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NOTES ON THE ARCHIVE OF NICANOR

The Coptos find seems to be one of the most interesting groups of ostraca published up till now as it provides some valuable information on the economic life of Roman Egypt¹. The basis for the study of this group of documents, admirably edited by Tait, was laid by Rostovtzeff in his review of Tait's work² and it seems that a more detailed study might not be wholly devoid of interest.

Sixty-four of the eighty-five ostraca published by Tait are certainly connected with one family while only six cannot be proved to belong to this group³ and fifteen cannot be classified on account of their partial illegibility⁴. These sixty-four ostraca (together with O. Bruess. 7) form a family archive which might be conveniently called the *archive of Nicanor*⁵. The name of Nicanor son of Panes occurs forty-two times in these ostraca⁶, his brother Philostratos son of Panes is mentioned four times and another brother Apollos once, two sons of Nicanor, Peteharpochrates and Miresis are mentioned eleven and seven times respectively.

The forefather of this family bears an Egyptian name Πανῆς and though his sons have Greek names⁷ an Egyptian name Peteharpochrates occurs again in the third generation⁸. In so far as it is possible to judge on the basis of names, the family might have been either Egyptian but hellenized to a degree, or of Greek origin,

¹ Published by Tait as: O. Petrie 220—304 in: *Greek ostraca in the Bodleian Library and various other collections* (1930).

² *Gnomon* 7, 1 (1931) pp. 23—26.

³ Nos. 220, 221, 223, 248, 265, 279.

⁴ Nos. 222, 226, 236, 243, 250, 263, 272, 281, 286, 289, 293, 294, 302, 303, 304.

⁵ There are four still unpublished ostraca belonging to the Coptos find; cf. Tait, op. cit. p. 125.

⁶ In Nos. 232, and 299 probable but not sure.

⁷ The form Ἀπολλῶς is rare outside papyri.

⁸ The name of the second son of Nicanor — Μιρῆσις seems to be rare though Μιρῆς is quite common.

and have undergone some assimilation to the Egyptian population of Coptos.

Almost all the ostraca pertaining to this family are receipts written by various persons who acknowledge to Nicanor or one of his brothers or sons the delivery of certain consignments sent to them from Coptos. The word γόμος, usually connected with transport-services⁹, occurs often in the ostraca¹⁰; the impression that the ostraca are receipts for transport-services is strengthened by the use of such words as, for instance, φόρετρον¹¹ and φορτία¹², and it seems to be finally confirmed by the fact that Nicanor is called in one of the receipts a καμη(λοτρόφος)¹³. As all the receipts are for goods delivered either at Myos Hormos or at Berenice and loaded at Coptos one may conclude that the head-office of *Nicanor's Transport-service* was at Coptos and that the caravans of the firm were operating on the lines Coptos-Myos-Hormos and Coptos-Berenice¹⁴.

The history of this transport-business is revealed, in broad outlines, in the ostraca. The firm of Nicanor appears for the first time in A.D. 6—a receipt for delivery of goods is given to Nicanor and to a certain Peteasmephis (No. 224). It seems that the business started as a partnership between Nicanor and Peteasmephis, but the latter fades away from the ostraca and one gathers that the firm continued on purely family lines. Nicanor seems to be the central figure. He is mentioned in the ostraca more than all other members of the family taken together and is found active in business for some 45 years. During the years 26 — 33¹⁵ his brother, Philostratos, participated in the activities of the firm¹⁶. Peteharpocrates, Nicanor's son, began to participate in his father's business — so far as one can judge on the basis of the preserved ostra-

⁹ Cf. e. g. *OGIS*, 629, 16, 26, 35, 40, 49—50; *P. Oxy.* 2125, 29.

¹⁰ Nos. 224, 227, 228, 229, 233, 237, 239, 240, 242, 245, 257, 285, 296.

¹¹ Nos. 238, 242.

¹² No. 237.

¹³ No. 224, cf. *Preisigke W.B. s. v. καμηλοτρόφος* — *Karawanenfuehrer*.

¹⁴ The only ostrakon written not in one of the two ports mentioned above was given at Apollinis Hydreuma (No. 245), a station on the way from Coptos to Berenice.

¹⁵ We are taking into account only the exactly datable ostraca.

¹⁶ Cf. Nos. 229, 238, 245, 251. — Apollos, the second brother of Nicanor, appears only once (No. 244).

ca — in A.D. 34¹⁷, and his brother Miresis in 41¹⁸. After the death, or retirement, of Nicanor in A.D. 50, Peteharpochrates took his place, being possibly assisted by Miresis¹⁹, and carried on until A.D. 53. After 53 the only member of the firm appearing in the ostraca is Miresis. With a last mention of Miresis in A.D. 62 the activities of Nicanor's firm — in so far as they may be reconstructed — come to an end. So the 56 years long business-history of „Nicanor's Transport” (A.D. 6-62) may, perhaps, be divided roughly thus: a) *Nicanor and company*; b) *Nicanor and brother* (or brothers); c) *Nicanor and sons*; d) *Sons of Nicanor* e) *Miresis son of Nicanor*.

The ostraca give us some insight into the business affairs of the customers served by *Nicanor's Transport* as well.

The receipts, written either at Myos-Hormos or at Berenice, adopt, with few exceptions, the following formula: name of the writer of the receipt — to Nicanor (or one of his family) — I acknowledge the receipt — place of delivery — εἰς λόγον of (name of the λόγος-holder follows) — the delivered goods stated — date.

What does the expression εἰς λόγον (τινός) mean? Who are the men whose names appear in connection with the words εἰς λόγον? And who are those giving receipts on behalf of the λόγος-holders? The correct explanation accounting for all the facts of the case seems to be that we have here firms engaged in the foreign trade which was conducted via the ports of Berenice and Myos-Hormos. The men whose λόγος is mentioned in the ostraca are the owners of the firms while those who acknowledge the receipt of various consignments are their business-agents. The big businessmen do not reside in the far-away ports of the Red Sea; it may well be that most of them do not reside even in Coptos, but carry on their business entirely through agents²⁰. The merchandise destined for the Indian and Arabian trade was sent up the Nile to Coptos, here it was received by agents of the firms resident at Coptos, and may be in some cases by the owners of the firms themselves,

¹⁷ Nos. 240, 253, 257, 259, (*O. Bruess.* 7) 266, 274 (probable not sure), 275, 280, 285, 301 (not sure, but cf. the note of Tait ad. loc.).

¹⁸ Nos. 260, 287, 288, 290, 291, 292, 300. (probable not sure).

¹⁹ Miresis appears for the first time, as stated above, in 41 and then since 57 frequently. He might have been active in the family-business interruptedly although we have no definite evidence of his co-operation with Peteharpochrates.

²⁰ Cf. *Rostovtzeff* op. cit. 24—25.

and thence brought for them by *Nicanor's Transport* on the caravan-route to Berenice or Myos-Hormos. On delivery of a consignment at one of the ports Nicanor would obtain a receipt. The payment for transport was effected at Coptos on producing this receipt. This last suggestion seems to be strengthened by the fact that no payments for transport are mentioned in ostraca in which the phrase εἰς λόγον, followed by a name of an absentee businessman, appears, while φόρετρον occurs in a case when the recipient is not an agent but the businessman himself, residing at Berenice and receiving merchandise on his own account²¹.

The ostraca reveal 25 λόγος - *holding* businessmen represented in Berenice or Myos-Hormos or both of them by resident-agents. They form twenty firms²². Names of about thirty business-agents, who were in service of these firms, are likewise to be found in the ostraca²³. In addition there appear several men personally carrying on their commercial activities at the ports of the Red Sea²⁴.

The merchants may be, roughly, divided into the following classes: Romans; Greeks and hellenized (some of them Roman citizens, some freedmen); Egyptians²⁵. (I) To the first class seem to belong Γαῖος Νορβανός (Nos. 244, 257)²⁶, Κορνήλιος (227, 246) and Macro (268, 270). (II) The group composed of men bearing Greek or Graeco-Roman names comprises: Μᾶρκος Ἰούλιος Ἀλέξανδρος (Nos. 252, 266, 267, 271, 282); Μᾶρκος Λαίλιος Ὑμεναῖος (240); Λούκιος Ἰούλιος Φ..... (261); Ἐρμερῶς (287); Ἐρμοιδᾶς (241); Φθόγγος (O. Bruess. 7) as well as Τιβέριος Κλαύδιος Σεραπίων (297); Τιβέριος Κλαύδιος Ἀγαθοκλῆς καὶ (Τιβέριος Κλαύδιος) Θεόδωρος (275, 276), and Ἀῶλος Γαβίνιος Εὐδαιμίων²⁷. (iii) The Egyptian

²¹ Cf. Nos. 238, 242.

²² There are some joint-holders of λόγος. On *Paminis and sons* see below.

²³ Some of them represent more than one firm; cf. e. g. 266, 271, 282 with 261; 233, 253 with 241; 256 with 262.

²⁴ Certainly Ἀνίκητος Κομμούνου (Nos. 238, 239, 242); probably also f. i. the men mentioned in Nos. 224, 264,

²⁵ Only λόγος — *holders* represented by agents and connected with the firm of Nicanor are taken into account in the following list. Some escape qualification because of partial illegibility of the names.

²⁶ *Rostovtzeff* (p. 24) points to the economic interests in Egypt of the family of Norbani.

²⁷ No 225; Cf. also Schubart, *O. L. Z.* 34 (1931) col. 337.

group is quite large. It comprises²⁸ Παμῖνις Παρθενίου (Nos. 228, 229, 231, 248, 249), his sons Ψενποῦθις (233, 250, 253)²⁹ and Πανίσκος (230, 255, 256); Ποριεύθης (269, 284); Μω.ιτιος Πετασμήφιος (277) and the partners Ἀρποκρατίων and Χρητουχοῖσος (247).

Among the agents there are slaves (e. g. 252, 267) freedmen (cf. e. g. 225) but also freemen bearing Egyptian and Greek names. A *business-woman* Ἰσιδώρα Μηνοδώρου, acting for G. Norbanus is mentioned in Nos. 244 and 257.

The firms most frequently occurring in the archives—may be the most important customers served by Nicanor—are the business enterprise of the Egyptian Παμῖνις and his sons, and the, probably, Jewish firm of Marcus Julius Alexander³⁰.

The trading-enterprise of Paminis occurs in the ostraca from c. A.D. 25 until 29, his son Psenpouthis appears from 29 until, at least, 37-8, while another son of Paminis named Paniscos is mentioned during the period A.D. 28—40. It might well have been a big Egyptian firm *Paminis and sons*³¹. This firm had its agents in both the important ports of the Red Sea. It was represented by Παμῖνις Πετεμίνεως and afterwards by Κρόνιος Ἀνδρείου and Κρόνιος Ἐρμίου at Myos-Hormos, by Ἀρυάθης, Πτόλλις Πανίονος and Paminis (who had been previously at Myos-Hormos) at the port of Berenice.

The only firm, besides that of Paminis son of Parthenios, which may be proved to have carried on business both at Berenice and at Myos-Hormos is that of Marcus Julius Alexander. It appears in the receipts in the years 37—43-4. That business-enterprise was represented at Myos-Hormos by a free man Ἀντίοχος Σατορνεῖνου³², while at Berenice it was represented by a slave, whose name is only partially preserved³³, and, it seems, by Ἐρμίας, another slave of Marcus Julius Alexander (No. 252).

The general lines of the eastern trade of Roman Egypt are well-known and need not to be repeated here in full. The expedition

²⁸ In 253 his name is to be restored (cf. 233). It is not certain whether No. 250 belongs to the archives, but probable.

²⁹ Cf. also *O. Bruess*. 7.

³⁰ On M. Julius Alexander see below.

³¹ Cf. *Rostovtzeff*, p. 25.

³² Nos. 266, 282; most probably to be identified with Ἀντίοχος Σατορνίλου in 271 (cf. *Rostovtzeff*, op. cit. p. 24); cf. also No. 261 and above note 23.

³³ No. 267, cf. τοῦ ἐμοῦ κυρίου *ibid.* l. 4.

of Gallus, the pacification of the southern and eastern neighbours, the care taken of the road to Myos-Hormos, which was provided with water-stations and other facilities, all affected the trade conducted via the ports of the Red Sea. Owing to this interest taken by the Roman Government, and no less to the general atmosphere of peace and prosperity, the eastern trade of Egypt flourished as never before. Already Strabo was told of 120 ships leaving yearly the port of Myos-Hormos for India, and may be that this trade reached even bigger dimensions later on³⁴.

Could the family archive, which tells the story of *Nicanor's Transport* and enables us to trace about twenty firms engaged in the eastern trade, add to our knowledge of the trade itself and its technical side? In this connection the evidence of our material is rather one-sided. As we have not even one receipt written at Coptos, i. e. for merchandise brought *from* one of the Red Sea harbours, we learn nothing regarding imports. But when we turn to export-goods we are much better off. The variety of goods brought, via Coptos, to Berenice and Myos-Hormos may be instructive.

Wheat (πυρός) was the main commodity transported to the ports of Myos-Hormos and Berenice. It is mentioned in the ostraca more than all other goods taken together and the consignments supplied to some of the agents are sometimes rather large, up to 36 artabae at a time³⁵. Wine seems to be next in importance. We find in the receipts Italian, Greek, Asiatic and, may be, Spanish wines³⁶. Quantities vary from 2 κεράμια to as much as 22 κεράμια

³⁴ On the ports of Berenice and Myos-Hormos cf. Rostovtzeff in *Journ. of econ. and business hist.* 4 (1932) p. 741; Tschirikover, *Hellenistische Staedtegruendungen* (1927) p. 14 (dealing with the Hellenistic period). — On the eastern trade of Roman Egypt cf. esp.: Charlesworth, *Trade Routes*², (1926) p. 18, 21—4, 28—9, 59 sq.; Kortenbeutel, *Der aegypt. Süd und Osthandel* (1931) 52 sqq.; Rostovtzeff, *Soc. ec. hist. Rom. Emp.* p. 513; Warmington, *Commerce between the Rom. Empire and India* (1928), p. 6 sqq.; Heichelheim, *Wirtschaftsg.* I, 702 sqq. Leider, *Der Handel von Alexandria* (1933) 57 sqq. See also Schaal, *Vom Tauschhandel zum Welthandel* (1931), 138 sqq. — On the road to Myos-Hormos cf. Strabo, 17, 1, 45; on 120 ships leaving Myos-Hormos Strabo 2, 5, 12.

³⁵ No. 228.

³⁶ Cf. Nos. 227, 240 for the Aminaeon, which is an Italian sort, (*Forcellini* s. v.); the Onisian (247) is a Greek wine from an island near Crete (Cf. Tait's note ad 247); Spanish brand is to be found in No. 261, 1,5 if Schmidt's conjecture: οίνου κοκο<λοβ(του)> is correct (*Phil. Woch.* 51 (1931), col. 540). For Asiatic

in a single transport³⁷. Drugs (φάρμακον) occur several times and may have been of importance as an export merchandise³⁸. Rushmats appear in notnegligible quantities — they too seem to be destined for the eastern trade³⁹. Anise, garments, leather-products, products of linden-wood, hemp, silver-bullion, oil, bread, complete the list⁴⁰. Flowers (ἄνθη) occur, surprisingly, in one of the receipts⁴¹.

According to Rostovtzeff φάρμακον only was destined for the eastern trade while the rest of the goods transported to the ports, are to be regarded as monthly provisions (ἐπιμήνια) for the agents living in the far-away ports of the Red Sea⁴². We must suppose, no doubt, that in the consignments were included some commodities for the personal needs of the residents, but on the whole it is difficult to accept Rostovtzeff's view in this connection. The word ἐπιμήνια is mentioned, quite incidentally, in connection with one firm only⁴³; the quantities of the commodities regarded by Rostovtzeff as *Monatsgehalt* are sometimes, as we have seen, quite large, and, last but not least, some of the goods regarded by Rostovtzeff as ἐπιμήνια are explicitly stated by the *Peripl. maris Erythr.* to be among the Egyptian exports to Arabia viz. wine, wheat, oil⁴⁴. The φάρμακον was, to be sure, among the exports but by far not the most important.

It seems that the archives of Nicanor, besides presenting us with a more complete list of export-goods than any other source, may be instructive on a point or two concerning the technical side of the caravan trade.

The dates of the ostraca enable us to establish the fact that the caravans were operating along the routes Coptos — Berenice (11-12 days) and Coptos — Myos-Hormos (6-7 days) throughout the year — as every season occurs in the ostraca.

wines cf. Nos. 241, 289, 290; the Λαοδικηνὸς οἶνος mentioned here, came „either from Laodicea in Phrygia or from Laodicea in Syria” (Tait ad no. 241); cf. also Tcherikover, *Jews in Egypt*, (1945), p. 23 (in Hebrew).

³⁷ Cf. No. 287.

³⁸ Cf. Nos. 225, 244, 257, 275.

³⁹ Nos. 228, 233, 257, 262.

⁴⁰ See also Johnson, *Roman Egypt* (1936) p. 381.

⁴¹ No. 262.

⁴² Op. cit. p. 23—4.

⁴³ Nos. 223, 264.

⁴⁴ *Peripl.* 6, 7, 17, 24, 28; cf. Kortzenbeutel, p. 63; Johnson, l. c.

Concerning the respective importance of the ports of Berenice and Myos-Hormos one cannot, of course, draw valid conclusions on the basis of one transport-firm only. But the archives of Nicanor seem to point to the fact that the two ports were equal in importance during the first 5 — 6 decades of the first cent. A.D. — as the receipts are equally divided between Berenice and Myos Hormos⁴⁵.

The various persons named in the archives, though of interest from the economic point of view, are, to be sure, quite unknown. It seems, however, that one of the business-men served by *Nicanor's Transport* may be identified with some probability.

Tiberius Julius Alexander, the prefect of Egypt, is one of the well-known personages of Roman and Jewish history as well. He was not, however, the first Roman citizen in the family. According to modern scholars his father, Philo's brother, Alexander the alabarch, was already a Roman citizen. Since he received his citizenship — as commonly accepted — from Tiberius⁴⁶ his full Roman name most probably was: Tiberius Julius Alexander. If that is correct Tiberius was his eldest son bearing, as was quite usual, the full name of his father. Any other son of Alexander the alabarch ought to bear the last two names, i.e. Julius Alexander, but could not bear the first. A second son of Alexander Μαρκος by name is mentioned by Josephus⁴⁷. His full Roman name must have been Marcus Julius Alexander, and this is exactly the name of one of Nicanor's biggest customers⁴⁸.

Marcus, the brother of Tiberius Julius Alexander, married princess Berenice, daughter of Agrippa I, in A.D. 41⁴⁹. As Berenice was married to her uncle Herodes on the death of her father, i.e. before the end of A.D. 44⁵⁰, *the end of A. D. 44.* is a terminus ante

⁴⁵ On the respective importance of the ports cf. Warmington, op. cit. p. 7. The archives seem to confirm, on the whole, his conclusions.

⁴⁶ See e. g. Dessau, *Prosop. Imp. Romani* II, 164 No. 92 (1898); Groag-Stein, *Prosop. Imp. Rom.* I, 86, No. 510 (1933); Lepape, *Bull. de la Soc. Roy. d'Archéol. d'Alex.* No. 29. tome 8 (1934), p. 332.

⁴⁷ *Antiq.* 19, 277.

⁴⁸ For details cf. above, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Joseph. Antiq.* 19, 276—277.

⁵⁰ *Antiq.* 19, 359 cf. Charlesworth, *C. A. H.* 10, p. 681. — The supposition that he died as early as 41, immediately after the marriage (Schurer, *Gesch. d. Jued. Volk.* I, p. 723; Goodenough, *Polit. of Philo.* 65, n. 6),

quem for the death of Marcus, while Marcus Julius Alexander of the ostraca appears from 37 until 43-44. This coincidence of the general chronological data of Josephus with the chronology of the ostraca seems to confirm the identity of the businessman Marcus Julius Alexander with Μάρκος the brother of Tiberius Julius Alexander⁵¹.

Marcus' father seems to have been one of the richest men in Alexandria. In A.D. 36 he lent to King Agrippa I 200 thousand drachmae⁵². Since he would not have had much hope for the repayment of the loan — in view of Agrippa's notoriety in money matters — one would suppose that this big sum was by no means all his fortune. Additional proofs of his great wealth are his generous gift of gold-plates for the embellishment of the nine gates of the Temple⁵³ as well as the fact that the conduct of the money-matters of Claudius' mother, Antonia, was entrusted to him⁵⁴. Alexander is called by Josephus *the alabarch*⁵⁵. Since another Jew had been called by this name⁵⁶ the *alabarchs* were identified with the *ethnarchs* of the Jewish community. But as the *alabarchs* occur sometimes in the sources in no connection whatever with Jews they are to be identified, as suggested by some scholars, rather with the ἀραβάρχαλ, in charge of the customs on the eastern frontier of Egypt⁵⁷. So, the wealthy banker Alexander the brother of Philo, served as a high financial official as well.

His elder son Tiberius Julius Alexander was appointed to the post of the epistrategos of the Thebais in A.D. 42⁵⁸. He served from 46 till 48 as procurator of Judaea and afterwards was one of the commanders in the war with the Parthians in 63. Three

is an erroneous deduction from the none — too — clearly worded passage in Joseph. *Antiq.* 276—7.

⁵¹ The exact interpretation of the pertinent passages in Josephus and further chronological details are given in my article on the family of Philo Jud. in *Zion* vol. 13 (1949) p. 14—71 (In Hebrew).

⁵² *Antiq.* 18, 159—160; cf. also Goodenough, *Politics of Philo* p. 64.

⁵³ *Joseph. Bell.* 5, 205.

⁵⁴ *Antiq.* 19, 276.

⁵⁵ *Antiq.* 18, 19, 259; 19, 276; 20, 100.

⁵⁶ *Antiq.* 20, 147.

⁵⁷ Cf. Schuerer, *Gesch. d. jüd. Volkes*, 3, 79, 132 sqq; Wilcken, *Griech. Ostraka* 1, 350; Jones, *The Herods of Judaea* (1938), 187; Wallace, *Taxation in Egypt* (1938), 274.

⁵⁸ Cf. Martin, *Les épistratèges* (1911), 107, 109, 133, 185.

years later he reached the highest point in his career on being appointed the prefect of Egypt. Tiberius played an important rôle during the imperial crisis. The support he gave to Vespasian considerably contributed to the final victory of the Flavian. We have a last glimpse of Tiberius during the war in Judaea when he seems to be next in rank only to Titus himself⁵⁹.

As the business affairs of Marcus Julius Alexander were conducted in the same region in which his brother had once been the Governor and his father had acted in a high financial capacity, it might be suggested that the family of Philo Alexandrinus had some special connection with Upper Egypt.

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⁵⁹ For details of his career see Lepape, op. cit. 330—341. The very interesting P. Fouad 8 (published in 1939) is now to be added to the papyrological documents in which Tiberius occurs (cf. also BGU 1563, P. Boswinkel 1, P. Oxy. 899). See recently Stein, *Praef. von Ägypten* (1950) p. 37 ff.