



TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Herausgegeben von

Gerhard Dobesch, Hermann Harrauer
Peter Siewert und Ekkehard Weber

Band 6, 1991

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ROGER S. BAGNALL

The Taxes of Toka

SB XVI 12324 Reconsidered

H. C. Youtie published this text (P.Mich. inv. 439) with the description of “complaint about a sitologos” in *BASP* 16 (1979) 145–147¹. Its major point of interest is a list of tax rates, unfortunately broken off after the first few entries, which Youtie compared to P.Oxy. XVI 1905². This list was appended to the cover document, which was addressed to a person whose name (and title, if any) are lost after the article τῷ. Youtie’s commentary to this letter is brief, as are his notes to it, and I believe that he misunderstood the nature and part of the contents of the papyrus. Here is the text.³

1 τῷ [
2]αν [
3 ἐπιδὴ Παπνοῦθις ὁ σιτολόγος τῆς Τόκα
4 προφασίζει μὴ θέλων τὰ δημόσια πλη-
5 ρῶσαι καταξίωσον δηλῶσαι τὸ κατὰ τίτλον
6 διὰ τὸ μὴ θέλιν αὐτὸν τελεῖν ἐφ’ ἴσης
7 ἄλλων χιλίων τετρακοσίων ἀρουρῶν
8 τοῦ αὐτοῦ νομοῦ τυπωθέντον ἓνα καὶ ἕ-
9 καστον τίτλον ἐμ μέσῳ τῆς κόμης Κευόθεως
10 μεταξὺ τοῦ ἡμετέρου μου γεούχου καὶ τῶν
11 μιζόνων τῆς κόμης καὶ τῶν νομικαρίων
12 καὶ τῶν μιζόνων τῶν κτητόρων. οὕτως
13 τὸ καθ’ ἓν· ναύλου θαλαττίας (δηναρίων μυριάδες) κς· βουρδόνων
14 (δηναρίων μυριάδες) κε” περι[μπίλου 5–6] . [
15 λινῆς [

This he translated, “... Inasmuch as Papnouthis, the sitologos of Toka, makes excuses in his unwillingness to pay in full the public dues, deign to publish the tax schedule, since he is not willing to pay at equal rates on another thousand four hundred arouras in the same nome, each and every tax that was fixed within the village of Keuothis by the

¹ Reprinted in *Scriptiunculae Posteriores* I, Bonn 1981, 53–55.

² Among other texts of this period with tax schedules or extracts from them are SB V 7756, PSI VII 741, P.Fuad Univ. 30, P.Oxy. XLVIII 3424, and P.Laur. IV 172.

³ I am indebted to Traianos Gagos for having a photograph made for me, and I owe helpful comments on an earlier draft to Dominic Rathbone and Klaas A. Worp.

coöperative efforts of my landlord⁴, the notables of the village, the officials acting for the nome, and the more important of the landlords. Herewith the itemized list: transport charges on a seafreighter 260,000 denarii; on mules 250,000 den.; for the primipilus ...”

From the introduction: “The document is a petition. The name and title of the addressee are lost in the opening lines, but he is presumably the strategos (*exactor*) of the Oxyrhynchite nome. The petitioner is in all probability an estate agent, doubtless acting directly or indirectly for his γεοῦχος (cf. line 10). He here presents a complaint against a certain Papnouthis, who is identified as the sitologos of Toka. The petitioner’s concern, however, is not with Papnouthis in his official capacity, but with his refusal to pay certain taxes at the set rates. This accusation is based on the level of assessments established after a discussion by the headmen of the village of Keuothis, where Papnouthis possesses 1400 arouras, with certain nome officials delegated for this purpose and the more important of the landed proprietors ... The recipient of the petition is requested to give publicity, primarily doubtless for the enlightenment of the sitologos, to the tax schedule as it was fixed at the conference.”

There are serious difficulties with this understanding of the text. The most obvious is perhaps that *sitologoi* were villagers, and no villager can possibly have owned 1400 arouras, let alone in a village other than his primary residence, where he would be *sitologos*. Such a figure would exceed the largest metropolitan holding (spread across several *pagi*) in P.Herm. Landl. Papnouthis’ recalcitrance must in fact be connected to his official duties, and not to his private estate.

Secondly, “petition” is not an appropriate description of the text. It has none of the structure or normal supplicating vocabulary of a petition. Moreover, it concludes with an official tariff for posting. A petitioner to the *exactor* would not attach such a document. He might ask the *exactor* to send him a copy of it, but he would not be in the position of dictating it or even transmitting it to the *exactor*. Rather, this text is a letter written from one man to another, requesting the recipient to post publicly an attached schedule of rates (analogously to, if at a much lower level than, P.Cair. Isid. 1). The absence of the writer’s name at the beginning confirms this interpretation. In a petition, one puts the name of the recipient first, followed by his title, then one’s own name. Here, the name was preceded by some other element.

And yet this is clearly written from inferior to superior, even if the difference is not great. A clue is provided by καταξίωσον, which comes into use in the fourth century in private letters. Its context is virtually always from inferior to superior, though the social distance generally seems modest rather than vast⁵. A peasant would not use it to his landlord, but the writer’s need of the assistance of the recipient could be expressed in a way more deferential than καλῶς ποιήσεις. Some examples of the openings of these papyri will give the phrasing expected here:

⁴ Youtie cites one parallel for ἡμετέρου μου, which seems in fact to be a distinctively fourth-century usage. See also P.Panop. Beatty 1. 69, P.Abinn. 35 and 50, and P.Oxy. XIX 2235. It is certainly a colloquialism; there is no example in the TLG (CD-ROM C).

⁵ M. Naldini, *Il Cristianesimo in Egitto*, Florence 1968, 77, 14n. describes it as a “formula di urbanità comunemente usata nell’età bizantina, che attenua il tono volitivo dell’espressione”. That is true as far as it goes, but it fails to recognize the relative status of the writer and recipient.

P.Herm. 8 = Naldini 83 (4c): τῷ δεσπότη μου τιμω[τ]άτω καὶ εὐλαβε[σ]τάτω Ἰωάννη Η[. . .]βραάμ.

P.Abinn. 33 (middle 4c): τῷ δεσπότη μου Ἰβιννέφ Κλημάτιος.

P.Ant. II 92 (4/5c): ὑπομν[η]σ[τι]κὸν [ἐ]μοῦ Ἰωάννου πρὸς τὸν δεσπότη[ν] μου ἀδελφ[ὸ]ν Ἰανα[σ]τάσιον.

P.Ant. I 44 (4/5c): lacuna in line 1, followed by Ἐρμάμμωνι; writer's name in line 2; addressee referred to as τοῦ ἐμοῦ δεσπότη (13), δέσποτα (21). τῷ δεσπότη μου is certainly to be restored in line 1.

P.Neph. 19 (4c): τῷ κυρίῳ μου τιμωτάτω πατρὶ Παύλῳ τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ἀπὸ κόμης Νήσων. Line 4, δέσποτα πάτερ.

It seems clear enough that we must restore τῷ δεσπότη μου followed by a name⁶ in the dative in line 1, with the sender's name in line 2⁷. The epistolary character of the text is thus confirmed⁸. In the circumstances, we might expect the writer to have a weak command of Greek syntax. And, in fact, there are problems in the understanding of the Greek to which we must give some attention.

First, however, a look at the tax rates is of interest. The two figures surviving before the papyrus breaks off are that for *naulon thalassion*, at 26 myriads per aroura, and *bourdonon* at 25 myriads per aroura. For *naulon*, it is interesting to compare P.Oxy. XLVIII 3424, where a surtax (προσαίτησις) of 8 myriads 2 talents per aroura is imposed. In a brilliant analysis, Jean-Michel Carrié has shown that at the normal value of the solidus during the period 360–375, this *superindictio* equalled (thus doubling) the basic rate of a solidus per 243 arouras given as the rate in P.Oxy. XVI 1905⁹. Both of these texts, therefore, are probably to be dated in the same year, and that is probably 372¹⁰. The rate for *naulon* in P.Mich. inv. 439 is about 3.1 times these rates (260,000 vs. 83,000). When we compare *bourdonon* in the same manner, it is a lower ratio, 2.38, but roughly in the same range. Since, as Carrié has shown, rates remained relatively stable through the century, we must then suppose that we are dealing with a time when gold was priced somewhere between roughly 2.4 and 3.1 times what it was at the time of the earlier schedules. That point is reached, more or less, by the 380s, when gold is a little over 2,000,000 tal./lb. to judge from the various indications available¹¹. That yields a *terminus post quem*, but the course of gold in the following years is poorly known and it does not

⁶ Which can have been preceded by some other title, like πατρὶ, since the introductory phrase occupies only 12 letters of the roughly 30 letters per line; admittedly the opening letters are rather large and somewhat fewer may have occupied this line.

⁷ Such openings are extremely common in the numerous requests for assistance directed to Abinnaeus.

⁸ By itself τῷ δεσπότη μου does not guarantee much of a social gulf, as one can see from the tone of near-equality in P.Oxy. XLVIII 3420; the δεσπότης in question writes to this correspondent addressing him as κύριε in 3419.

⁹ "Observations sur la fiscalité du IV^e siècle pour servir à l'histoire monétaire", *L'inflazione nel IV secolo* (Rome, forthcoming). The value is equivalent to 968,164 tal./lb. of gold.

¹⁰ Carrié n. 28.

¹¹ R. S. Bagnall, *Currency and Inflation in Fourth Century Egypt*, Atlanta 1985, 46–47.

seem possible on this basis to set any *terminus ante quem*¹². Since *primipilon* generally runs around an eighth or a ninth of *bourdonon*¹³, it is a reasonable guess that the figure here was 3 myriads.

The difficulties of the Greek are several. The first is at the end of line 6, in the phrase ἐφ' ἴσης. Youtie commented, “= ἐπ' ἴσης: ‘equally,’ i. e., ‘in the same way, at the same rates, at the rates agreed upon’”. He thus took what followed, ἄλλων χιλίων τετρακοσίων ἀρουρῶν τοῦ αὐτοῦ νομοῦ, as dependent on τελεῖν. Now τελεῖν always occurs with a direct object or with a preposition governing what follows. One pays taxes, or rent, or interest; or one pays on behalf of land (or something else). I have not found a single instance of a genitive directly depending on the verb¹⁴. Equally peculiar, in fact, is ἐπ' ἴσης, which as far as I know occurs otherwise in the papyri only in P.Oxy. XXIV 2412. 57, where it precedes an amount in drachmas which is then added to a following figure for poll-tax to get a total paid. The editor there comments, “The expression here is obscure.” The expression is, however, common in Greek literature¹⁵, where it has essentially the same meaning as all of the prepositional uses with ἴσος, “on an equal basis” or “equally”. It seems worth considering making the following phrase depend on ἐφ' ἴσης rather than directly on τελεῖν, that is, to translate “because of his unwillingness to pay on the same basis as for another 1400 arouras.” The main objection to such an interpretation is that ἴσος takes the dative for a complement, and I have found no use of ἐφ' ἴσης in which it has a dependent genitive. Given a choice, however, such genitive-for-dative interchange is more acceptable, especially at this date, than a construction of τελεῖν directly with a genitive.

The next major difficulty is the construction of τυπωθέντων in line 8. Youtie, without comment, “corrected” it to τυπωθέντα and construed it with what followed, ἕνα καὶ ἕκαστον τίτλον, translating “each and every tax that was fixed.” This all must in turn be taken as in apposition to τὸ κατὰ τίτλον in line 5, after a long interruption. The placement of τυπωθέντων, however, if it is to be taken with what follows, is not attributive, as Youtie’s translation requires, and the absence of a definite article is acutely embarrassing. The necessity of assuming the long interruption of the construction, as well as the postulation of a gross case error, can be avoided by taking this as a genitive absolute, with only a trivial omega / omicron interchange: read τυπωθέντων, ἕνα καὶ ἕκαστον, τίτλων ἐμ μέσῳ κτλ.: “tax rates having been determined, each and every one, etc.”¹⁶.

The force of μεταξὺ still requires thought. Tax rates were set by the imperial administration, and proclaimed at the level of the nome and, presumably, the pagus by the

¹² Youtie described the hand as an ancestor of that in PSI XII 1265, which is now datable fairly securely to 426 (see P. Rainer Cent. 122 introd.) and dated it to the late fourth century. The hand seems to me characteristic of the last few decades of the 4th century and the very start of the 5th.

¹³ Cf. J. Gascou and K. A. Worp, ZPE 56 (1984) 122–126.

¹⁴ A survey of usage in the authors in the TLG suggests that this is not only a papyrological quirk.

¹⁵ There are over 450 instances in the TLG, with philosophical usage the largest contributor but a very wide range of users.

¹⁶ The idiom ἕνα ἕκαστον (καὶ here is original; there is not one instance in the TLG) is surprisingly scarce in the papyri. It is not registered in Preisigke, *WB*, and I can cite only P.Mert. II 98. 17 und SB XII 10884, the former of the sixth century, the latter from 200/1, neither with καὶ. It is found over 150 times in the TLG, however. I take it here to be used as if in the idiom καθ' ἕνα ἕκαστον (one of the commonest idioms in the

appropriate officials. It is difficult to envisage the situation in which a conference of one landlord, the village headmen, the *nomikarioi*¹⁷, and the larger landowners (presumably of the village) get together and simply decide what the rates are to be. And yet there is no doubt that the word typically is used with reference to agreements¹⁸. The probable answer emerges from P.Oxy. XLIX 3500, a marriage contract of the third century, in which a woman gives herself in marriage. They record (lines 9–12), ἐστάθη δὲ ἐν ἀλ[λ]ήλοις μετοξὺ [Αὐ]ρηλίων Διογᾶτος Διογέ[νου] καὶ Σαραπ[ί]ωνος Παυλείνου ἀμφ[οτέρ]ων συνομοφ[ύ]λων: “This mutual agreement was made in the presence of Aurelius Diogas son of Diogenes and Aurelius Sarapion son of Paulinus, both members of the same profession” (the profession in question being embalming). This usage derives essentially from the spatial sense of the word, but has something more than that here, a sense of being witnesses and perhaps even of assenting. We may thus suppose that the various parties here were present, or at least represented, at the public posting¹⁹ of the rates, in effect giving their assent to them.

Why does the writer describe the 1400 arouras as “of the same nome”²⁰? What nome? The most plausible response is that it is the same nome as Keuothis²¹. A clue may be found in the fact that Keuothis is referred to as being part of the Kynopolite Nome in the sixth century; as Pruneti says, the location of that nome, adjoining the Oxyrhynchite on the East²², “rende abbastanza verosimile l’ipotesi che possa trattarsi della κόμη altrove attestata come appartenente all’Ossirinchite”²³. If the nome referred to here is the Kynopolite, then, that nome’s links to the Oxyrhynchite were as close in the fourth century as

TLG). See LSJ s. v. εἶς 1 (f). The writer’s use of καθ’ ἐν in line 13 suggests that this is what he had in mind. But it is possible that it is meant as an accusative of respect. It is perhaps worth recording that ἕνα καθ’ ἕκαστον (for ἕνα καθ’ ἕκαστον) is definitely not a possible reading in line 8.

¹⁷ Youtie’s translation “the officials acting for the nome” far outreaches what is known of these officials, who were involved in rural tax-collection. They do not appear to have been of particularly elevated status. Cf. J. Gascou, *Les grands domaines, la cité et l’état en Egypte byzantine (Recherches d’histoire agraire, fiscale et administrative)*, Travaux et Mémoires 9 (1985) 58 n. 329, who describes the *nomikarios* (following Skeat) as “un agent public s’occupant des levées dans les zones rurales.” In P.Oxy. XLIV 3190, cited by Youtie, the *prytanis* orders the *komarchs* and *demosioi* of Pakerke to send up with a *nomophylax* a former *nomikarios* and his mother, because Isidora has petitioned against them. Village residence seems clearly implied, and with it modest standing.

¹⁸ See CPR V 15, 12n. The word also has spatial and chronological senses, as well as a use in decisions between parties in a suit.

¹⁹ τυπώω has a remarkable range of meanings, including ‘stamped’, ‘settled’, and the like. Noteworthy in the present context are Athanasius, *Expositiones in Psalmos* (PG 27. 429. 15), καθάπερ ἐν στήλῃ τυπωθεῖσα δέδοται τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις (sc. ἡ ἐπαγγελία), cf. John Chrysostom, *In Psalmos 101–107* (PG 55. 639. 37); Gregory of Nyssa, ἐπειδὴ τοῖνον τοῦτον ἡμᾶς ἀπαιτεῖτε τὸν λόγον, οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀπὸ στόματος ἀλλὰ γράμμασι τυπωθέντα.

²⁰ Accenting νόμου does not offer any obvious sense to the passage.

²¹ Rathbone suggests that the phrase implies that the writer is in a different nome from his (presumably Oxyrhynchite) addressee, but to me the reference implies (if anything) that both writer and addressee are in the Oxyrhynchite and that the note concerns another nome; a reference to the nome in which one is located as “the same nome” seems less likely.

²² The site of Kynopolis itself has been disputed; I incline to think it was on the East Bank as shown on the TAVO map (B V 21) by H. Heinen, at Sheikh Fadl. But the nome certainly included villages on the West Bank.

²³ P. Pruneti, *I centri abitati dell’Ossirinchite*, Florence 1981, 84 (Pap. Flor. 9).

later, when it seems practically a dependency²⁴. But why would the *sitologos* of Toka be involved with it? Toka, described as relatively unimportant by Daris²⁵, was in the middle toparchy of the Oxyrhynchite, near Peenno²⁶. Its only other fourth-century attestation is in the undated P.Princ. II 100. It never appears in the Apionic documents. Curiously enough, Peenno also vanishes from the documentation after the third century²⁷. In fact, a large part of the villages of the Middle Toparchy do a disappearing act at the beginning of the fourth century. No fewer than ten of twenty-five villages in this toparchy have no attestations after the introduction of the *pagi*, and the *pagus* number is known for very few²⁸. Since the Oxyrhynchite possesses an abundant documentation from the fourth through sixth centuries, this is a surprisingly high level of “mortality”²⁹. No such pattern is visible in the Hermopolite nome³⁰. It may be suggested that somewhere early in the century, perhaps precisely at the time of the creation of the *pagus* system, a chunk of the Oxyrhynchite’s Middle Toparchy, which adjoined the Kynopolite, was administratively transferred to it and remained a part of it for the remainder of Roman and Byzantine rule. Most of the missing places, in fact, can be linked together in a locational diagram, even though their exact location is unknown³¹.

I propose the following translation: “To my master NN, from NN. Since Papnouthis the *sitologos* of Toka is making excuses, being unwilling to pay the taxes, please be so good as to publish the detailed tax schedule, because of his unwillingness to pay on an equal basis with another 1400 *arouras* of the same nome, though the tax rates, each and every one, have been posted in the middle of the village of Keuothis in the presence of our landlord and of the village headmen and of the *nomikarioi* and of the larger land-owners.”

The situation, then, will be something like the following³². The writer is the agent of a *geouchos* at a local level, whether a *phrontistes* or similar appointee in charge of an

²⁴ That could be just a product of the structuring of the Apionic management system.

²⁵ S. Daris, *Stud. Pap.* 19 (1980) 116.

²⁶ Pruneti 205–206; *περὶ Πειεννῶ πλησίον ὄντος Τόκα κόμης*, P.Oxy. XLI 2997.

²⁷ See Pruneti 141.

²⁸ See the article of Daris cited above, n. 25, the list of Pruneti, p. 236, and that of J. Krüger, *Oxyrhynchos in der Kaiserzeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, 265–308. Excluding some doubtful cases, the following seem to vanish: Tholthis, Kerkeurosis, Mastiggophorou, Melanthiou, Nemera, Pakerke, Peenno, Petenouris, Senopothis, and Toka. Istrou, which in Daris and Pruneti had no late attestations, appears in P.Wash. Univ. 28 (6/7c), reminding us that some of these could yet occur in later texts. Melanthiou is uncertain; it does appear in P.Col. VIII 238, of the second half of the fourth century, but it is not certain that this is the same place (cf. p. 154 n. 76). The other toponyms in the papyrus point to the Upper Toparchy.

²⁹ Given the large volume of fourth-century Oxyrhynchite documentation, it cannot be attributed merely to their absence from Apionic holdings or responsibilities.

³⁰ M. Drew-Bear, *Le nome Hermopolite*, Missoula 1979, 351–373 (*Am. Stud. Pap.* 19).

³¹ See Krüger (above, n. 28) 52, diagram 5, in which Nemera, Senopothis, Melanthiou, Pakerke, Peenno, Toka, and Keuothis can all be found to the left of an imaginary line. Krüger’s diagram is constructed on the basis of links between villages found in various papyri. One could also add Pamis, not attested after 160 and linked to Nemera in SB VIII 10192, which is the only other village included in the diagram not mentioned earlier. Renate Müller-Wollermann (letter of 28 February 1991) remarks that a similar transfer of West Bank districts of the Oxyrhynchite to the Kynopolite is attested for Pharaonic times.

³² It should be obvious that this reconstruction is offered by way of hypothesis (in the Popperian sense in which that term is used by Peter Medawar, *Philo’s Republic* [Oxford and New York 1982] especially “Induction

estate, or an employee for the purposes of tax collection, as Papnouthis and Dorotheos in P.Oxy. XLVIII so regularly were. He writes to a higher-ranking employee of the same landlord, perhaps his *pronoetes* in Oxyrhynchos. The writer's responsibilities include areas once in the Oxyrhynchite but now in the Kynopolite, probably Keuothis, Toka, and other neighboring areas. In Keuothis, the tax rates have been published in the presence of all of the major players, but in Toka the *sitologos* is refusing to acknowledge them, perhaps claiming that their relevance was limited to Keuothis. (He has presumably rejected the rates outright, since posting them would not be a relevant solution if he had accepted them for some land.) The writer asks his correspondent to arrange for a similar publication in Toka, so that its land will come under the same schedule and the taxes will be collected in the right amounts. It is difficult to say why the *geouchos* and hence his subordinates have the type of responsibility they do, and without having more than a *terminus post quem* for the date, argument is probably vain. But it is possible that he has a direct tax-collection liturgy like that of *epimeletes*, or that he has a higher post like that of *praepositus pagi*. It is even conceivable that we have here the broadening responsibility of large landowners which marked the growth of the "large estates"³³.

The writer's Greek is also of some interest. It is not free from stylistic infelicity, but we have seen several instances in which he uses (not necessarily quite correctly) idioms rare in the documents but common in literature, and particularly the writers of the fourth century. He would hardly be described as highly educated, the kind of man likely to have read these writers. But Athanasius, at least, must have had a significant impact on the discourse of bishops throughout Egypt by way of his festal letters and other writings, and one is left wondering if our writer had heard these idioms – none of them specifically Christian in content – in sermons or other religious contexts.

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and Intuition in Scientific Thought", pp. 73–114), not with any claim of finality. As with most letters, the things left unstated prevent certainty about many aspects.

³³ For which see J. Gascou, *Les grands domaines* (above, n. 17) 1–90.