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OXYRHYNCHUS, THE CHRIST-LOVING CITY?

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SB VI 8987¹ preserves a sale of a part of a house drawn up at Oxyrhynchus in 644/5, that is, shortly after the Islamic conquest of Egypt. It is the latest exactly dated Greek papyrus attesting the city.² Oxyrhynchus is described in these terms (line 1):

ἐν τῇ λαμπρῷ καὶ φιλ[τάτη] [᾽Ο]ξ[υ]ρ[υγγ]ι[τῶν πόλει

In this context, φιλ[τάτη] is odd, and perhaps nothing more than a mere stopgap. The adjective generally refers to people;³ as far as I am aware, it has not been found with a city elsewhere. In his study of the epithets of Oxyrhynchus, D. Hagedorn considers this as ‘das singuläre und vielleicht auch nicht ganz sichere Beispiel’ (*ZPE* 12 (1973) 290). All this prompted me to examine the original at the British Library, where it is kept as Papyrus 2018. As I was able to see, there can be no grounds for objecting to the editor’s reading of φιλ[, or to his calculation of the capacity of the lacuna. I would, however, propose a different restoration:

ἐν τῇ λαμπρῷ καὶ φιλο[οχρ(ίct)φ] [᾽Ο]ξ[υ]ρ[υγγ]ι[τῶν πόλει

(The length of the break suggests that the word must have been contracted, as containing a *nomen sacrum*.) φιλόχρητος does not apply to Oxyrhynchus in any other papyrus, but we find it with Alexandria in POxy LXIII 4394.10-11 (494—that part of the text) ἐν τῇ λαμπρο(τάτη) | καὶ φιλοχρ(ίct)φ Ἰαλεξ(ανδρεία) τῇ πρὸς Αἰγ(ύπτω). Its association with Alexandria is in fact well attested.⁴ J. R. Rea observes that ‘in documentary papyri the adjective is mostly used of people’ (POxy 4394.10-11 n.), but also notes that it is found in connection with an unnamed city in PApoll 69.3 (late VII, cf. BL VIII 10); the city may, but need not, be Alexandria.⁵ It is possible that the Oxyrhynchites were influenced from the titlature of Alexandria; the verbal coincidence is remarkable. At any rate, the epithet fits in well with the picture of Oxyrhynchus as it emerges from other evidence. The account of the *Historia Monachorum* (5.42) about the overwhelming presence of churches and monasteries at Oxyrhynchus at the close of the fourth century is well-known.⁶ It may also be relevant that several medieval sources, Coptic, as well as Arabic, narrate the story of the Holy Family’s sojourn at Oxyrhynchus.⁷ Finally, it is worth drawing attention to a Coptic text of 1357 in which the city is called Ⲡⲃⲁⲕⲓ ⲙⲙⲁⲓⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲡⲉⲘⲁⲢⲏ ‘the God-loving city (of) Pemjē’ *mutatis mutandis*, could this be a reminiscence from a time when the city was called φιλόχρητος?

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¹ The papyrus belongs a well-known Graeco-Coptic archive; see A. A. Schiller, *Actes X. Congr. Int. Pap.* (1964) 193-200; id., *Studien Oertel* (1964) 107-19; id., *JARCE* 7 (1968) 79-118.

² I am aware of only one document which may be later, viz. PWisc I 11, cf. K. A. Worp, *ZPE* 45 (1982) 224-6. There are a few other Oxyrhynchite documents dating from after the conquest, such as e.g. TVarie 8 (669), or PLeidInst 80 (VIII), but none of them refers to Oxyrhynchus. (PLond IV 1383.5 (709) probably refers to the Oxyrhynchite pagarchy.)

³ See H. Koskeniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (1956) 97-100; cf. also N. Gonis, *ZPE* 119 (1997) 148-52.

⁴ See J. Irmscher, ‘Alexandria. Die Christusliebende Stadt’, *BSAC* 19 (1967-8) 115-22.

⁵ The use of the epithet with cities other than Alexandria appears to be rare. Irmscher, loc. cit. 117-18 n.9 cites two instances of φιλόχρητος found with non-Egyptian cities, both from later times; one, of 861/2, refers to Tiberias in Palestine, the other, of 911/2, to Attaleia in Pamphylia. Searches of the TLG_D and PHI7 CD-ROMs have yielded two further examples: I.Thrace 100r.b.3 (= IK Sestos 16) (365?) τῆς φιλοχρ(ίctου) Πα(πα)νιτῶν πόλ(εως); John Chrysostomus, *De incomprehensibili dei natura* (*Contra Anomoeos; homiliae* 1- 5 [SC 28]) hom. 2.37-38 φιλόχρητος ἡμῖν ἄνωθεν ἢ πόλις ἐcτί (Antioch).

⁶ Cf. S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* i.283-300.

⁷ See Timm, op. cit. 299-300 n.45; also O. F. M. Meinardus, *The Holy Family in Egypt* (1986) 44-47.

⁸ Ms. Copt. Bibl. Vat. no. 14 = A. Hebbelynck, A. van Lantschoot, *Codices Coptici Vaticani* (1937) 52 (the reference in Timm, op. cit. 299 n.37). ΠⲉⲘⲁⲢⲏ is a Coptic name of Oxyrhynchus.