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Who was the official behind the so-called ‘Archive of a Memphite official’

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A group of papyrus documents found in Saqqara in the mid 19th century was named the ‘Archive of a Memphite official’ due to the character of texts and to several mentions of Memphis and Memphite nome in them. The fragmentary nature and poor conservation state of the documents resulted in them being barely studied as an archive. In particular, scholars have not so far posed the question of what administrative office in Egypt under the Roman rule could be behind these documents. In the article, first time in scholarship, a hypothesis is made about this archive deriving from the bureau of a representative of the Roman *dioiketes* in Memphis.

Keywords: Memphis, Roman administration, Roman Egypt, ‘Archive of a Memphite official’, *dioiketes*.

A group of documents* from the 3rd century Memphis known as the ‘Archive of a Memphite official’ has been poorly studied in papyrology and scholarship of Roman Egypt¹. Although the texts are very fragmentary, I believe that several of them, and possibly the archive as a whole, can be interpreted as pertaining to communication between Alexandrian financial procurators and local officials in Memphis. In the 2nd–3rd centuries CE finances of Egypt being a Roman province were administered by several procuratorships of the highest rank: διοικητής (*dioiketes*) and ἴδιος λόγος (*idios logos*), which were partly rooted in the

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¹ Trismegistos archive 403. Fragments are presently distributed in three collections in Saint-Petersburg, Berlin

and Leipzig. On this archive see Chepel 2018: 57–58, 61; 2019. The documents are partly published in P. Berl. Bibl., P. Leipz., P. Ross. Georg. and described in P. Petersb.

Ptolemaic tradition; *usiacus*, the Roman *procurator patrimonii*; and ἀρχιερεύς (*archiereus*) who was put in charge of temples and priesthood. Since Alexandria is a region where papyrological material was hardly preserved, only partial reconstruction of the central level of the Roman financial administration is possible on basis of the surviving evidence about these officials and their departments². We know that procurators were assisted by ἐκλογισταί (*eklogistai*) who also resided in Alexandria and each of whom was appointed to deal with financial matters of one nome. We also know that communication between the centre and the *chora* required appointing lower officials who acted as messengers and at the same time represented the central Roman authorities. These were *beneficiarii*, *tabularii*, ἐπιστολαφόροι, ὑπερέται (*hyperetai*) and others³. One of their main functions, apart from delivering official correspondence, was transportation of fiscal reports to Alexandria. In some documents these officials are labelled as employees of a particular procuratorship: the *hyperetai* of the *idios logos* in P. Princ. 2. 22⁴, lines 4, 11 (246–249, Oxyrhynchus)⁵; the *beneficiarii* of the *idios logos* in P. Oxy. Hels. 11, line 7 (41/42) and BGU 2. 388, line 10 (2nd century, Alexandria)⁶; a *tabularius* of the *archiereus* in P. Achm. 8, lines 8–9 (197, Panopolis)⁷.

Usually these officials served as a link between procurators in Alexandria and the highest officials of the nome — στρατηγοί (*strategoí*) and βασιλικοί γραμματεῖς (*basilikoi grammateis*)⁸. However there is also evidence that in some cases communication and exchange of documents took place without mediation of the nome administration. One instance is P. Oxy. 17. 2116 (229): an official of the prefect's correspondence — ἐπιτηρητής ἡγεμονικῶν ἐπιστολῶν καὶ ἄλλων — confirms the receipt of six copies of a five-day report from the superintendents of the alum monopoly⁹. Two copies were intended for *dioikesis*, one — for the central archives (*tabularium*)¹⁰, one — for the *procurator ad Mercurium*¹¹, one — for his bureau, and one — for the οἰκονόμοι (*oikonomoi*) who in Roman times were associated with the department of *usiacus*¹². Another attested case of such direct communication is the commission of προχειρισθέντες / παραλήμπται who received from local tax-collectors registers of receipts for taxes and submitted them to the *eklogistai* of the nomes and to the department of the *idios logos* in Alexandria¹³.

² On *idios logos* see Swarney 1970; on *dioiketes* see Hagedorn 1985; on *usiacus* see Parassoglou 1978 and Beutler 2007; on *archiereus* see Parsons 1974 and Jördens 2014.

³ On administrative communication in Roman provinces see Strassi 1994; Jördens 1999; Thomas 1999; Nelis-Clément 2006; Haensch 2006.

⁴ All editions of papyri are abbreviated according to Oates et al.

⁵ For the διοίκησις (*dioikesis*) *hyperetai* are attested only for the 1st century CE in P. Oxy. 2. 259 (23) and P. Flor. 3. 312 (91, Hermoupolis Magna). See also Kupiszewski, Modrzejewski 1957–1958.

⁶ On *beneficiarii* as assistants of financial procurators in Egypt and other provinces see Nelis-Clément 2000: 243–246.

⁷ On *tabularii* see Kruse 2002: 733–735; Boulvert 1970: 420–428; Haensch 2006: 165–166.

⁸ See Kruse 2002: 824–843, 492–503.

⁹ On this official see Kruse 2002: 820.

¹⁰ On *tabularia* in Roman provinces see Haensch 2006: 162–163.

¹¹ On this official see Beutler-Kränzl 2007.

¹² See P. Hamb. 1. 8, line 2 (136, Theadelphia).

¹³ Kruse 2002: 821, n. 31 and P. Bub. 2, p. 18–22. This group of officials is attested for the second half of the 2nd century CE: P. Flor. 3. 358 (146, Arsinoite), P. Amh. 2. 69 (154, Arsinoite), P. Princ. 3. 127 (159/60, Arsinoite), P. Ryl. 2. 83 (138–161, Memphites); SB 12. 10883 (158, Soknopaiou Nesos), SB 6. 9322 (187, Bakchias), SB 12. 11149 (late 2nd — early 3rd centuries, Bakchias).

Moreover, there is also papyrological evidence that some of the employees of the financial procurators resided in the *chora*¹⁴. P. Fay. 23(a) (2nd century, Theadelphia) mentions a certain Philadelphos, a former secretary of the *idios logos* for some nomes: γραμματεὺς νομῶν τινῶν ἰδίου λόγου καὶ ἰσαγωγεὺς στρατηγοῦ Ἀμμωνιακῆς (lines 3–4). He also held several other positions in the Kabasite and Metelite nomes in the Delta, served as a clerk for the *strategos* of the Siwa oasis, and at the time of writing of this document he was *basilikos grammateus* of Libya. This description of Philadelphos’ career was probably organised chronologically, with the most recent position being the highest and the first one — probably, the least important. Nothing in his *curriculum vitae* reveals a connection with the bureau in Alexandria. It is, therefore, more plausible to interpret his first appointment as a secretary of the bureau of the *idios logos* located in the *chora*¹⁵.

Such a local bureau of the department of the procurator *usiacus* is mentioned in P. Amh. 2. 77 (139, Soknopaiou Nesos). The complainant was taken by force to λογιστήριον τοῦ ἐπιτρόπου τῶν οὐσιαῶν (lines 22–23) by one of its lower officials — μαχαιροφόρος οὐσιακῶν¹⁶. Apparently, the central financial department had its local branch in Arsinoite, with its own building and employees, separate from the bureau of the *strategos*. The chief of such a local branch could be βοηθός (*adiutor*) of the procurator *usiacus*. This office is attested not only in Egypt, but also in other Roman provinces¹⁷. From the 2nd century Egypt we know five βοηθοί: Epithumetos in P. Wisc. 1. 31 (149, Theadelphia), Aelius Heraclitus in P. Wisc. 1. 34 and 35 (144, Theadelphia), Kestos in BGU 4. 1047 (117–138, Arsinoite)¹⁸, Oulpios Thiasos in P. Prag. 2. 132 (122/123, Ptolemais Euergetis) and Aelius Eutuches in IGR I. 1325 (153, prov. unknown). The main function of these *adiutores* was to represent the procurator locally¹⁹. Another local non-liturgic official of the *usiacus* mentioned in papyri was ἐπιμελητὴς κυριακῶν (sc. οὐσιακῶν) κτημάτων (P. Oxf. 3; 142, Arsinoite) / ἐπιμελητὴς τινῶν οὐσιακῶν (BGU 9. 1895, lines 58–59; 157, Theadelphia)²⁰. In the former document ἐπιμελητὴς (*epimeletes*) Aelius Felix writes to the *basilikos grammateus*, after he (Felix) had inspected the estates of the *usiacus* and found some cut trees. Aelius orders the *basilikos grammateus* to conduct investigation and to report about the results so that he could forward this report to the procurator²¹.

¹⁴ This evidence challenges (or at least refine) what P. R. Swarney wrote about the *idios logos*: ‘The department’s own bureaucratic organization does not appear to have extended beyond the office in Alexandria in the second century any more than it did in the first. Many of the officials in the *chora* acted for the *idios logos*, but none of them exclusively. Several of πράκτορες (*praktōres*) handed in reports to couriers who transported information to the secretaries in the *idios logos*, but some of these were performing the same activity for other departments’ (Swarney 1970: 116).

¹⁵ Kruse 2002: 802–804. P. R. Swarney interprets Philadelphos’ post as one of the γραμματεῖς τοῦ νομοῦ/γράφοντες τὸν νομόν in Alexandria (Swarney 1970: 116–117).

¹⁶ See discussion in Mitthof 2007: 259–260, n. 21. On λογιστήριον as building see Kruse 2002: 799–800. P. Oxy. 1. 57 (195/6) mentions also a bureau of the department of the *dioikesis* — τὸ τῆς διοικήσεως λογιστήριον, but it seems that the central bureau in Alexandria is meant; see Kruse 2002: 322.

¹⁷ Haensch 2006: 164–165. On papyrological evidence see Parassoglou 1978: 90; Beutler 2007; Vidman 990.

¹⁸ On this papyrus see Kruse 2002: 1049–1050.

¹⁹ Mitthof 2007: 260.

²⁰ Parassoglou 1978: 90.

²¹ The editor E. Wegener suggests that this is the *idios logos*, not procurator *usiacus*, since the report concerned the trees, not the estates themselves, p. 18. See also Swarney 1970: 127–128.

As for the procuratorships of the *dioikesis*, there are three documents that might refer to local representatives or employees of this financial department. In P. Yale. 3. 137 (216/7, Philadelphia) a local resident and landowner Maximos is described as γραμματεὺς διοικήσεως (135). This office appears also in P. Oxy. 14. 1663 (2nd–3rd centuries, Tourbon; βοηθὸς Φιλοξένου καθολικοῦ γραμματέως διοικήσεως²²) and P. Oxy. 3. 642 (2nd century, Anoubion; son of Ioulios, γενόμενος γραμματεὺς διοικήσεως). The context does not allow for a conclusion about whether these employees were based in the *chora*, although this seems plausible. The ostraca receipts from the Upper Egypt attest the granaries of the *dioikesis* of the nome capital — διοικήσεως μητροπόλεως (O. Heid. 255, 5. 12 (191, Thebes) and O. Bodl. 2. 1000 (175–225, Thebes))²³.

Even though the evidence is insufficient to argue decisively for the existence of local offices and minor officials in the nomes, it seems reasonable that the large amount of fiscal transactions in money and kind as well as operations with public property in the *chora* required the assistance of local staff who would process taxes and documents for each department specifically. These local financial officials would cooperate with the nome administration, but at the same time be not fully dependent on them in the hierarchy which would contribute to strengthening the control of the central administration over the *chora*²⁴.

Two procuratorships are mentioned in texts of the ‘Archive of a Memphite official’. The *archiereus* is mentioned once (in a receipt (?) P. Berl. Bibl. 23, line 8), and *dioikesis* appears four times (P. Berl. Bibl. 23, line 7 (based on the photo, papyrus has διοικήσεως, not διοικήσεων as in *editio princeps*), semi-official letter P. Leipz. 2, line 6, land register P. Leipz. 18r, line 3²⁵ and in the fragment of proceedings P. Petersb. 11v, line 8)²⁶.

In P. Leipz. 2 the sender informs the addressee about some names that were not yet registered in the *dioikesis*: οὐπω τὰ ὀνόματα κατακεχ[ώ-]ρισται εἰς διοικήσεως (lines 5–6). The expression is probably a shortened version of εἰς τὸ τῆς διοικήσεως λογιστήριον, as it occurs in P. Oxy. 1. 57, lines 17–18 (195/6). There is no further context, and the rest of the letter contains private requests. However, usage of the special term καταχωρίζω — ‘to register’ — in combination with the name of the financial department does not leave any doubt that the two correspondents are officials. In papyri the term καταχωρισμός has meaning ‘submitting the registers of documents to the archive of the nome or to the central officials’²⁷. The latter implies sending documents to Alexandria, which was executed with the mediation of special messengers.

Another semi-private letter from the same archive — P. Ross. Georg. 5. 5 — seems to deal with the matter of sending documents too. In the text a messenger ἐπιστολαφόρος is mentioned (line 4) along with a new *beneficiarius* (ὁ καινὸς βενεφικάρτιος, line 7), an office that was also frequently involved in the communication between Roman administrators of Egypt. It is known from other papyri that Roman financial procurators, the *idios logos* and,

²² The *editio princeps* reads the abbreviation as διοικ() as διοικητοῦ.

²³ On the granary of the department of *dioikesis* as separate building see J. Shelton in P. Brookl., p. 90.

²⁴ See Haensch 2006: 166 on the control over the local institutions which was probably stronger in Egypt than

in other provinces since the cities were not administrative entities before Septimius Severus.

²⁵ For new readings see Chepel 2019.

²⁶ See Чепель 2020.

²⁷ See Kruse 2002: 82–83, 776–777, 801.

probably, *usiacus*, appointed *beneficarii*²⁸. One can assume that each procurator could have a number of *beneficarii* acting on behalf of his department in each nome and, therefore, P. Ross. Georg. 5. 5 could refer to one of them. Unfortunately, the text is too fragmentary and allows only for speculations.

Another document of the archive — P. Ross. Georg. 5. 56 — is a list of expenses of a bureau λογιστηρίον that includes writing materials, wages of assistants (βοηθοί, lines 7 and 9) and travel costs of some officials (lines 1 and 3). One of them, a νομοφύλαξ, was going to Alexandria. We do not know much about this official²⁹, but he appears also in P. Bub. 3 fr. 4, lines 10–11 that comes from a roll of correspondence of the *dioiketes* addressed to the *strategos* of the nome. Moreover, a private letter P. Princ. 3. 164 (2nd century, prov. unknown) mentions a νομοφύλαξ acting as a mediator in submitting official monthly reports: δὸς τῶ νομοφύλακι τὴν | διαγραφὴν εἰδῶς τὴν ἀν|νάγκην τοῦ μηνιαίου (lines 4–6)³⁰. Such reports are known to be submitted by σιτολόγοι (*sitologoi*) to the *strategos* as well as to the central financial administration — *eklogistai* and financial departments — through προχειρισθέντες³¹.

The bureau mentioned in P. Ross. Georg. 5. 56 is likely to be the office from which all the documents of the ‘Archive of a Memphite official’ derive. Unfortunately, from the fragments it is unclear whether it was the bureau of the *strategos* of the Memphite nome, or of the *basilikos grammateus*, or, perhaps, even of the secretary of a financial department (*dioikesis* would be the most likely one). In any case this Memphite bureau seems to have had a great deal of communication with the central financial administration, submitting reports and sending its employees to Alexandria as well as interacting with messengers and representatives of the Roman magistrates.

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²⁸ In P. Amh. 2. 77 the *beneficiarius* was informed about the violence against the complainant that took place in the local office of the *usiacus*.

²⁹ This official appears to be a village policeman in several papyri, see Oertel 1917: 276.

³⁰ On monthly reports see Kruse 2002: 330–331.

³¹ See P. Amh. 2. 69 and A. Paphthomas, introduction to P. Heid. 7. 398.

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Кому мог принадлежать «архив мемфисского чиновника»

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Группа папирусных документов была найдена в Саккаре в середине XIX в. и получила в папирологии название «архив мемфисского чиновника». Обрывочность и разрозненность этих текстов, а также их труднодоступность для научного сообщества привели к недостаточной их изученности как единого архива. В частности, исследователи до сих пор не задавались вопросом о том, с какой административной должностью в римской системе управления Египтом они могли быть связаны. В статье впервые высказывается предположение о происхождении этой группы документов из бюро представителя диоикета Египта в Мемфисе.

Ключевые слова: Мемфис, римская власть в Египте, архив мемфисского чиновника, диоикет.

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