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MEMORANDUM OF RECEIPT OF GRAIN BY A MESITES


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MEMORANDUM OF RECEIPT OF GRAIN BY A MESITES

P. Col. inv. 76a 14.5cm × 6.5cm Sept.–Oct. 192 CE

Tebtunis

This small papyrus, purchased for Columbia by H. I. Bell through M. Nahman in 1923, has fifteen lines of Greek text written with the fibers in a fast cursive hand. The top, left, and (just barely) right margins are visible; the bottom margin has been lost. There are two lengthwise folds, 1.5cm and 3cm from the right edge, and a diagonal fold from the bottom-left corner. The verso is blank.

The document notes that Demetrios, who has the title mesites, received grain from the public granary at Tebtunis. Demetrios does not address the document to the sitologoi, either by greeting them (cf., for example, the receipts of sitologoi in CPR VI 5.20–21) or by referring to them in the second person, nor does he name them. The document cannot therefore be a ‘receipt’ written out by Demetrios for the sitologoi; it is probably a copy (cf. line 1) of such a receipt, made by Demetrios or his assistant.

In later papyri (e.g. SPP III 580 and 581, CPR VI 9) μεσίτης was the title of a distinct office, the full title of which was μεσίται δημοσίων (or πολιτικῶν) ὄρριον, “liaison-officers of the public storehouses.” Preisigke in Wörterbuch II qualifies this meaning with “byz. Zeit,” and the editor of CPR VI 9 also says that these μεσίται are “nur aus byzantinischer und islamischer Zeit bekannt.” These μεσίται were “middle-men” between the private individuals and the public granaries: during the harvest, they took the grain-tax from the taxpayers to the granaries, and subsequently they distributed loans of grain to the taxpayers to be repaid with interest at the next year’s harvest. The editor of P.Bingen 109, from the first half of the third century CE, saw in the document’s mention of μεσίταις θησαυρού (line 82) a predecessor to these “Byzantine” liaison-officers, and P.Col. inv. 76a—the earliest mention of the office—confirms that impression: by 192 CE, there were officials called μεσίται in the Arsinoite nome who operated between private individuals and the public granaries.

A blank space of 2.5cm separates the receipt from the date, which is written in the same hand. After line 14, there was probably one more line indicating the month and day.

1

1 I owe many thanks to Rodney Ast, in whose seminar and with whose assistance this contribution was produced.
Memorandum of Receipt of Grain by a mesites

I, Demetrios the mesites, through my assistant Theogiton, received [l. 5] from the sitologoi of the village of Tebtunis from the produce of the 32nd year through Nilion fifteen artabai of wheat, total 15 artabai of wheat, [l. 10] of which from the cleruchs 12 ¼ artabai of wheat, from the requisitioned grain 2 ¾ artabai of wheat.

In the 33rd year of Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus [l. 15] Caesar the Lord [month, day].

1. ái(ντίγραφον): The document is probably a copy of a receipt that Demetrios or his assistant had written for the sitologoi (see introduction).

2. μεσίτης: In the Roman period this word commonly designates an “arbiter” (corresponding to Ptolemaic κοινοὶ ἄνδρες) in the context of private arbitration (cf. J. Modrzejewski, “Private Arbitration in the Law of Greco-Roman Egypt”, JJP 6 (1952) 239–256); P.NYU II 11 (3rd c. CE) and P.Sijp. 12f (222–235 CE), among others, have the word in this sense. This document, however, refers to an official connected with the public granaries (see introduction). The title of μεσίτης also tells us that the wheat received by Demetrios was not for consignment to Alexandria (the κατογογή σίτου), but for redistribution to individuals. This redistribution was usually done at the beginning of a year, after the previous year’s produce had been measured and taxed. Thus we can likely narrow the date down to the first few months of Commodus’ 33rd regnal year, i.e. September or October of 192 CE.

3. Θεογίτων: A relatively common name, though we know of none in Tebtunis at this time. The spellings Θεογίτων and Νόλων (line 7) are itacizing. Theogiton was presumably an assistant to the μεσίτης.

4. στολ. (όγων): Officials in charge of the public granaries (δημόσιου θησαυροί); they accounted for deposits and withdrawals, organized and received the grain-tax as well as repayments of loaned grain (both of which tasks involved...
other officials, the ἱεράκων, oversaw the distribution of seed-corn and cereal-grain, and supervised the consignment of grain to Alexandria for export (cf. Z. Aly, “Sitologia in Roman Egypt”, JJP 4 (1950) 289–307, and Aly in Akten des VIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie (1955) 17–22). It was liturgic in the second century (N. Lewis, The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt, 2nd ed., Florence: 1997, p. 45). The στολόγος were responsible to the στρατηγὸς of the nome, to whom they were supposed to give detailed monthly reports. A record of Demetrius’ withdrawal would have been made in the accounts of the granary in Tebtunis. Only here in this papyrus is an abbreviation indicated by a raised letter (cp. γενήμετος, 6, κληροῦμα 10, συναγοραστικοῦ 11). κάμηλα is abbreviated κκ, as often.

6 [Τε]βτεύνεις: the location of one of the major granaries (θησαυροῖς). A different sign for ἔτους is used here (ι) from the one in line 12 (Λ.

7 νιλιανος: See n. Nilion was presumably an assistant to the στολόγος. We know that the στολόγοι had assistants from, e.g., P.Grenf. II 63.9 (with correction of BL I 189) and SB 10293.4-5.

8 [π]ροοῖ: must be read, but the rho is very cursive (as seen also in συναγοραστικοῦ of line 11 and κυρίου of line 16).

9 The sign for πυρὸς ἀρτόβας is the cross with a curved stroke to the left at the top; in this line it is preceded by a downward stroke (the sign for γίγνοται, “total”) and followed by another downward stroke (the numeral 1), and in the following line it is joined at the top to the lambda of κκ, and again followed by the numeral 1. Fifteen artabai of wheat approximately equalled six hundred liters.

10 κλ(προοῖς): The writer of the memorandum has distinguished the stores from which the fifteen total artabai of wheat have been taken. Since most of the land in the Arsinoite nome was cleruchic, the tax in kind on cleruchs constituted the largest store at the public granaries.

11 συναγοραστικοῦ: πυρὸς συναγοραστικοῦ (frumentum emptum) was the designation for “requisitioned” wheat that had been sold by private individuals to the public granaries under compulsion; the στολόγοι recorded it separately from the grain-tax. The examples of requisitioned grain are concentrated in the latter part of the second century (cf. p. 22 of S. L. Wallace, Taxation in Egypt, vol. 2, Princeton: 1938, and D. Hagedorn in ZPE 13 (1974) 141–2 for πυρὸς συναγοραστικόν).

14 Κομμόδον: Commodus was killed on 31 December 192, i.e. Tybi 5 of his 33rd regnal year. His death was not announced to the στρατηγὸς of the Arsinoite nome until March of 193 (as known from BGU VI 646 = W.Chr. 490; cf. p. 145 of P. Parsons, “Ulpius Serenianus,” CE 49 (1974) 139–157; also pp. 11–12 of Greek Medical Papyri I, ed. I. Ardolini, 2001). The titulature (Δούκιον Αἰλίου Αἰσχύλου Κομμόδον τοῦ κυρίου) reflects the addition of Lucius Aelius and the removal of Antoninus in Commodus’ 32nd regnal year, and is standard for his 32nd and 33rd years. Examples include BGU I 270.1–3, BGU II 651.12–13, BGU XIII 2289.1–3, O.Edfou III 460.2–3, O.Heid. 320.5–7, O.Wilck. 1464.3–4, P.Gen. II 110.1–2, P.Lond. III 1216.1–2, P.Mich. XV 756.1–2 (recto and verso), P.Oxy. XXII 2340.1–2 (recto), P.Strab. IV 189.1–2, P.Strab. V 373.1–2, P.Tebt. II 353.1–2, SB XII 11010.1–3, SB XVI 12683.1–2, Stud.Pal. XX 16.5–6, Stud.Pal. XXII 132.1–2, and P.Yale inv. 606 in Aegyptus 84 (2004) 167ff. It is likely that a single line, containing the month and the day, has been lost.

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