

ANDREW OLLETT

MEMORANDUM OF RECEIPT OF GRAIN BY A *MESITES*

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MEMORANDUM OF RECEIPT OF GRAIN BY A *MESITES*¹

P. Col. inv. 76a
Tebtunis

14.5cm × 6.5cm

Sept.–Oct. 192 CE

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.

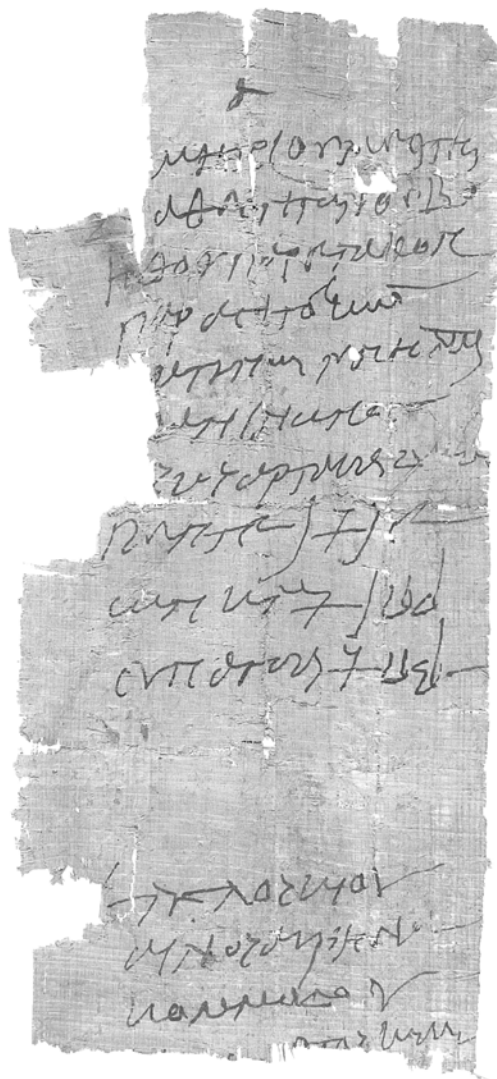
The document notes that Demetrios, who has the title *mesites*, received grain from the public granary at Tebtunis. Demetrios does not address the document to the *sitologoi*, either by greeting them (cf., for example, the receipts of *sitologoi* in CPR VI 5.20–21) or by referring to them in the second 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 III² 580 and 581, CPR VI 9) μεσίτης was the title of a distinct office, the full title of which was μεσίται δημοσίων (or πολιτικῶν) ὄρριων, “liaison-officers of the public store-houses.” 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 μεσεΐταις θησα[υροῦ] (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 ἄ(ντίγραφον)
[Δη]μήτριος μεσίτης
δ[ι]ὰ Θεογίτωνος βο-
ηθοῦ παρέλαβον
5 παρὰ σιτολ(όγων) κώ(μης)
[Τε]βτύν<ε>ως γενή(ματος) λ̄β̄)
[δ]ιὰ Νιλίωνος
[π]υροῦ ἀρτάβας δεκα-
πέντε, (γίνονται) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβαι) ιε
10 ὦν κλ(ηρούχων) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβαι) ιβ d
συναγορασ(τικοῦ) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβαι) β ψ —.
- Λ λγ̄ Λουκίου
Αιλίου Αύρηλίου
Κομμόδου
15 Κ[αί]σ[αρο]ς τοῦ κυρίου

¹ I owe many thanks to Rodney Ast, in whose seminar and with whose assistance this contribution was produced.



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 $\frac{1}{4}$ *artabai* of wheat, from the requisitioned grain 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ *artabai* of wheat.

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

- 1 ἀ(ντί)γραφον): 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 καταγωγή 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 Θεογίτωνος: A relatively common name, though we know of none in Tebtunis at this time. The spellings Θεογίτων and Νιλίων (line 7) are itacizing. Theogiton was presumably an assistant to the μεσίτης.
- 5 σιτολόγων): Officials in charge of the public granaries (δημόσιοι 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 *πράκτορες σιτικῶν*), 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 *σιτολόγοι* were responsible to the *στρατηγός* of the nome, to whom they were supposed to give detailed monthly reports. A record of Demetrios’ 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. *γενή(ματος)* 6, *κλ(ηρούχων)* 10, *συναγορασ(τικοῦ)* 11). *κώ(μης)* is abbreviated *κω*, as often.
- 6 [Te]βτύν<ε>ως: the location of one of the major granaries (θησαυροί). A different sign for ἔτους is used here (ι) from the one in line 12 (L).
- 7 Νιλίωνος: See 3n. Nilion was presumably an assistant to the *σιτολόγοι*. We know that the *σιτολόγοι* had assistants from, e.g., P.Grenf. II 63.9 (with correction of BL I 189) and SB 10293.4–5.
- 8 [π]υροῦ must be read, but the rho is very cursive (as seen also in *συναγορασ(τικοῦ)* of line 11 and *κυρίου* of line 16).
- 9 The sign for *πυροῦ ἀρτάβας* 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 *γίνονται*, “total”) and followed by another downward stroke (the numeral ι), and in the following line it is joined at the top to the lambda of *κλ*, and again followed by the numeral ι. Fifteen artabai of wheat approximately equalled six hundred liters.
- 10 *κλ(ηρούχων)*: 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 *συναγορασ(τικοῦ)*: *πυρὸς συναγορασ(τικὸς)* (*frumentum emptum*) was the designation for “requisitioned” wheat that had been sold by private individuals to the public granaries under compulsion; the *σιτολόγοι* 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 συναγορασ(τικὸς)*).
- ϖ: This fraction sign for $\frac{3}{4}$, though resembling an inverted *beta*, developed by combining vertically the sign for $\frac{1}{2}$ (λ) with the sign for $\frac{1}{4}$ encountered on the previous line (d). Why the grain was measured out from the taxed and requisitioned stores in a ratio of 49 to 11 is not quite clear: it is unlikely that such a high proportion of requisitioned grain reflects the relative proportions collected from the previous year’s harvest.
- 14 Κομμόδου: Commodus was killed on 31 December 192, i.e. Tybi 5 of his 33rd regnal year. His death was not announced to the *στρατηγός* of the Arsinoite nome until March of 193 (as known from BGU VI 646 = W.Chr. 490; cf. p. 145 of P. Parsons, “Ulpius Sernianus,” CE 49 (1974) 139–157; also pp. 11–12 of *Greek Medical Papyri* I, ed. I. Ardolini, 2001). The titulare (Λουκίου Αἰλίου Αὐρηλίου Κομμόδου Καίσαρος 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.Strasb. IV 189.1–2, P.Strasb. 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.

Andrew Ollett
Columbia University
aso2101@columbia.edu