ptolemais Melissourgon, 54) and [P.Mich. 9 545.21–22](#) (Karanis, 88/89).
- §14 This is the earliest reference to the *grapheion* of Herakleia, which in the following years was in the hands of Hermias son of Neilos, an entrepreneur who also held the concession of the *grapheia* of Nilopolis and Soknopaiou Nesos, the last of which, at least, he subleased to a local man. His dossier ([BGU 13 2214](#), [M.Chr. 183](#), and [BGU 1 297](#)) is to be discussed in a forthcoming reedition of M.Chr. 183, which was addressed to and signed by Hermias.
- §15 17 The short-lived month Γάιος Σεβαστός (also simply Γάιος or Γαίειος) equates to Phamenoth (cf. [Hanson 1984](#): 1110–1111 and [P.Oxy. 55 3780.7 n.](#)) and thus the oath was drawn up between 26 Feb. – 26 March, 40.

## Bibliography

- [Armoni, C. \(2018\)](#) “Aus dem Archiv des Διοικητῆς Athenodoros: Neuedition von BGU XVI 2601, 2605 und 2618,” ZPE 207: 123–134.
- [Borrelli, B. and Claytor, W.G. \(2024\)](#) “A Dossier of Seed Orders and Farmers’ Oaths from Karanis,” Tyche 39: 11–55.
- [Broux, Y. \(2024\)](#) The Imperial Ousiai of Roman Egypt. Leuven.

- ☞ **Derda, T. (2006)** Ἀρσινοΐτης νομός. Administration of the Fayum under Roman Rule. Warsaw.
- ☞ **Hanson, A.E. (1984)** “Caligulan Month-Names at Philadelphia and Related Matters,” *Pap.Congr.* 17: 1107–1118.
- ☞ **Kruse, T. (2002)** Der königliche Schreiber und die Gauverwaltung. Untersuchungen zur Verwaltungsgeschichte Ägyptens in der Zeit von Augustus bis Philippus Arabs (30 v.Chr. – 245 n.Chr.). Munich - Leipzig.
- ☞ **Parássoglou, G.M. (1978)** Imperial Estates in Roman Egypt. Amsterdam.
- ☞ **Straus, J.A. (1978)** “Notes sur quelques papyrus concernant l’esclavage dans l’Égypte romaine,” *ZPE* 32: 259–262.

Claytor, W. Graham

GND: ☞ <https://d-nb.info/gnd/1164982230>

ORCID: ☞ <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9838-3318>

University of Warsaw

[w.claytor-vi@uw.edu.pl](mailto:w.claytor-vi@uw.edu.pl)