

The documentary texts in volume 48 of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* come primarily from the archive of Dorotheos and Papnouthis. These brothers served as *boethoi* in fourth-century Oxyrhynchos. Papnouthis also served as a *pronoetes* for a private estate. Although this archive provides considerable insight into the period's administrative and business practices, it has not received the attention it deserves. Roger Bagnall's short 1993 treatment describes the archive as evidence of the convergence between the public and private roles of Oxyrhynchite "large estates". But this over-categorizes the evidence, distorting it through the lens of the historiography of later centuries. I argue a two-part counter-thesis: (1) that the brothers' private work and public work should be seen as distinct, one area perhaps paving the ground or developing the qualifications for the other. This is not a proto-feudal blurring or convergence of categories, but a revolving door much like government and the private sector today. (2) The violence and corruption with which they were entangled suggests that their transition to the public sector was perhaps a poor career move, one that put them in situations for which they were socially unqualified.

The first argument shows that the work the brothers performed in the public sector had very little chronological or prosopographical overlap with their work for private landholders. Sarapammon, the landlord who employed both Dorotheos and Papnouthis, appears to have been in the tax-collecting business, but not in a private capacity, as Jean-Michel Carrié argued. The fact that the brothers collected other debts for him does not in turn award them a public role. Likewise, the brothers owed money to Maximos, the *μείζων* of Leukiou, in *P.Oxy.* 48.3417, but the editors' "natural supposition" that taxation is the context has no support in the text. *P.Oxy.* 48.3400 is a more difficult example, but one hardly iron-clad for Bagnall's case. Papnouthis's role as a tax collector here is again only a presumption, one unnecessary from the internal evidence of the text itself; the case that his *γεοῦχος* was a *praepositus* as well, and thus acting in a public capacity, has less philological backing to it than the editors believed.

The second argument focuses on the high degree of financial risk and administrative pressure facing the two brothers in their public activities. Late antique collection practices, similar to tax farming in many ways, involved considerable initial outlay by intermediaries who expected to recoup their expenses through later collection. The measures to which the brothers had recourse – assistance from a soldier, physical abuse of a payer, summoning komarchs to the city – suggest that the brothers were rather ill-suited for their duties, perhaps lacking more moderate social leverage in the areas under their jurisdiction. In *P.Oxy.* 48.3393, the brothers complain about a *politeuomenos* who took their money for the collection of "every sort of public dues," but then sent out collectors of his own. This apparent case of double-dipping by a superior highlights the difficulties facing the brothers as they failed to make an easy transition from private to public service.