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P. Petra V. People of Petra

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INTRODUCTION

PEOPLE OF PETRA

Of the papyri found in the main church of Petra, around ninety documents have been edited and published in these five volumes. Many of these rolls are so poorly preserved that we have been unable to identify the nature of their contents or the people appearing in them. However, when some link with recognizable persons emerges, the overwhelming majority of the texts pertain either to the archdeacon of the same church, Theodoros, son of Obodianos, or to his family members. Over three dozen documents belong to this group. Only a few documents cannot be linked with people who were unquestionably related to Theodoros (see below). Moreover, a dozen texts, while not concerning Theodoros' private matters, do still relate to the affairs of his church. A reasonable hypothesis is thus that all these papyri once belonged to Theodoros, who would have collocated the rolls relating to both his personal and clerical life. With a few exceptions, all the edited papyri come from the main deposit of the rolls, located along the western wall of the storage room. The smaller deposit on the southern wall of the same room might have formed a group of its own, but these rolls have been so badly burned that their relationship with those of the main deposit cannot be securely established.¹

It is impossible to determine the exact number of individuals who appear in the papyri. Homonyms can only be determined to signify different person when their accompanying patronymics are preserved. For example, there are at least eight different men called Valens, seven called Theodoros, and five called Leontios, while four are called Alpheios, Ioannes, or Obodianos.² Many names are fragmentary or missing in the gaps. Sometimes, people can be identified by their hand, but even this is not conclusive; Theodoros himself signed his documents for many decades with two clearly distinct hands. By a conservative estimate, around one hundred individual males appear in the documents either as participants or witnesses or are otherwise mentioned, and another fifty may also be different personalities, although it cannot be verified (for women, see below). In addition, over fifty men are attested only from the patronymics of their offspring.

One way to identify people is by their honorific titles, which were used with some consistency. Military men were usually designated *kathōsiōmenos*. Clerics, on the other hand, were titled *theosebēstatos*, *theophilestatos*, or *eulabēstatos*, these designations being used interchangeably for the same person. *Panhagiōtatos* was used for a bishop and *hosiōtatos* for a member of the higher clergy. Theodoros was called *eudokimōtatos* before he entered his ecclesiastical career, while his uncle Patrophilos carried the same title for as long as he lived; the title is attested for several other people as well and was obviously a common designation for propertied gentlemen in Petra.³ Women in the same circles were called *kosmiōtatē* or *eulabēstatē*. It is additionally worth noting that, in the one document written in Gaza, near the Egyptian border (2),⁴ Theodoros is called *thaumasiōtatos*. This title never appears in Petra, whereas it was quite common in Egypt. Local notables sometimes carried the title *lamprotatos*, whereas *megaloprepestatos* already signified a more elevated status. Tax collectors were habitually furnished with the title *aidesimōtatos*, though we do not know if it was linked directly with their particular

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1. The most important text deriving from the southern cluster is **62**, a list of agricultural plots; see also **16** and **78**. For the archaeological context, see P. Petra I, pp. 5–8.
 2. Stephanos of Byzantium notes that Gesios was a name typical of Petra, and it is indeed often attested in the dossier, see **29** 289 comm. For the Nabatean names Dusarios and Obodianos, see **2** 12–18 comm. and 19–23 comm.
 3. However, *eudokimōtatos* could be used for military men as well, see Introduction to **50**.
 4. Note that one other, much more fragmentary text (Inv. 16) may also have been written in Gaza, see **Single Words** 28.

function in city administration or rather with the fact that they often, if not always, were of curial status. The implication of *eugenestatos* remains equally obscure. Deceased people were almost always distinguished by the title *makariōtatos*. Finally, it has to be noted that the status designation Flavius was carried by practically all lay gentlemen in Petra and obviously from an early age, because Theodoros carried it already before he was twenty-five years of age (1).

We shall first sum up the information the texts give on Theodoros' life. He was evidently born sometime between 512 and 514, achieving his full legal majority between May 537 (1) and August 539 (18). He became a deacon sometime between September 549 (66) and January 559 (25), being at that time between thirty-five and forty-seven years of age. He was next promoted to archdeacon no later than August 574 (39), when he was around sixty. Theodoros was still certainly alive in the reign of Maurice, at least in the early 580s (29–31). In the last datable Petra texts from the 590s (32–34, 42–43), however, Theodoros is no longer mentioned, suggesting that he might have died by then, in which case the last documents would have been added to the archive by some of his heirs or even by totally unrelated persons. However, since the location of Theodoros' personal papers in the ecclesiastical complex was certainly determined by his role in the adjacent church, it would have been odd for his family members to continue to use the same deposit after his death. The rolls may just have been forgotten and left in the room after the archdeacon died, but it is not impossible that Theodoros was still alive when the church burnt and collapsed, as we simply do not know the exact year of its ruin.⁵

In 537, at around the age of twenty-four, Theodoros married his first cousin Stephanous (1, 18) with whom he had at least one son, Panolbios, who died before him, no later than 592 (29, 32–34).⁶ We do not know how long Stephanous lived, as she does not appear in any document after their marriage. Theodoros, at any rate, need not have been widowed before becoming deacon, because clerics were only forbidden to enter marriage after they had assumed ecclesiastical office.⁷ In addition to marrying his daughter, Theodoros had other dealings with his maternal uncle and father-in-law, Patrophilos, son of Bassos. Loans were made and goods deposited between one another (29), and Theodoros evidently donated something to his brother-in-law and cousin, Patrophilos' son, Hierios, in the 580s (31). In addition, the archdeacon's archive included documents which must have originally belonged to Patrophilos, as Theodoros is in no way involved in them (7–10, 28), suggesting that the last owner of the archive, whether Theodoros or someone else, may have inherited Patrophilos' estate and documents.

Theodoros' legal domicile was the city of Petra, where his family obviously had its roots and where he himself established his ecclesiastical career. However, in 538, he resided in Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, in the neighboring province of Palaestina Prima (2). Later in his life, in the 560s or 570s, he may have resided at least temporarily in the garrison town of Sadaqa, some 25 km southeast of Petra (37). The place was evidently by then populated by soldiers and civilians alike.⁸ Like other wealthier inhabitants of Petra, Theodoros owned property there (23, 46), including a townhouse over which he had a prolonged quarrel with one of his neighbors (39). At that time, he was already archdeacon of the metropolitan see, but how he could perform that task from Sadaqa is not clear. The papyri also reveal that the citizens of Petra often owned land in another neighboring town, Augustopolis.

We know much less about Theodoros' family members. The lifespan of his uncle and father-in-law, Patrophilos, who remained a layman up to the end of his life, can be extrapolated from two facts: his daughter's marriage to Theodoros in 537 and that he was himself probably still alive in the 580s or at least after 565 (29). Assuming that his daughter was in her teens at the time of her marriage, Patrophilos must have been born around 485 to 500.

5. For the life of Theodoros, see esp. P. Petra I, pp. 9–10, 23–26; P. Petra III, pp. 17, 104–5, 130–32, 169–70. For the offices of deacon and archdeacon, see, e.g., Meimaris, *Sacred Names*, 162–82.

6. Marriages between first cousins were legal in the eastern empire, Cod. Just. 5.4.19; Inst. Just. 1.10.4; Kaser, *Privatrecht*, II, 166.

7. Cod. Just. 1.3.44; see Kaser, *Privatrecht*, II, 168, with further sources. Another deacon in Petra, Stephanos, son of Leontios, also had a son (40).

8. For Sadaqa, see P. Petra IV, pp. 27–28; Fiema, *Late-antique Petra*, 211–12, and *Byzantine Military*, 313–19.

Theodoros' cousin Hierios was probably born after 537, because he does not figure into the financial scenarios discussed in that year by Theodoros and Patrophilos (1). Judging by his honorific title, Hierios also became a cleric (6, 29, 31). He passed away between 582 and 592 (31, 33).

Theodoros' parents had died before his marriage in 537 (1). His father, Obodianos, son of Obodianos, seems to have owned property in Palaestina Prima, where he may have resided for some time.⁹ In the papyri, Obodianos is only mentioned in connection with the earlier transfers of property Theodoros had inherited. A different Obodianos, son of Obodianos, appears much later donating property to two pious institutions (55). The same document presents no fewer than three other people also said to be sons of Obodianos: besides the archdeacon Theodoros, there are two priests by the names of Leontios and Gesios—we do not know if any of these men were brothers. Obodianos was a typically Nabataean name but not particularly common, so it is reasonable to assume that they were somehow related, though not necessarily in the same generation. Moreover, at least one further Obodianos is attested in the archive (59).

Theodoros' family and peers were clearly among the wealthier landowners in Petra. They owned houses, vineyards, and grainland in the region and handled considerable sums of money. For example, Patrophilos seems to have borrowed 50–60 *solidi* from Theodoros (29), and the customary penalties for breaking a contract were set at 20–40 *solidi*. However, as the countless individual plots of agricultural land mentioned in the documents are always quite small (usually only fractions of hectares and rarely more than a few hectares), we have to assume that landowning in the area was deliberately dispersed. The clearest measure of the family's financial means is the value of the property which Stephanous brought to her marriage: 6 ½ pounds of gold (468 *solidi*). This can be compared, on the one hand, to the annual wage of a simple worker, which was only a few *solidi*, and, on the other hand, with the largest dowries known from the eastern empire, which could be as valuable as 100 pounds of gold.¹⁰ Thus, while Theodoros' family was far from being among the highest provincial elites, it was certainly affluent by local standards. Perhaps significantly, neither Patrophilos nor Theodoros are ever said to be *politeuomenoi*, members of the curial class, unlike around a dozen of the other men appearing in the papyri.

We can only speculate about other potential relatives of the archdeacon. Around 580, Theodoros was in the process of dividing up an estate with a man called Georgios, son of Panolbios (30). The estate may have been left by another Theodoros, who, for his part, may have been Georgios' brother. Although it would be natural to connect the name Panolbios with the archdeacon's deceased son, these might also have been different individuals. Thus, Georgios and the late Theodoros need not have been the archdeacon's grandsons but were at least quite possibly related.¹¹ Here, it is worth noting two further documents from the archive which do not exhibit any secure connection to the archdeacon. They come from the 590s and concern the marriage of a soldier, Thomas, son of Nikephoros, with Kyra, daughter of Georgios (42–43). One way to explain the presence of these texts among Theodoros' papers is that the bride's father, Georgios, was somehow connected with the family. However, the name Hierios is also mentioned, and this man might even have been Kyra's deceased husband. If he can be identified with Theodoros' cousin, it would suggest that the archive really did contain documents from the entire extended family.

Another group of papyri is linked with a certain Patrikios, son of Diphilos, and also shows no trace of Theodoros, son of Obodianos. However, in all cases where their contents can be reconstructed, Patrikios is in dealing with a man called Panolbios, son of Megethios, or with a son of Panolbios. It seems that these documents came to the archive through Panolbios or his son and not through Patrikios.¹² Thus, there must have been some

9. See 2 and 39 102–3 with comm.

10. See P. Petra III, p. 21; Arjava, *Women*, 66–67.

11. The identity of the people in 30 is discussed in P. Petra III, pp. 130–32. Note that a certain Theodoros, son of Georgios, appears in one of the very late receipts (34), but his function there is obscure.

link between the archdeacon and the family of this Panolbios. That the son of Theodoros had the same name as this Panolbios may or may not be a coincidence. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the link was established in a later generation, perhaps even leaving the son of Panolbios as the last owner of the archive.

One further person who figures quite prominently in the papyri is Patrikios, son of Ailianos. He appears already in 528/29 with the title of *prōteuōn* and the less exalted honorific of *lamprotatos*. He thus evidently belonged to the local upper class. Yet, by the early 540s, Patrikios was already styled as *comes* and *megaloprepestatos*, both words indicating that he had somehow acquired a higher rank, though perhaps no more than titular, so he need not have assumed any real function in imperial service. He is still attested in 557/58 (or even 572/73). Patrikios acts sometimes together with two brothers, Ailianos and Nikias, sons of Monaxios. They must have been close relatives, though Patrikios could hardly have been the son of this Ailianos. For his part, Ailianos was also a *megaloprepestatos comes*, while Nikias was simply a member of the curial class. The obvious question remaining is how these people were connected with the archdeacon. In most cases, the answer is easy, as Theodoros was the other party in the transactions, so the documents in the archive were simply his own copies (22–24, 45–47). In the case of 50, an exchange of land, the party contracting with Patrikios was called Valens, whose patronymic may have been Dusarios (though the text here is damaged). This could be significant because Patrophilos' father-in-law (and thus the grandfather of Theodoros' wife) was called Dusarios, son of Valens. The younger Valens in 50 might consequently have been a member of the archdeacon's extended family. However, we also have to reckon with the possibility that some documents simply accompanied the property which Theodoros later acquired and thus did not originally have any link with him. Such may be the case with 65, which evidently records the previous transaction of a plot that, sometime later, ends up in Theodoros' possession (23).¹³

An additional text possibly mentioning the same Patrikios is a contract where a Patrikios leases a considerable area of land from a certain Gessios (51). We cannot establish any link with the archdeacon, except that this was a discarded document, the other side of which was later used to draft a will in favor of ecclesiastical institutions (52). Hence, the recycled roll may have been used by Theodoros for his functions in the church. Several other texts probably belonged in the same category (48–49, 53–56, 64, 83, 85, and possibly 68). They include donations for pious purposes, accounts of some kind, and perhaps receipts. They are mostly so fragmentary that they shed little light on ecclesiastical administration in Petra. It has to be noted, however, that, when an ecclesiastical institution acquired landed property, it was registered under the name of its presbyter (25).

The Petra papyri present us with more than two dozen men linked with the church.¹⁴ This is a relatively high proportion of all males appearing in the texts and certainly reflects Theodoros' circles. First, we have at least three bishops: one named Ioannes, probably the bishop of Petra (48), a certain Theodoros (72), and a man whose name is lost but who is said to be the bishop of Phaeno, a town located 45 km north of Petra (49). In two further documents, the name of the bishop is lost (52, 64).¹⁵ Next, eight or nine men in all hold the title of *presbyteros* (priest), including two who have the additional title of *hēgoumenos* (superior) and another who is also called *chōrepiskopos* (country bishop). In addition to the archdeacon Theodoros, son of Obodianos, we encounter another archdeacon, Theodoros, son of Alpheios, and seven deacons. However, their titles are not wholly reliable: in one and the same long document, this latter Theodoros signs himself as deacon and is given

12. Three requests for transfer of taxation, 3–5 (538), were made jointly by Patrikios and Panolbios, and 36 was a division of property between them. One receipt was drawn up by Patrikios for a certain son of Panolbios (35), a roll that was found underneath 5, indicating that the two documents may have been connected in some way. The same Patrikios is later mentioned in 67 (569), while the hand of 87 very much resembles his handwriting; both these texts are, however, far too fragmentary to reveal which other people were involved.

13. Note, however, that in 65 and 23 the intervening owner was Dusarios, Theodoros' relative. Generally, for Patrikios, see 22–24, 45–47, 50–51, 65, 82; P. Petra IV, pp. 165–66, and Introductions to 50 and 65.

14. For the ecclesiastical functions, see Meimaris, *Sacred Names*, 162–263; and cf. Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*.

15. For the attested bishops of Petra, see Fedalto, *Hierarchia ecclesiastica*, 2, 1040.

the same title by the scribe but is called archdeacon by two other persons (39). Several people are attested as clerics only by their honorific title. Finally, two *oikonomoi* (stewards of church property, 72) and a *xenodochos* (head of a hospice, 52, 56) can be counted among the church functionaries.

At least one of the presbyters is only able to write (though with some difficulty) his own name (25), suggesting that the clergy was recruited from broader social classes, not only from the circles of Theodoros and his peers.¹⁶ We learn that clerics owned land, houses, and slaves, obviously in the same manner as laymen and that they might have children (see above). They could also end up in quarrels among themselves. The prolonged dispute between Theodoros and the deacon Stephanos over a building in Sadaqa is a prime example (39), but there is also another curious case: the priest Epiphanius accused Hierios, whose honorific shows him to be an ecclesiastic as well, of stealing some items from a building he owned (6).

A few military men are found in the papyri, showing that the presence of the army was a part of daily life in the area. As would be expected in this archive, none of these men seems to have belonged to the rank and file. Four of them hold the title *priōr*, a broad term that covered officers of different rank. One of these four was chosen as an arbiter in the quarrel between Theodoros and Stephanos (39). Two were asked to write for people unable to do so themselves (37, 43), and one may have been the lessee of a vineyard (59). Thomas, the bridegroom of Kyra, was called *embathmos* (42–43). This is a mysterious rank which has so far been attested only in Nessana but nowhere else in the eastern empire.¹⁷ There is thus no way to determine what kind of military service is denoted by such a title. The military status of three further men is revealed only by their honorific title *kathōsiōmenos*. It appears that members of the Byzantine frontier troops had been to some extent integrated with the civilian population, taking part in their affairs where the need arose. Often, they are said to belong to the garrison in Sadaqa. The military units which may have been stationed in the city of Petra itself cannot be recognized from the papyri.

Some twenty women are attested in the texts. Five of them are slaves (see below). Several texts are so fragmentary that, though a female name may sometimes turn up, her role therein does not become apparent. A few women are mentioned as family members of the males drawing contracts between themselves: these include the mother, grandmother, and wife of Theodoros (1). Stephanos, for example, though mentioned in 1, did not herself participate in the financial documents drawn up by her father and bridegroom at the time of her marriage—their marriage contract itself has not been preserved. Obodianos' mother Thaaious is yet another woman who plays a rather passive role in the document in which she is mentioned. When her son anticipated his death at the plight of an illness and expressed his wish to donate his property for pious purposes, he included a condition that his mother be nourished and clothed at the provision of the estate for as long as she lived (55).

Only four women appear as real parties in agreements. The most active among them is the widow Elaphia, who represents both herself and her three underage children, being also their legal guardian (28). In this document, Elaphia and Patrophilos divided two small slave boys between themselves, perhaps because the boys' parents had been separately owned by Patrophilos and Elaphia's late husband. Another widow, Hyperechia, negotiates the fate of a vineyard which had originally been leased out by her husband (59). Thus, in a way, both of these women inherited the affairs of their husbands.

In their marriage contract and additional agreements that followed between Kyra and Thomas, the bride was formally an active party, though she used a proxy to sign on her behalf (42–43). Kyra's father may already have died, or he at least does not participate in these documents. Moreover, she appears already to have a child, so she, too, was evidently a widow. In the fourth case, Arista and her husband Kyrikos issue a receipt for the archdeacon Theodoros (37). The property in question seems to have belonged to Arista as part of her inheritance, but

16. For the literacy of clerics, see Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 70–75.

17. See P. Petra IV, p. 142.

Kyrikos states that he represents her in the matter. Thus, although imperial law did not lay any restrictions on women's involvement in legal or financial issues, we can conclude that females did not play a very active role in the transactions Theodoros and his peers conducted in sixth-century Petra, especially if they were not widowed. On the other hand, women were intimately involved in the transmission of property, possessing full inheritance and ownership rights in accordance with contemporary law.¹⁸ Finally, like Kyra and Arista, Elaphia may have used a proxy to sign on her behalf. Although most men in Petra were of course also illiterate, it seems that, even in those circles wherein males were more or less literate, females often had difficulties with the art of writing.

Slaves were an important class of property in Petra. In several contracts, their existence is mentioned in passing, and at least three documents discuss them in further detail. The clearest example is the division of the two slave boys mentioned above, the two evidently being the offspring of slaves owned by two different people (28). The other two documents are also some kind of agreements about slaves, though the contents are obscure (57–58). Altogether, the papyri provide little information about the number of slaves possessed by the free inhabitants of Petra. An estate which included widespread agricultural property and several houses did not contain more than four slaves, apparently comprising two informally married couples (17). While agriculture in Petra may not have been based on slave labor, the role of tenants (*coloni*, γεωργοί) nevertheless remains equally obscure.¹⁹ In general, slave names are not well documented in Late Antiquity. In Petra, the attested male names are Hadrianos, Ioannes, Kalemeros, Kyriakos, and Salamanios; the female ones are Almasia, Ampelion, and Kyriake.

Not surprisingly, all the papyri published in these volumes have some kind of financial purpose. One area which clearly caused a lot of papyrus-work in Petra was taxation: almost half of the texts where the contents can be determined (i.e., some thirty documents) are somehow linked with taxes. These are either receipts for taxes paid or requests for the transfer of taxation from one owner to the next. About the same number of texts can be classed as contracts between private individuals. Many of these concern matters within a family, recording gifts, divisions of inheritance, or financial arrangements connected with marriages. Outside of the family, sales, exchanges, and leases of important property, mainly agricultural land, were documented. Some texts record the settlement of quarrels. There are also a couple of fragments of letters and several intriguing fragments of lists or accounts, but their exact nature cannot be reconstructed. The dozen or so documents linked with Theodoros' ecclesiastical role form a special group of their own. Financial business (e.g., the production and sale of goods) did not seem to figure prominently into Theodoros' life nor that of his peers. Admittedly, about one half of the whole deposit of some 150 rolls disclosed no identifiable contents, yielded only a few noteworthy words (**Single Words**), or could not be opened at all. However, it is unlikely that these would have produced a significant quantity of texts with a character different from what has already been mentioned.

Apart from taxation, there is not much in the papyri to connect Petra with the imperial or provincial administration or with persons known from other sources. Theodoros at least once received a short formal order or notice from a high magistrate, Flavius Marianos, most probably the governor of Palaestina Tertia (60). The Ghassanid leader Abu Karib ibn Jabala, who was allied with the Byzantines and received the title of phylarch, is mentioned as an arbitrator in the dispute between Theodoros and Stephanos.²⁰ Emperors and consuls appear in routine oaths and dating formulas.

The major earthquake in the region in 551 is not reflected in the archive. Of course, we would not expect it to be expressly mentioned in documents of this type, so the papyri do not exactly prove that the earthquake was

18. For the legal position of women in the later Roman empire, see Arjava, *Women*, esp. 230–66.

19. See 51 25 with comm.

20. For Abu Karib, see P. Petra IV, pp. 46 and 90, with further sources.

not felt in Petra. However, it has now been realized that there is, on the whole, no archaeological evidence for damage caused by it east of the Dead Sea.²¹ In any case, as far as the administration of their daily affairs was concerned, the lives of Theodoros and his fellow citizens seem to have continued into the late sixth century as they did before. The looming calamities of the Persian war in the early seventh century and the following incursions from the Arabian Peninsula lay still in the future.

A. ARJAVA

21. Fiema, *Methodology*, 11; idem, *The Jabal Harun Site*, 558. A very uncertain reference to an earthquake might be found in the ruined house in **39** 232–33, see comm. ad loc.