

IX. On Timber and Nile Shipping

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I

OGIS 674 = *IGRR* 1.1183, of 90 A.D., is a roster of tolls or fees to be collected on persons and goods moving between the town of Coptus on the Nile river and a Red Sea port.¹ This "Tariff of Coptus," as it is sometimes called, has elicited comparatively little comment in the fifty-five years since Dittenberger's annotated edition; and there has been no attempt, so far as I know, to explain why the list is made up of this particular farrago of items. Along with persons of various callings easily identifiable with the nautical life (captain, lookout, guard, sailor, shipwright's helper, artisan, prostitutes, other women) and conveyances (camel, donkey, wagon), there are listed two items of freight: a mast, and a yard-arm (lines 29-30).

This is a puzzling fact, which raises unanswerable questions. Why are only these two items listed? Were these really such common articles of freight on the Coptus road? And if so, then what about other elements of nautical gear? Are we to assume that they passed free of toll or fee? On these and similar questions the inscription is silent, leaving us to our rather fruitless speculations.

The editors of the inscription also felt that some explanation was called for at line 29. "Malus qui Copto ad litus maris Rubri portatur ut illic navi imponatur" is Dittenberger's footnote in *OGIS*, reprinted by the *IGRR* editors. Now supplies for ship

¹ To serve the needs of the caravans, the roads crossing the desert from Coptus to the Red Sea ports were provided with *hydreumata* at convenient intervals. The distance to Myus Hormus, 127 Roman miles, was usually covered in six or seven days (Strabo 17.1.45, C815). The trip to Berenice, 258 Roman miles, was made in twelve stages (Pliny, *NH* 6.26.102); although the distance was twice as great, Berenice was the preferred port in Ptolemaic and Roman times: cf. G. W. Murray, *JEA* 11 (1925) 138-47 (includes good map). J. G. C. Anderson, *CAH* 10 (1934) 246, follows Wilcken's view that the inscription records the dues collected for convoy service and protection provided on these desert roads. On Coptus as a center of Red Sea trade, cf. e.g. P. Jouguet, *Bull. de l'Inst. franç. d'arch. orientale* 31 (1930) 12-26.

repairs are needed in all seaports of any consequence, and this was, if anything, more than ordinarily true on the Red Sea, which was treacherous to ancient mariners.² But is it necessary, or even probable, to assume that the Romans' Red Sea ports received their supplies of nautical timber from the Nile valley?

Egypt, while not altogether devoid of trees, was (and is) notoriously poor in construction timber. To be sure, boats, mostly small ones but some of impressive size, have been built there of native woods—notably acacia—from Pharaonic times to the present.³ Herodotus (2.96) tells of such boats, and he mentions that the masts too were made of acacia. But the domestic supply of wood has throughout Egypt's history had to be supplemented from external sources. This was one of the reasons why the Ptolemies were so anxious to control Cyprus, with its abundant forests, and Lebanon, with its famous cedars.⁴ For the Red Sea region excellent shipbuilding timber was available from the East. For example, ships built on the Persian Gulf of teakwood, and remarkable for their longevity, were reported among the Greeks at least as early as the fourth century B.C.⁵ In Roman times beams of teak were among the woods exported from India to Persian Gulf ports,⁶ and, as one modern writer aptly puts it, "some must have reached the Roman Empire even if it went no farther than the eastern provinces."⁷ Thus while the Tariff of Coptus no doubt applied to traffic in both directions, the masts and yardarms referred to in the inscription were perhaps more apt to be imports moving from the Red Sea to the Nile valley rather than domestic products moving in the opposite direction.

II

The need for replacement masts in Nile shipping is vividly illustrated by the following document—unprecedented, I believe—which I publish here with the kind permission of the authorities of the Cornell University Library. The papyrus, which is nearly

² Cf. M. Rostovtzeff, *Soc. Econ. Hist. Hell. World* 388.

³ Cf. e.g. A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*² (London 1932) 388.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Rostovtzeff (above, note 2) 381, 385, 1168–70.

⁵ Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 5.4.7; Pliny, *NH* 16.80.221. Teak is still prized for shipbuilding.

⁶ *Periplus maris Erythraei* 36.

⁷ E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge 1928) 214.

complete, contains an acknowledgment of the receipt of a year's rental and the return, in sound condition, of a ship's mast. The first hand, which wrote the acknowledgment, is upright, skilled, and not without a certain elegance. The second hand, which wrote the signature, is slanted and angular. The use of ι for ε is frequent and is not separately noted in the apparatus.

P. Cornell Inv. No. I, 81

(Oxyrhynchus)

22 × 11.8 cm.

May 2, 299 A.D.

- [ἐπὶ ὑπάτων τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν Αὐτοκρατόρων Διο-]
 κλητιανοῦ τὸ ζ— καὶ Μαξιμιαν[οῦ τὸ σ— Σεβα[στ]ῶν.
 Αὐρηλία Ταπάμμων ...^{±8...}]ου μη(τρός) Ταπανσίριος
 ἀπὸ κώμης Μουχιντάλης κάτω το(παρχίας) [κα]ι ὁ ἀδελφιδέος Θεόδωρος
 μη(τρός) —]κωνος [Ῥωμαίου
 5 ἀμφοτέρου(?) δι' ἐμ[οῦ] Πανσίρι[ος Σ]αραπίωνος μη(τρός) Σοήριος
 ἀπὸ τῆς α]ντῆς [κώμης] Αὐρηλίου Ἱερακίωνι τῷ καὶ Διονυ-
 σίῳ δ]μ(οίως) πρ[ο]υτανε]ύσαντι βουλευτῇ τῆς λαμ(πρᾶς) καὶ
 λαμ(προτάτης)
 Ὁξυρυγ]χιτῶν πόλ[εω]ς χαίρειν. ὁμολογοῦμεν ἀπεσχη-
 κέναι πα]ρὰ σοῦ τὸν [φ]όρον οὐ εἶχες μου ἰστοῦ πλοίου
 10 διὰ το]ῦ χρόνου τῶν ἀπὸ ις— Φαρμουθι ἕως ιε— Φαρμου-
 θι τοῦ ἐν]εστώτος ιε (ἔτους) καὶ ιδ (ἔτους) καὶ ζ (ἔτους) πλήρη, τὸν
 δ' αὐτὸν ἰστόν
 παρει]ληφάναι παρὰ σοῦ ὑγιῇ, καὶ μηδὲν σοὶ ἐγκα-
 λεῖν μη]δὲ ἐγκαλέσιν περὶ μηδενὸς ἀπλῶς τὸ σύν-
 ολον.]κυρία ἢ ἀποχή, καὶ ἐπερωτηθεὶς ὁμολόγησα.
 15 ἔτους ι]ε[ς καὶ ιδ] τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν Διοκλητιανοῦ
 καὶ Μαξι]μιανοῦ Σεβαστῶν καὶ ζ] τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν
 Κων]σταντίου καὶ Μαξιμιαν[οῦ] τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων
 Κα]ισάρων, Παχῶν ζ—. (2nd hand) Αὐρήλιοι Θεόδωρος Ῥωμαίου καὶ
 Αὐρη]λία Ταπάμμων δι' ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς Πανσί-
 20 ριος ἀ]πέσχον τοὺς φόρους τοῦ ἰστοῦ ὃν καὶ παρι-
 λήφα]μεν ὑ<γ>ιῇ καὶ οὐδ' ἐγκαλῶ οὐδ' ἐγκαλέσω
 περὶ μ]ηδενὸς ἀπλῶς ὡς πρόκειται, καὶ ἐπερωτηθεὶς
 ὁμολόγ]ησα. Αὐρ(ήλιος) Σαραπάμμων ἔγραψα ὑ(πὲρ) αὐτῶν
 παρόν]των ἀγ[ρά]μματαον.

12 παρειληφέναι 12, 13 εγ'κα- Pap. 18 Αὐρήλιος 21 ὑη Pap.,
 ἐγκαλῶ, ἐγκαλέσω. 23 αὐτων: ω corr. from ο 24 ἀγραμμάτων.

Translation

Consulship of our lords Emperors Augusti Diocletianus, 7th time, and Maximianus, 6th time. Aurelia Tapammon daughter of ———us and Tapausiris from the village of Muchintale in the lower toparchy, and her nephew Theodorus son of Romaeus and ———con, both(?) acting through me, Pausirius son of Sarapion and Soëris from the same village, to Aurelius Hieracion also called Dionysius son of *ditto*, ex-prytanis, councilman of the illustrious and most illustrious city of Oxyrhynchus, greeting. We acknowledge having received from you in full the rent on my ship's mast which you had for the period from Pharmuthi 16th to Pharmuthi 15th of the current year 15 and 14 and 7, and having gotten the said mast back from you in sound condition, and neither make nor will make any claim about absolutely anything at all. The receipt is valid, and upon formal interrogation I have acknowledged it. Year 15 and 14 of our lords Diocletianus and Maximianus Augusti and 7 of our lords Constantius and Maximianus the most illustrious Caesars, Pachon 7th.

(2nd hand) Aurelius Theodorus son of Romaeus, and Aurelia Tapammon, acting through me, her husband Pausirius, have received the rents of the mast which we have also gotten back in sound condition, and I neither make nor will make a claim about anything at all as aforesaid, and upon formal interrogation I have acknowledged it. I, Aurelius Sarapammon, have written for them, in their presence, since they are illiterate.

Commentary

1. The restoration is assured by *P.Oxy.* 1204.

4. The name of the village restored here is the only one known which will fit the requirements of length, ending, and location in the lower toparchy, for which cf. *P.Oxy.* 1747.55, 2422.86.

Apparently the scribe, when he sat down to write the acknowledgment, did not have the name of the second acknowledging party and left blank space for the name at the end of line 4. When he came to write the name, however, he saw that the blank space would be quite inadequate. He therefore made the insertion in very small writing, carrying over what would not fit in line 4 into the interlinear space between lines 4 and 5.

8 ff. The acknowledgment begins here in the plural “we” but shifts in the next line to singular forms, which continue through line 23. For similar examples of such mechanical writing of formulaic language without regard to the instant situation, cf. e.g. *P.Cair.Isidor.* 95, 97, 98; *P.New York* Inv. No. xvi.1 (publ. in *Studi Calderini-Paribeni* 2 [Milan 1957], 321–23).

21. $\acute{\upsilon}\iota\eta$, with γ omitted, is an example of the palatalization of gamma common in popular speech since classical times: cf. E. Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit* 1.163–64, 167–68.

24. There is no escaping the reading $-\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\omicron\nu$ at the end. The explanation appears to be this: Sarapammon first wrote $-\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$, with something of a flourish to the final alpha; then observing that the genitive was called for, he added $\omicron\nu$ (for $\omega\nu$), but neglected to cancel the preceding alpha.