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Aspects of Church Finance in the Seventh-Century Hermopolite
According to P.Lond. Copt. I 1077

It is gratifying for a papyrologist to see that the historian J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz has introduced the section of his recent (perhaps unfortunately titled) monograph Decline and Fall of the Roman City (Oxford 2001) entitled “The Position of Bishops in the East” (pp. 145–146) by making extensive use of the early seventh-century Hermopolite register of taxes in grain in P.Sorb. II 69.1 Documentary papyrologists in particular want to see their raw data utilised in the creation of historical syntheses. In this case, for this place and time, more data are available to be factored in. P.Sorb. II 69, which records amounts in grain, has a companion piece (often cited by Gascou in his edition), P.Lond. Copt. I 10772, which records amounts in money (gold keratia and solidi). Both documents are written in essentially the same codex format, in the same type of hand; both overlap in content, mentioning many of the same people and institutions. They are close in date. Gascou dates P.Sorb. II 69 to a seventh indication that corresponds to either A.D. 618/19 or 633/34 (pp. 15–17). P.Lond. 1077 mentions many individuals as alive who are recorded in P.Sorb. II 69 as deceased: thus the London papyrus, which bears dates of a fifteenth and a first indication, is the earlier of the pair. If P.Sorb. II 69 were from 633/34, that would place P.Lond. 1077 at 626/27–627/28, during the Persian occupation, which is unlikely. Therefore I take Sorb. II 69’s seventh indication as 618/19 and accordingly place P.Lond. 1077 at A.D. 611/12–612/13, early in the reign of Heraclius.

Here I should like to single out some data from the London document that shed light on the temporalia of the Egyptian church at this eventful point in the eventful seventh century. By this time the Christian church and its institutions and personnel were deeply and firmly rooted in Egyptian society. These people and institutions interacted with their lay counterparts in many areas of life, and contributed to the creation of provincial wealth and its distribution within the empire. Churches, monasteries, hospitals, hospices, charitable organisations, and clerical and religious men and women were integral parts of the scene, and they were recorded as such by imperial officials responsible for gathering tax revenue. Attested in P.Lond. 1077 we find five churches, five monasteries (one for women) with their superiors, the Hermopolis city diakonia, and five named hospitals (plus one unnamed) including the κελευθοκεμέον of Apa Nok(o)s known from other documents (see below). There are twenty-one priests (including a physician), fourteen deacons, one (named) subdeacon, one oikonomos, one monk (who is also a hospital worker), and three nuns. Three of the priests and two of the deacons are married, as are the subdeacon and the oikonomos. All tax assessments for individuals and institutions are reckoned in sums of gold currency, whole and fractional.

P.Lond. Copt. I 1077 proceeds in a month-by-month fashion, giving a month name and then successive days, at the left of each page, and then listing the name of the taxpayer (individual or institutional) followed

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3. On the zygotostatai so numerous in this document (though none are ecclesiastics) I would like to add to my earlier comments: see N. Gonis, A symmachos on mission and his paymaster: P.Herm. 80 enlarged, ZPE 132 (2000) 182 n. 1, stating that “texts ... show them acting as cashiers or treasurers of great landowners ... (cf.) P.Oxy. LV 3805.30, in which zygotostatai make payments on behalf of the heirs of certain individuals”, which we find happening also in P.Lond. Copt. I 1077. Also J.-M. Carrié, Les métiers de la banque entre public et privé (IVe–VIIe siècle), in: Finanza e attività bancaria tra pubblico e privato nella tarda antichità, Naples 1998. 65–93, here 89–93. These officials helped in the negotiation of equivalents for the fractional gold amounts assessed as tax. Among the things a zygotostatés could do was act as a person with whom gifts of money to a religious institution could be deposited, and then lend the money out at interest with the interest going to the same institution, pro tem., until such time as it could take possession of the entire sum: see the introduction to P.Oxy. LXIII 4397 (p. 148).
by his, her, or its money amount. The document appears to reckon with an indiction year beginning in Pachon: after Pharnouthu then comes Pachon again and so on in order. Thus Mecheir of ind. 15 leads into Pachon of ind. 1, and so on, in the lists. (I present the data in list form since having them written out in prose would be tiresome for the reader.)

A: Clergy

διάκονος:  
Βάνος son of Ιωάννης: 6 ker., Phamenoth 27, ind. 15  
Βίκτωρ: x as agent, [Thoth?], ind. 15  
1 sol. 6 ker. as agent, Mecheir 27, ind. 15  
½ ker. as agent, Pachon 21, ind. 1  
6 ker. as agent, Phamenoth 24, ind. 1  
Γεώργιος: 6 ker., Phamenoth 15, ind. 1; for wife  
Θεοδόσιος: 2 ker., Pharnouthu 12, ind. 1(?)  
4½ ker., Pharnouthu 12, ind. 1(?), for wife  
† Κολλούδος: 3 ker., Phamenoth 5, ind. 1(?)  
Κ. . . .: ½ ker., Pharnouth 20, ind. 15  
M.: 1 sol. 6 ker. as agent, Epeiph 16, ind. 1  
Τιμορίνος: 16½ ker. as agent, Phaophi 3, ind. 15  
2 ker. as agent, Thoth 4, ind. 1  
½ ker. as agent, Pharnouthu 12, ind. 1  
Φοιβάμμον son of Μίνος: x, Pachon 15, ind. 15  
Φοιβάμμον: 9½ ker. as agent, Phamenoth 4, ind. 1  
Χρήστοδόρος: ½ ker., Mecheir 5, ind. 15  
1 ker., Thoth 30, ind. 1; for mother  
Χριστόδόρος son of Νιμη[?]: [x?]  
Χρήστος son of Τιμόθεος: 9 ker., Thoth 30, ind. 1; for St. Mary’s church  
5 ker., Mecheir 9, ind. 1; for mother  
Χρήστος son of Φοιβάμμον: x, [Thoth?], ind. 15

ήγομένος:  
Βασιλειάδης: 3½ ker. as agent, Pachon 2, ind. 15  
8 ker., Mecheir 14, ind. 1

μονάζουσα:  
Διοσκουρία: 1+ ker., Pachon 7, ind. 15  
1½ ker., Mecheir 19–24, ind. 1  
“Αμα: Ἱεράς daughter of Ζαχαρίας: 3½ ker., Phaophi 7, ind. 1  
†Μαριά: 3 ker., Mecheir 16, ind. 15  
¼ ker., Tybi 15, ind. 1

μονάζου[?]  
Χριστόδορος son of Θεοδόσιος, also νοσοκόμος: x, Pachon 17, ind. 15  
x, [?]  

οἰκονόμος:  
Γεώργιος: 5 ker., Phaophi 8, ind. 15; for wife  

πρεσβύτερος:  
†Βίκτωρ son of Παύλος: 3+ ker., Phaophi 11, ind. 1  
Βίκτωρ: ½+ ker. as agent, Phaophi 14, ind. 15  
Ἐπιφανέστατος: 5 ker., Phaophi 8, ind. 15; for wife  
3 ker., Phamenoth 12, ind. 15  
3 ker., Phamenoth 2, ind. 1  
Ζαχαρίας son of Πέτρος: ½ ker., Phamenoth 17, ind. 15

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5 One such is attested in P.Sorb. II 69, 34 17.  
6 Probably not the same as the Kollouthis deacon of St. Theodore’s in P.Misc. I 124a 6; N. Gonis, The Salaries of the Clerics in a Papyrus from Hermopolis, paper at the VII Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 2000 (I thank N. Gonis for sending me a copy of his paper).  
7 See Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 231.  
8 P.Sorb. II 69, 59 C 7 (where he pays 3 ¼ art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 235.  
9 Presumably of the monastery of Sittah (q. v.): cf. Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 58, 85.  
10 P.Sorb. II 69, 58 44 (where she pays 1 ½ art.).  
11 Of the South Church (q. v.), P.Sorb. II 69, 49 D 5 (where he pays 3 art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 232.
†Zeuxippos: x, [Thoth?], ind. 15
3½ ker., Mecheir 25, ind. 1

Θεοδόσιος: x, [Thoth?], ind. 15; for wife

'Ilkóbhos (?): 3 ker. as agent, Phamenoth 12, ind. 15

'Isakios; 19¼ ker.15 as agent, Epeipho 16, ind. 1

'Isakios; 1¼ ker. as agent, Pachon 24, ind. 15
2¼ ker. as agent, Phamenoth 5, ind. 1(?)

'Isánnis: x, Phaoophi, ind. 15
3½ ker., [Cheiak] 17, ind. 15
19¼ ker., Epeipho 16, ind. 1
4 ker., Thoth 19, ind. 1

Kallínikos: 8 ker. as agent, Phamenoth 26, ind. 1

Kosmás, also iatróς; 9½ ker., Phamenoth 4, ind. 1

Kyprikos: 9 ker., Mecheir 29, ind. 1

"ABa Kúros: x as agent, Pachon 15, ind. 15

Mégas: 2 ker., Pachon 28, ind. 1; for wife

"ABa Mégas (same?): 5½ ker. as agent13, Mecheir 29, ind. 15

Mónios, also stathmophoros14: 3¼ ker. as agent, Mecheir 25, ind. 1

"Apo Nókos15, also/or προεστός of the “leper hospital” (see below) and always acting as its agent: 6 ker., Pharmouthi 6, ind. 15
6 ker., Thoth 13, ind. 1

4 ker., Tybi 7, ind. 1

†Samonoúsios, also τελελλίων16, father of Ισάννης νοπάριος: 1½ ker., Pachon 7, ind. 15

1 ker., Pharmouthi 14, ind. 1

†Samaritión: 2¼ ker., Payni 21, ind. 1

Χριστόδωρος17: 9 ker. as agent, Phamenoth 23, ind. 1

προεστός18: Biktaw, of Aphous monastery (q. v.): 3 ker. as agent, Phaoophi 7, ind. 1

5½ ker. as agent, Cheiak 22, ind. 1

'Iskóboús, of Abba Iakóbos monastery (q. v.):
1 sol. 12 ker., Pharmouthi 13, ind. 1

†Samaritión, of Hermopolis διακονία (q. v.):
2½ ker., Phamenoth 1, ind. 1

προεστόςα: Aýrhlía19, of monastery of Sthihe (q. v.): 9 ker. as agent, Mecheir 19, ind. 1

ύπαξίκονος20: Gýrhygos;21 13½ ker., Phaoophi 9, ind. 1; for wife

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12 If this reading is correct, here and below on the same date we find a number of keratia greater than 18. For the most part our document appears to reckon with an 18-ker. solidus. Cf. J. Banaji, Discounts, weight standards, and the exchange-rate between gold and copper: insights into the monetary process of the sixth century, in: Finanza (s. n. 3), 183–202. I thank J.-M. Carrié for sending me copies of Banaji’s papers.

13 For the principal church of Hermopolis.

14 P.Sorb. II 69, 54 D 3 (where he pays ¾½ art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1) p. 234.

15 On this name cf. Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 247–248; Brunsch, Index Heuser, 133; idem, Index Crum, 139, 151.

16 P.Sorb. II 69, 83 A 8 (where his heirs pay 3 art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 241. This is probably the deceased father of John son of Samuel, symboli atographos, Hermopolites 9.9, in Diethart, Worp, Byz. Not. p. 67, who wrote BGU XII 2209 (A.D. 614).

17 Is the Χριστόδωρος father of Θεόδωρος in P.Sorb. II 69, 43 5, 77 E 3 a priest (cf. Gascou, Codex fiscal [s. n. 1], p. 283)? Probably no identification here.

18 It is often uncertain whether the abbreviation πρ/ is to be expanded as πρ(ειβάτερος) or as πρ(οεστός): e. g. in the case of Apa Nokios of the “leper hospital.”

19 See Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 85.


21 P.Sorb. II 69, 112 B 7 (where he pays 3 art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 283 (index).
B: Religious institutions and foundations

διακονία: ή διακονία 'Ερμού (πόλεως) 10½ ker., Phamenoth 1, ind. 1

ἐκκλησία: Ο 'Αγιος Χολομόντος ½ ker., Payni 12, ind. 1

Η 'Αγια Μαρία 5½ ker., Payni 30, ind. 1

9 ker., Thoth 30, ind. 1

Η (άγε) ἐκκλησία (Ερμοῦ (πόλεως)) 2½ ker., Phaophi 9, ind. 1

2 sol. 11½ ker., Mecheir 16, ind. 15

13½ ker., Phaophi 8, ind. 15

Μοναστήριο: “Αμά “Αννας 11½ ker., Mecheir 27, ind. 15

16¼ ker., Tybi 2, ind. 1

"Αββα 'Αρσάτος 5½ ker., Choia 22, ind. 1

"Αββα Ιωκάκιου 2 sol., Pachon 15, ind. 15

1 sol. 12 ker., Choia 22, ind. 1

1 sol. 12 ker., Pharnouthi 13, ind. 1

τῶν Σαλαμιτῶν Θύνεως 14 ker., Tybi 3, ind. 15

Shteh (ΩΤΕΞ) 9 ker., Mecheir 19, ind. 1

νοσοκομείο: νοσοκομείον 'Αχίλλεως 1¼ ker., Pachon 24, ind. 15

2¼ ker., Mecheir 25, ind. 15

2½ ker., [Phamenoth] 5, ind. 1(?)

25 For the list of two such see Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 77; also for an earlier period cf. E. Wipszycka, L’activité caritative des voces ciégàni, in: L’évêque dans la cité, du IVe au Ve siècle: image et autorité (Coll. École Fr. de Rome 248), Rome 1998, 71–80.

26 For the list of the two such see Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 77.

27 For the list of the two such see Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 72–76.

28 P.Sorb. II 69, 15 24 (paying 32½ art. on behalf of a woman religious), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 74; M. Drew-Bear, Le nome hermopolite, tòponyms et sites, Missoula 1979, 145.

29 P.Sorb. II 69, 106 B 22 (paying ½ art.) et alibi (with its dependency), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 73.


31 P.Sorb. II 69, 16 B 8 (paying 2 art.) et alibi, Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 75 (more than one; I assume this is the μέγας).

32 P.Sorb. II 69, 19 A 24 et alibi, Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 73. On its finances see below. Grossmann and Bailey, The South Church at Hermopolis Magna, 64 give an attempt at the text of the inscription found in the baptismal tank. It is clearly not a “prayer” concerning “one Dorotheos the Blessed” but rather a dedicatory inscription of expected type. The text has now been published and improved in E. Bernand, Inscriptions grecques d’Hermopolis Magna et de sa nécropole, Cairo 1995, 95–97 (no. 21 bis). For the phraseology cf. G. J. Cuming, The Liturgy of St. Mark (OCA 234), Rome 1990, 30, with εἰσελέη. The nomenclature found in the inscription accords with a date earlier than P.Sorb. II 69 and P.Lond. Copt. 1077; I do not find a Dorotheos or a John the oikonomos of the South Church at our time period.

33 P. For the Hermopolite list see Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 80–85.

34 See Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 84, Drew-Bear, Le nome (s. n. 25), 65. I would redate P.Lond. V 1758, with its diasteòles Phoibamnon (as here) and dating to a first indiction, to contemporary with P.Lond. Copt. 1077. P.Sorb. II 69, 58 32 (paying ½ art.), Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 81; Drew-Bear, Le nome (s. n. 25), 77.

35 P.Sorb. II 69, 40 C 5 (paying 1 art.) et alibi, Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 82, Drew-Bear, Le nome (s. n. 25), 122. The grain amounts in Sorb. (3½ art. legible total) seem small as against the 5½ solidi here.


37 See Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 58 (a translation of οὐράνιος [?]), 85; Drew-Bear, Le nome (s. n. 25), 336; St. Timm, Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit, Wiesbaden 1984 sqq., V, 2386.

38 For the Hermopolite list see Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 78–79.

39 Gascou, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 79; cf. P.Lond. III 1324.
The persons and institutions we meet in this document are of familiar types in the landscape of late antique Egypt. What if anything can we learn about prices and about the economics of church activities at this time? In a couple of cases we can compare the money paid by an institution in P.Lond. 1077 with the grain contributed seven or eight years later by the same institution in P.Sorb. II 69. For the Holy Church of Hermopolis, the principal basilica, its two-indiction total in money is 3 sol. 10½ ker., over 3½ solidi. Its grain total looks as though it comes to at least 106 ar tabas, but this figure comes from totalling only the amounts preserved in right-hand portions of the Paris document’s leaves (many are lost): 30 art. sol. is much too low to correspond with known grain prices. For the South Church, its sum in money is illegible in P.Lond. 1077, while for grain its total is at least 136½ ar tabas; for St. Phoebammon’s Church as well, its money sum is lost. The monastery of Abba Jacob looks well-to-do as far as cash is concerned, while its recorded grain sum looks low, as noted above. Also, for both the Thomas hospital and the κελευκομετον it is hard to discern a relation between their money and grain amounts: for the latter institution, more money is paid in ind. 15 than in ind. 1, but its grain amount is not high.

In any case, what is visible is the involvement of all classes of society and both sexes in the support of Christian institutions in seventh-century Egypt. It is hoped that these data gathered from detailed government record-keeping will contribute to our picture of the late Roman state’s “ability to make itself present to its subjects.” A document of this type would have been drawn up by an experienced and specialized scribe with competence in the drafting of itemized tax records. Phoebammon the diastoleus, accountant of this document, who names himself a total of six times in both indications, did a thorough job for his employers.

38 Gasco, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 79.
39 For the (λαμπροποτή) eponym, P.Sorb. II 69, 20 40 (where her heirs pay 52½ art.) et alibi, see Gasco, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 79, 213 giving stemma of her clarissime family.
40 P.Sorb. II 69, 43 3 et alibi, Gasco, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), p. 78; cf. 213–214 for the eponym.
41 This is the same as the νοσοκομείων τῶν κελθφῶν (κελευρίν) of P.Sorb. II 69, 103 31 (called a ξενοδοχείων τῶν κελθφῶν in 13 9, 101 C 9), Gasco, Codex fiscal (s. n. 1), pp. 78–79, the superior of which seems to have been Apa Nokios (q. v.). An Apa Nokis/Nokios, superior, is also attested on fol. 1v of P.Lond. Copt. I 1075, which dates to a tenth indication that may be A.D. 546 (in the plague period). The earlier Nokios seems to be the later one’s father and predecessor in the position of superior. — The identification as a leper hospital seems to be made on the basis of the etymology of the word chncbch. I have also suggested the possibility that it was a hospital for plague victims, given the sixth-century plague pandemic. I further venture to suggest here that it might have been an institution for the care of sufferers from bejel or endemic non-venerable syphilis (M. S. Goldstein et al., Pathology of Bedouin Skeletal Remains from Two Sites in Israel, American Journal of Physical Anthropology 45 [1976] 621–639, and B. M. Rothschild et al., Treponemal Diseases Revisited: Skeletal Discriminators for Yaws, Bejel, and Venereal Sypihlis, Clinical Infectious Diseases 20.5 [1995] 1402–1408).
44 I thank Karen Lemeski and Roy Rukkila for their help, good questions, and computer knowledge. — As always, in loving memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali (“If I quit now, they win”: Mulder and Scully).