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EXTRAIT

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The Date of *P. Kell. I G. 62* and the Meaning of χωρίον

This wooden board, found in House 3, contains a list of payments made by an individual ὑπὲρ φόρου χωρίου Πανέους. These are tabulated by the editor in his commentary, showing the earliest in Choiak and the last on Tybi 20 of the next year, that is, over a span of about 13 months. The total amount is 960 drachmas. The heading of the account indicates that the payments are made for a 5th year (only the S-shaped symbol is used, with no word for year).

In a lengthy note to line 1, the editor discusses the possible dates. He canvasses the possibility that the S-shaped symbol stands for Ἐτος, in which case it should refer to a year before the accession of Diocletian, after which multiple regnal years are the norm; or that it stands for Ἰησοῦιον, in which case only 316/7 can come into question. In the commentary, however, he had concluded that "it may be assumed that this wooden board should probably be dated to the first decade of the 4th century or else to the preceding period." The basis for this statement was the fact that 960 drachmas would not amount to very much money, hardly an artaba of beans, already in 308. The note thus says that if indiction is meant, no date earlier than 316/7 is possible, while the commentary says that no date much after 308 is possible. The implicit contradiction between these two statements suggests that no fourth-century date for the board is possible, and thus the S-shaped symbol cannot refer to inductions. Indeed, the payments are, as the editor pointed out, clearly made in the Alexandrian tetradrachm currency no longer in use after Diocletian's reforms in 296/7, including amounts of 24 and 68 drachmas.

Turning to regnal years, the editor notes that "the latest possible year 5 of a single ruler is that of the emperor Probus, i.e. 279/280; but then one cannot rule out, of course, year 5 of Aurelian, 273/4." Such a date is archaeologically significant, because the tablet would, with either date, be the earliest datable object found in House 3. It is therefore worth looking a little more closely at the question of what year 5 is at stake here.

The only basis for discussion is the amount of rent paid. As we do not know what the extent of property leased was, this may not seem like a
promising line of approach. In fact, however, it is possible to establish a
terminus ante quem. Under Aurelian there was what Dominic Rathbone,
in the most recent study of third-century prices, has called “the brusque
leap in price levels around 274 by a factor of ten or more” (1). In the quar-
ter-century before that leap, wheat sold in private transactions for amounts
from 12 to 24 drachmas, with 16 the median. A jar of wine ranged from
8 to 21 drachmas, with a median of 12. Although the period after 274 is
less well documented, wheat in transactions with the government stood at
200 dr. in 276, and other commodities followed roughly in its wake. That
is, after 274 the sum in the Kellis tablet would have been worth at most
about 5 artabas of wheat. As an amount to be painstakingly recorded over a
13-month period in nine installments, one worth as little as 1/8 artaba, this
seems inadequate.

This first impression is reinforced when thought is given to the word
chorion by which the object of the rent payments is designated. The ed-
tor translates it “farm”, which is in line with the practice of most recent
editors of papyri (“plot” is also common). The influence of Preisigke
(WB II 767, s.v. (1)) is visible: “Ackerstück, Landstück, Grundstück,
Landgut, Landbesitz.” But in this case Homer nodded. Preisigke’s cita-
tions in support of this definition mostly do not fit this vague definition
but the more specific and longer phrase χορίον ὀμπελικόν which
Preisigke cites immediately afterward. Here they are (2):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Papyri Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd century BC</td>
<td>Dittenberger, <em>OGIS</em> 59.9</td>
<td>Revenue-producing properties, type unknown (Thera)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd century BC</td>
<td><em>P.Hal.</em> 1.85,108,110,111</td>
<td>Building plots (in civic laws)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>P.Giss.</em> 108.17 (add.)</td>
<td>Word entirely restored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st century BC</td>
<td><em>BGU IV</em> 1130.31</td>
<td>2 aouras, character not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st century AD</td>
<td><em>P.Lond.</em> I 131 passim</td>
<td>“Central farm” with vineyard, gardens, date-palm grove (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>P.Oxy.</em> VI 985</td>
<td>account of work on vineyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd century AD</td>
<td><em>P.Oxy.</em> III 653</td>
<td>unclear character; on same roll as tax list concerning <em>apomoir</em> etc. nature of land unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>P.Par.</em> 18.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(2) I have altered Preisigke’s abbreviations to modern standards.

(3) See D.P. KEHOE, *Management and Investment on Estates in Roman Egypt During the Early Empire* (Pap.Texte Abh. 40, Bonn 1992) 60. The land was artificially irrigated.
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3rd century AD
CPHerm. 7 passim
P. Oxy. IV 705.70, 78
P. Oxy. VI 907.8, 13
P. Oxy. IX 1220

5th century AD
SB I 4481.8, 14, 16, 21

6th century AD
P. Flor. III 279.9
P. Giss. 56.6
SPP III 98
P. Hamb. I 23.16
P. Cair. Masp. I 67028.15
P. Oxy. VI 998
P. Cair. Masp. I 67104.6

Byzantine
SB I 4869.4

vineyard (4)
nature of land unclear
culture, vineyard: ἀμπελαίκον (5)
occurs in letter concerning vineyard work
vineyard (6)
concerns chorion with reedbed (7)
vineyard: ἀμπελαίκον
money rent (phoros) on chorion
vineyard: ἀμπελαίκον
choria part of inheritance; nature unclear
reference to vineyard (8)
vineyard: ἀμπελαίκον
means place or village

It is evident that Preisigke simply misclassified many of these references, where the modifier ἀμπελαίκον actually appears, or where the land is clearly a vineyard. Although it is impossible in some cases to determine the nature of the land in question, there is not a single instance from the Roman period where it demonstrably refers to land which is not vineyard, garden, or orchard. This meaning could already be at stake in the Theran inscription of the Ptolemaic period, but in P. Hal. it is clear that building plots, what elsewhere would be called οἰκόπεδα, are at stake. But from (at the latest) the first century AD the reference to uninundated land used for tree crops is clear.

Instances published since Preisigke also conform to this pattern. An example can be seen clearly in P. Oxy. XVII 2153.3 (3rd century): ῥόοις χωρίου Διονύσου. Similarly, the letter P. Oxy. XLVIII 3430 (4th cent.) deals with a chorion allowed (the writer says, perhaps hyperbolically) to “go to desert.” Instructions are given for some children to be brought εἰς ἀμπελουργίαν τοῦ χωρίου. Still more telling is a petition dated 292/3, P. Oxy. XXXIV 2712, in which a matrona stolata tells the acting strategos

(4) This papyrus concerns chorion and paradeisoi, vineyards and orchards.
(5) This is the will of Aurelius Hermogenes. It distinguishes explicitly between ἀμπελαίκον χωρίον and στίτικαι ἄροιραι.
(6) Preisigke actually, by a typographical error, cites SB 448 instead of 4481.
(7) Preisigke mistakenly assigns this text to the 3rd cent. Reedbeds were normal accompaniments of vineyards.
(8) This account is only described; the passage in question is given as [τὸ] ὁ πόσιν της Νεκόλθας ἀκτοπόσις τος χωρίου. The phrase will be discussed in Todd Hickey’s forthcoming dissertation, chapter I, where it is shown that it refers to vineyard.

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of the misbehavior of a certain Salpon, ἐκ πατρὸς μισθούμενος χωρίον ἡμέτερον περὶ κώμην Ἰβίωνα Ἑσοῖν καὶ σπικῆν γῆν. That is, the chorion and the arable land are distinguished from one another (as in P.Oxy. 907, from the citations given earlier). In this connection it is worth recalling H. Cadell's argument that the word κτῆμα suffered a "brusque disparition” after 280 in the traditional sense of vineyard” (9). It is thus possible that chorion had to take over by itself the role that ktema had often played up to that time in referring to a garden plot, usually enclosed, with vines and trees.

This is also the meaning we find in the Apophthegmata Patrum, for example in Gelasios 2 and 4 (10), where a chorion (in Palestine) turns out to have olive trees. It may of course have contained other crops. Gardens on land not reached by the Nile flood commonly included several different tree crops, including olives, grapes, and dates. Such mixed plantings are common today in enclosed gardens in Egypt. Such a chorion could easy have farm buildings and facilities, even a threshing floor (P.Oxy. XLVII 3354.40, ἑφ' ἀλω τοῦ χωρίου; it is clear that this is referring to the ἄμπελικόν κτῆμα which is the object of this labor contract, cf. line 6).

It is routinely stated (but never to my knowledge clearly shown) that χωρίον comes in late antiquity to be used synonymously with κώμη as a term for "village" (11). The relationship of this development to the usage described above, if there is one, has also not been demonstrated. In any event, we need not suppose that the pattern of usage for which I have been arguing was absolutely exclusive even in the Roman period — that is, that no one ever used χωρίον with any other meaning. But it seems clear that the dominant sense was that of non-inundated land, primarily used for growing tree crops of various sorts, but especially vineyards, and sometimes also containing farm buildings or equipment.

If the chorion of the Kellis tablet was such a vineyard / garden, it was probably (as such gardens were) of considerable value. The fact that the


(10) In the alphabetic collection; Greek text in Migne, PG 65: 148, 152.

(11) See M. Drew-Bear, Le nome Hermopolite (Missoula 1979) 42, citing L. Robert and P. Lemerle. The point has not, however, been demonstrated for late antique Egypt, certainly not for the period before the Arab conquest, and it remains to be shown that the evidence usually taken to show such usage really does so. (I am indebted to Todd Hickey for discussion of this point.)
rent is given in cash may also be a sign that we are not dealing with a small plot of arable land, where the rent is most typically in kind, but with garden-land, where it is usually in money (12). It is most unlikely that the equivalent of 5 arabas was sufficient rent for such a garden, of any size. A date after 274 thus seems extremely improbable. Because price movements between the Severan period and 274 were not large, we cannot exclude fifth regnal years before Aurelian, but at least it can be said that 273/4 is the latest possible date for the tablet.

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(12) The pattern is well-known. See J. Herrmann, *Studien zur Bodenpacht im Recht der graeco-aegyptischen Papyri* (Münch. Beitr. 41, 1958) 111-12. Rents in money, as Herrmann notes, are also found for arable land planted in some crops other than the standard cereals, particularly in fodder (typically in alternate years in leases with crop rotation); money rents are thus not an absolute indicator but a confirming one. The fact that the rent year in the Kellis papyrus is not that of arable crops but that of tree crops makes it unlikely that fodder or flax is at stake.