Private letter About Olives
By
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The Papyrus is mutilated at the upper side and has margins on the other sides. The handwriting is of medium size and semi-uncial to which a close parallel is Schubart, pal. 34 (Time of Hadrian). Due to the mutilation of the Papyrus neither the name of the addressee nor that of the addressee are known. The addressee wrote his letter while being in Babylon of the Heliopolite nome (L. 14 n.). Since the Papyrus was found with a collection from Theadelphia, the addressee was almost living there.

The letter is a kind of instructions to a subordinate, giving him directions to collect sweet-olive in order to be preserved in salt and greek-olive to be bruised. It is worth noticing that the addressee asks for unlimited amount of olives. The fact that he has boys working under him in Babylon and asks for other boys may indicate that he has an oil-press there. It is clear that he has also an olive-grove in Theadelphia (LL. 15-16).

The nature of the document does not reveal whether the business of the addressee was a private investment or has something to do with official character. He mentions that he needs sweet-olive for the current year (LL. 11-2), but there is no reference to administrative instructions or orders. It is highly probable that his needs are in accordance with the needs of the market, i.e., his customers (cf. P. Ryl. 128; P. Fay. 91; Johnson, Roman Egypt, P. 328). There is no clear trace of the Ptolemaic monopoly, which was almost vanished (cf. P. Ryl. 231; P. Brit. Mus. 893, both
A.D. 40). Private individuals, as it seems, were allowed to invest their money in oil-trade (cf. p. Oxy. 2783. 8n.)

The addressee of our document asks for collecting olives from Theadelphia to be sent to him in Babylon, so there were no restrictions on transporting olive crops from one nome to the other (cf. p. Hib. 49), nor a mention of payments to the administration in case of this transportation. He also does not mention custom dues which were paid in case of oil (cf. p. Fouad XXXIV. A.D. 42, and introduction).

One may deduct from the eagerness of the addressee to collect any amount of olives from Theadelphia to be sent to him in Babylon, where he might have had an oil-factory, that Theadelphia was rich of olive-groves or had a flourished market of olives. We do not know whether he was the owner of both the olive-grove and the oil-press or was a lessee of them (cf. p. Oxy. 3639, introd.; P. phileadelphia 12; Johnson, Roman Egypt, P. 366sqq.; Yale classical Studies XXVIII, 1985, P. 95sqq.; ZPE,50, 1983, P. 81sqq.). But it is highly probable that he undertook to supply Babylon or Theadelphia or both with oil, the quality of which he asks for may show that he had something to do with the duty of providing fine-oil, which was a form of liturgy both in Oxyrhynchus and Arsinoe (cf. P. Oxy.1445; P. Hib.49; Jonson; Roman Egypt, P. 328, 359).

The Ἐλαιούργοι were exempted from liturgy (cf. P. Philadelphia 1.31. A.D. 103-24; Taubenschlag, haw, P. 668 Sq.). This was due to interest of the Roman administration in the oil, which
was requisitioned for the army temples and certain cities such as Alexandria. The Ptolemaic monopoly of oil seems to have taken a different development in the Roman period (Taubenschlag, op.cit.). For various reasons, the Roman administration continued to supervise the prices of oil (cf. p. Oxy. 3628) both in local market as well as of oil for export and import (cf. παραγωγή ἐλαίας Preissigke, WB. absch. 11).

Since oil was a complete monopoly in the Ptolemaic period the ἐξειληφώς τὴν διάθεσιν καὶ τὸ τέλος τοῦ ἐλαίου (Wilcken, Archiv F. Pap. V, 222, Taubenschlag, P. 668) was instituted. But the Roman Administration cared only for the revenues from the olives and oil and left its industry to private individuals who had to get the license from the administration and to pay their dues. Therefore, the Roman administration instituted the epiteretai to supervise the concessions both of olive-groves and of oil-factories and to collect the dues (cf. P. Anh. 92. A.D 192), they were ἐπιτηρηταὶ ἐλαίης καὶ ἄλλων προσοδών (P. Tebt. 539. A.D. 151).

In P. Cairo Mus. S.R. 3049/37. A.D. 144 (ZPE 50, 1983, P. 82 ed. by S. Omar) 11.25: τοῦ φόρου ὀραχυόν χωρίς πειστοῦ ἐξ ταῖς διὰ τοῦ ἀναφορίου σοι προθεσμίας ἀκολούθωσεν ἀναφορίον in this proposal for a rent of ἐλαίην παραδέδον was a kind of report or a bid made to the strategus (cf. Johnson, Roman Egypt, P. 326). So, there was some form of official
control on this sort of contracts. In another proposal for a
rent of ἑλαίων παράδειγμα (PSI inv. Cap. 371; A.D. 141
YOS, XXXIII, 1985, P. 95 sqq ed. by Manfredi), the lessee is
to pay the φόρος in money (L. 9) and the ἐξαίρετον
in kind (L. 10 sq.). Such ἐκφορία (L. 16 sq.) which denote
payments in kind, the lessee will pay μέτρῳ ὑπομορφῷ τῆς κάμης
adds that he will pay the ἐξαίρετον which are considered
as extra payment (see YCS,XXVIII? P. 97), both according to
the measure of the granary of the village and ἀνυπόλογον
καὶ ἀκίνδυνον (P. Philadelphia 12.19).

On one hand, we can not exclude the probability of some
kind of monopoly on olives and oil in the Roman epoch,
especially where the φόρος is mentioned. We notice that
in the contracts of rent of olive-groves the φόρος is
always mentioned. On the other hand, it is interesting to
find that wherever the ἀναφορά is mentioned in the
contracts of rent of Olive-groves: τὰ πολλὰ τοῦ ἀναφοράς ὑπὲρ προ-
θεσμίας ἀκολούθως (P. Cai. Mon. S.R. 3049/37; ZPE,50, 1985;
P. 82), no other stipulations are mentioned. Wherever there
is no mention of ἀναφορά either the measure of the
granary of the village or the ἀνυπόλογος καὶ ἀκίνδυνος,
or both are mentioned (PSI. inv. Cap. 371, YCS,XXVIII; P.
95 sqq.; P. Philadelphia 12; Taubenschlag, haw, P. 357 sqq.)
This may be an evidence of official control in a way or an-
other on the crops of the olive-groves for the sake of oil.
It should be noticed also that the ἀναφορά was mentioned
in the case of φόρος in money (ZPE, 50, P. 82); while the measure of the village granary and the stipulation ἀνυπόλογο καὶ ἀκινδύνος are mentioned in the case of the έκφορτον (YCS, XXVIII; P. Philadelphia 12). This έκφορτον was considered as ἐξαιρέτου i.e. extra payment. What was the nature of this extra payment is uncertain. One may ask whether this extra payment is kind or the rent in money was to cover the requirements of the government.

The monopoly was developed in some kind of liturgy in various places when there was a need for that. In a lease of oil press from Socnopaeou Nesos (SPP.XXII. 177), the lessee pays the diploma of the priests on condition that he is exempt from the sales tax. Only he had his agent have the right to sell oil in the village where mill is located. It is expected that the lessee of an oil mill, who presented a petition to the strategus of the Arsinoite nome, was also a rental retail (W.Chr. 176. A.D.64). Marcus Antistius Capitolinus applied to the nomarch of Arsinoite nome to be conceded the right to retail all the oil in one factory at the village of Hieraclea in the division of Themistes. Capitolinus is to pay to the account of the tax on sales on behalf of the whole year and the government charges on other accounts falling upon him. Capitolinus admits that the right resting with the nomarch to make fresh lease with other persons whenever the nomarch chooses (P.Amh. 92=W. Chr. 311.A.D. 162-3). P. Amh. 92 shows, in fact, the practical attitude of the Roman administration towards the exploitation of the materials which were under the Ptolemaic monopoly. Private individuals were able to get the licence to press oil and sell it but they had to pay to the government and to work under control. In
certain circumstances the government resorted to liturgy, a practice which was gradually increased since the second century A.D. In an address by Aurelius Theodorus, seller of fine oil, he undertakes by oath to the strategus of Oxyrhynchus that he will provide daily in factory which he possesses in the market place fine oil for sale and service of the city (P. Oxy. 1455. A.D. 275). Farmers of the monopoly, at any rate, are met at work in Oxyrhynchus in the 3rd - 4th century A.D. (P. XV Congr. 20 Bruxelles, 1979, n.1.1., ed. by A.H.S.El-Mosallamy). This is attested by the fact that Nepheros received the quota of olive oil of the present month:

Νεφέος ὁ δήμος ἀπέσχε τὸν ἐλαιόν τοῦ ἔνεντος 

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5 τοῦτος τῷ ἐν 13 Letters νομίζω

[Image 0x0 to 599x841]
ἐξοντα ἀυτὸν μοι ἐπισκοποῦμαι

καὶ παιδία μου ἀποστέλλεις μοι μέτρη

ητού [νε] ἀς ἐλλευκηθεὶς ἐλέας εἶνα θλάσσω

μο[...]υςαν ἢθυρ α γίνω ἀυτόν

Ἀποστέλλεις ἐπεὶ, χρήζω παιδίον ἵνα ἐπεὶ ἐλαίας γενοῦ

"......to buy them. Send Promus there at least for their sake.

Please, do care by yourself for all your work. You do also good
if you fetch sweet olive and preserve it in salt for me since I need
sweet olive in the current year. Please, if you can fetch for me a
boy in order to come into Babylon since I send Apophorus beside you
for the sake of the olive-grove. Do not neglect to search in order
to find even one for me and to send Promus accompanying him to me.
I am supervising my boys. Send me a measure of new greek olive
in order to bruise it ......1st of Hathyr, let this be done".
1-3. is a separate piece by the same hand.

10. ἡ τί: the letters are clear. ὥστε: "surely may be intended. Otherwise, ἡ τί "which ever". At any rate, no grammatical parallel is available, but cf. F.T. Gignac, XII Intern. Congr. Pap. P. 142.

ταριχὲ σου: This is, as far as I am aware, the second example of the Papyri about pickling olives (cf. R.Ryl. 231.

5.1st cent. A.D.): καὶ τὴν ἐλάντιαν, οἰκίαν ἐν ταριχέασ (and P. Brit. Mus. 893, A.D. 40): ἐπεὶ ὄρυγὼ. Although P.Ryl. 231 does not show trace of monopoly, we know that the right of pickling meat and selling it in Theadelphia required an application to the epiteretai. The concession is to last one year (see G.M. Browne, XII Intrn. Congr. of Pap., P. 64 sqq.). In PSI. 692 the grant of the right to sell and pickle was from the ὄρχολοῡ[μεσος τὴν παντο]πολίκην καὶ ταριχεῖραν [καὶ ἅλλας ὀνόματα (cf. XII Intrn. Congr.Pap., P. 66). The addressee of our document was selling and pickling olives and, besides, had an agent who might be a sublessee. Consequently, he is expected to have official permission. 10-11. γλυκελέαν: It is not certain whether this meant a standard or kind of olive. This word is infrequent in the Papyri (P.Oxf. 18.2; P Ryl. 231.5) SB. 5747.8. Cf. H. I. Bell, Jews and Christians in Egypt, no. 15). Standard of olive could be perceived from ἐλαιῶν ἐκλεκτῆς μελαίνης (P. Philadelphia 12); τὰς ἐλαίας τὰς καλὰς (P. Hib.49.12); ἐλαίου λευκοῦ (Zen. Caire 59013. 12).
13. πατόν : either πατόν or proper name Πατόν
which is not attested in the Papyri, cf. Πατόν (SB.6543).

14. Βαβυλών του Ἡλιοπόλειτου νομοῦ (P. Hamb. 2.3): may the origin of the document.

15. λυκοφόρου : this proper name is not attested in the Papyri.

18. ἦρμος : cf. SB. 1016.8.1st cent. A.D. But also ἦρμος
(O. Tait. 1762. Roman epoch).

20-21. μέτρητου [ἐν] ἐλλενικὴς ἐλέας : There is some peculiarity about the measure. In an application to lease an olive yard the sent amounts to 15 metretae: ἐλαιοῦ μετρηθησαν ἐκατογενετε (P. ryl. ii. 97. A.D. 139 P. XV. Congr. 20.8). But in a lease of vine and Palm grove, the lessee pays καὶ ἐλαιῶν ἐκλεκτὴς μελαινῆς ἀρταβᾶς ἧμισυ μέτρῳ τῷ αὐτῷ
(P. Philadelphia 12.15-17). Another Person pays for the custom house ἐλέας ἀρταβᾶς τρις (Pap. de Cen. 112. 4.2nd 3rd cent A.D.). One expects that μέτρητου is used to measure oil and ἀρταβᾶς is used for olive. In SB. 5747.8: (κεραίου) γλυκυκελαίῳ where both γλυκελαίου and γλυκελαίῳ are suggested. About the usage of ἐλαίων ἀρταβᾶς
(cf. Pap. de Gen. 112. 4n. 2nd 3rd cent. A.D.)

21. ἐλλενικὴ ἐλέας τῆς αἰαί : There is a Variety of the kinds of olive in Egypt. It seems that Egypt imported olives from various countries. So ἐλαιῶν ἐλλενικῶν πεταλιᾶς
Zen. Cairo 59544. 2.3rd cent. B.C. ἦ γὰρ ἐλαία ἦ Ἀφρικανή
P. Bad. 42.12. 2nd cent. A.D.). But there are ἐλαίου Ἀιγ(υπτίου)
(P. Tebt. 887.4. 2nd cent. B.C.); ἐλαίου ὡς ἀργυρίων········
(P. Tebt. 932.4. 2nd cent. B.C.) and ἐλέας Ἑνόησιας
(P. Ross. 11.8. 145. 2nd cent. A.D.; see Johnson, Roman Egypt
P. 352 f.).

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