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SKEPE IN SOKNOPAIΟΥ NESOS

In a recent article Mlle. Piątkowska has studied the institution of *skepe*, protection, under the Ptolemies.¹ The institution continued and developed in Roman Egypt and a Berlin papyrus now in Warsaw, BGU I 23, illustrates it at a critical stage, as *skepe* began to acquire some of the aspects of the later *prostasia* or *patrocinium*.² However, before discussing the implications of this text it is worth quoting the papyrus in full since the Greek is far from straightforward and much depends on how it is translated.³

BGU I 23

ca. A.D. 207

- 1 Ἐριέως Παχύσεως καὶ
 Καλάβελις Σωτοῦ καὶ Ἄπυγχις
 . . ἰωνος οἱ γὰρ ἀπὸ κώμης
 Σοκνοπαίου Νήσου κατὰ
 5 Πασίωνος κολλητίωνος
 δεκαδάρχου. Αἰῶν ὁ κολλη-
 τίωνος καὶ οὐκ ἀφῆκεν
 ἄλλον ἐλθεῖν πρὸς τὸν δεκα-
 δάρχον καὶ ἔχει ἀδέλφους
 10 δ. αὐτὸς αὐτοὺς σκεπάζει
 καὶ ἄλλους σκεπάζει.
 καὶ ὑποκείμενα αἰτῆ ἀπὸ
 τῶν κωμῶν καὶ
 εἰς ἐ[τ]έρας κώμας γεωργῆ
 15 καὶ οὐ μετρεῖ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν.

¹ M. Piątkowska, *A propos de la σκέπη dans l'Égypte ptolémaïque*, *Eos* 54, 1964, 239—44.

² I should like to thank Professor A. Świderek for providing me with a photo of this document, Dr. Z. Borkowski for kindly examining the original and, in Cambridge, Mr J. A. Crook and Professor M. I. Finley for helpful criticism and discussion.

³ κολλητίων in lines 5 and 6—7 was originally taken as a proper name, E. Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, Heidelberg 1922, which for a long time obscured much of the interest of the document.

1. 1. Ἐριεῦς 3. ed. princ.: Ἀπίωνος; γ: 1. τρεῖς 7. 1. ἀφῆκεν 9. γον cor. ex χην
(BGU I Nachträge p. 353) 10. δ: 1. τέσσεραξ 12. 1. ἀλεῖ 14. 1. γεωργεῖ

Translation

Herieus son of Pakysis, Kalabelis son of Sotas and Apynchis son of . . . ion, all three from the village of Soknopaïou Nesos, against Pasion, the decadarch's *kolletion*. Aion, the representative of the *kolletion*, both has not allowed anyone else to approach the decadarch and he has four brothers. He protects these, and others. And he demands special emoluments from the villages and whilst farming in other villages he pays no taxes on these lands.

Notes

1. For Herieus son of Pakysis see perhaps BGU 45, 2 (A.D. 203).

2—3. The name of Apynchis' father is a problem. I should like to read Ὠρίωνος as in P. Gen 16 = W. Chrest. 354 = Select Papyri II 289, 3 (A.D. 207) and P. Cattaoui II = SB 4284, 2 (A.D. 207) but this is probably not consistent with the scanty remains on the papyrus. Dr. Z. Borkowski suggests Συρίωνος as a possible reading, perhaps preferable to the Ἀπίωνος of the original editor. It is worth noting that the papyrus is no longer in its original mounting.

5. On *kolletion* see below. The sense in which Pasion is the "decadarch's *kolletion*" is nowhere explicit. He could be either his nominee or his subordinate.

6. δεκαδάρχης or δεκαδάρχος is the Roman *decurio*. The local decadarch may still have been Antonius Antiochianus of the *ala veterana Gallica* posted in the Fayum who is recorded here in A.D. 201—2, J. S c h w a r t z, *Papyri variae Alexandrinae et Gissenses*, Bruxelles, 1969, p. 10.

10. αὐτός is ambiguous and might also refer to Pasion. In taking it as Aion I am relying on related texts. On these and on the nature of the protection exercised by Aion see below.

12. On the meaning of ὑποκείμενα, "special emoluments", see N. L e w i s, *On official corruption in Roman Egypt: the edict of Vergilius Capito. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 98, 1954, 153—8 at 156.

In the *Nachträge* to BGU I this text was described as "aus dem 2/3 Jahrh. n. Chr.", an approximate dating also indicated by Taubenschlag.⁴ It is possible however to date the text more closely. The tenor of the document is clear, if somewhat brief and tortuous in expression. Complaints are being lodged against Pasion, the *kolletion* who is the nominee or dependent of the decurion. The complaints concern his local representative, Aion, who seems to be exercising protection over his own four brothers and over others who are no doubt suitably obliged to him. His position as representative of the *kolletion* made possible tax-evasion both in Soknopaïou Nesos and elsewhere. He was also exorting money from the villagers and preventing access to the decurion. The recipient of these complaints is unknown but it must come from the same dossier as two further complaints from the same village, the one, P. Gen. 16 = W. Chrest.

⁴ G. D i ó s d i, *Zur Frage der Entwicklung des Patrociniums in Ägypten*, *JJP* 14, 1962, 57—72 at 60 n. 11.

354 = Select Papyri II 289, addressed to the centurion Julius son of Julianus by twenty five villagers and dated Phaophi 14, Year 16 (11 October A.D. 207) and the other, P. Cattaoui II = SB 4284 = F. F. A b b o t t and A. C. J o h n s o n, *Municipal administration in the Roman Empire* No. 190, addressed to the strategos Dionysios by twenty five named villagers and all the remaining *demosioi georgoi*, also dated to Phaophi of the same year.⁵

In the Geneva papyrus the complaint to the centurion concerns the shore land (of Lake Moeris) which, when reached by the flood, was the main agricultural land of the village. The villagers had recently come back to the village under the constraint of a decree of the prefect Subatianus Aquila,⁶ ordering all away from home to return to their own villages, but they had been prevented from sowing their land by a certain Orseus, son of Stotoetis, who with his brothers (five sons in total) had attacked them and driven them away. They ask the centurion to look into the matter.

The SB papyrus addressed to the civil authority, the strategos, preserves a far more detailed complaint. It starts on the same lines. During their visit to Egypt Severus and Caracalla had decreed that all away from home should return and put an end to their lawless ways⁷ and the villagers had returned to Soknopaiou Nesos. They were however driven from their land by a certain Orseus, a powerful and surly fellow (*ἀνὴρ βίαιος καὶ ἀδράδης*) who, with his four brothers, prevented them from sowing their corn; they would be forced to leave home a second time. The complaints against Orseus continue: he and his brothers were avoiding taxes and contributions, with their large flocks they had monopolized the grazing on a royal *ousia* for which the peasants paid an annual rent of 2,400 drachmas, they had never taken on a liturgy and they had terrorized successive village scribes. The strategos is asked to look into the matter, to force Orseus and his brothers both to pay their taxes and to undertake the liturgies due to them. They should all have a fair share of the cultivable land. The request is mild but probably realistic.⁸

⁵ On these documents see U. Wilcken, *Papyrus-Urkunden*, *APF* 3, 1906, 548—51. On petitions sent to both civil and military authorities cf. BGU 321 (to the strategos) and 322 (to the centurion) from A.D. 216; P. Tebt. 333, 16—17 (A.D. 216); P. Amh. 125, introduction; L. Mitteis, *Zur Lehre von den Libellen und der Prozesseinleitung nach den Papyri der früheren Kaiserzeit, Berichte über der Verhandlungen der kön. sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaft* 62, 1910, 61—126 at 64; R. MacMullen, *Soldier and civilian in the later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, 53 n. 10.

⁶ This may have re-inforced the decree of an earlier prefect, cf. P. Westminster College 3, 3 (A.D. 200—201) in D. J. Crawford and P. E. Easterling, *Three Greek papyri in Westminster College, Cambridge*, *JEA* 55, 1969, 184—90.

⁷ Cf. P. Westminster College 3, 5—6 (A.D. 200—201); P. Flor. 6, 10—13 (A.D. 210).

⁸ The document is discussed by M. Rostowzew, *Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Kolonates*, Leipzig-Berlin 1910, 166—8 and 210.

The Berlin papyrus belongs, I think, to the same story. One of its three petitioners (Herieus son of Pakysis) and possibly another reappear in the complaints to the centurion and the strategos. Aion, representative of the *kolletion*, who evades his taxes and exercises protection is, I suggest, one of the five sons of Stotoetis and a brother of big-bully Orseus. The complaints of the Berlin papyrus show a further side to the activities of this dislikeable family. Aion not only joins his brother in monopolizing both agricultural and grazing land in the vicinity of the village, in avoiding liturgies, evading taxes and terrorizing the village officials but he also uses his position as Pasion's representative both to limit access to the decurion and to extort supplementary payments from the villagers.

Aion is described as the *kolletion's* representative, ὁ κολλητίωνος, and the *kolletion* is closely linked to the decurion. What were these officials and what were their duties? The role of the decurions, the juniors of the centurion, is well known.⁹ As army representatives posted to a certain area they seem to have had certain judicial functions. They were the frequent recipients of complaints from the villagers and in this respect access to them would be of importance.¹⁰

The role of the *kolletion* is less well-documented. These officials appear in a series of inscriptions from Lydia also of Severan date¹¹ and in Egypt in another edict¹² of the same prefect, Subatianus Aquila, who ordered the villagers to their homes. They may well be a Severan innovation¹³ though their duties are far from clear. Even their name is puzzling. The Greek word *kolletion*

⁹ Mitteis, *Grundzüge* 30; *Verhandlungen der säch. Gesell. der Wiss.* 1910, 64. M. Ros-towzew, *Kornerhebung und -transport im griechisch-römischen Ägypten*, *APF* 3, 1906, 201—24 at 215 n. 1 argues for a connection with grain collection; I find the evidence (BGU 81) unconvincing. See R. MacMullen, *Soldier and civilian* 52.

¹⁰ Eg. P. Hamb. 10 (second century A.D.) with further references.

¹¹ J. Keil and A. von Premerstein, *Bericht über eine dritte Reise in Lydien*, *DAW* 57, 1, 1914, p. 11 No. 9, 22 (= F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, *Municipal administration in the later Roman Empire*, Princeton 1926, No. 144); p. 25 No. 28, 4 (= Abbott and Johnson, No. 143); p. 38 No. 55, 25, 35, 45 (= Abbott and Johnson, No. 142) with commentary; p. 28 with *Bericht über eine zweite Reise in Lydien*, *DAW* 54, 2, 1911, p. 114 No. 222, 3—5.

¹² P. Oxy. 1100 (A.D. 206).

¹³ P. Bruxelles E 7193 = SB 9207 (which reads κολλητίων(ι) in line 7, L. Robert, *Sur un papyrus de Bruxelles*, *RPh* 17, 1943, 111—119 at 114 = *Opera minora selecta* I, Amsterdam 1969, 364—72 at 367), was published as of second century date. Professor Bingen confirms my suspicion that this may be of Severan date or even later ("on ne peut pas exclure le premier quart ou le premier tiers du III^e siècle"), drawing particular attention to the abbreviation χα(λκίνη), line 10, for 6 obols. (Note also [στα]τιωναρτω, ll. 3—4). P. Flor. 91, 27 may also read κολλητίωνα (Robert, *RPh* 1943, 118 = *Opera minora selecta* I 371 n. 1) and the emperor of line 30 might be Caracalla, cf. P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte*, Bruxelles 1964, 102.

has been explained as derived from the Latin *collectio*¹⁴ or *collatio*¹⁵ but neither derivation seems really satisfactory.¹⁶ These officials have been variously described as tax-collectors with coercive powers¹⁷ or military police agents;¹⁸ their functions however remain unclear. But although the exact status and the history of the office of *kolletion* and their subordinates¹⁹ may be unknown, the context in which they occur is, as already noted by Robert,²⁰ consistently one of illegality and oppression; and in the present case Pasion is closely linked with a decurion of the Roman army. In attempting to facilitate the smooth collection of its revenues the state introduced yet another instrument of trouble and discord.

The Lydian inscriptions already mentioned are relevant as illustrating from another province at the same period the dislike felt by the provincials for these *kolletiones* with their army connections. In a Severan inscription from Ekiskuju the villagers complain to the provincial governor of harassment from officials, especially the *frumentarii* and *stationarii*:²¹ "they harass the village, they bring no good at all but trouble the village with unbearable fines and burdens so that the village has been ruined with the cost of entertaining visiting officials and the vast number of *kolletiones*; in their state of poverty the villagers are unable to afford even the cost of a bath and are deprived of the necessities of life".

But the closest parallel to the complaints of the peasants of Soknopaiou Nesos comes from the tenants of an imperial estate situated in the vicinity of the modern village of Aga Bey. The immediate cause of complaint is the

¹⁴ Keil and Premerstein, *DAW* 1914, 44; A. Garroni, *Osservazioni epigrafiche*, *RAL* 25, 1916, 66—80 at 78—80; A. Cameron, *Latin words in the Greek inscriptions of Asia Minor*, *AJP* 52, 1931, 236—62 at 242; R. Cavenaille, *Influence latine sur le vocabulaire grec d'Égypte*, *CE* 26, 1951, 391—404 at 397, as *colletio*; S. Daris, *Il lessico latino nella lingua greca d'Egitto*, *Aegyptus* 40, 1960, 177—314 at 222, as *colletio*.

¹⁵ M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Συτέλεια Τρωώνων*, *JRS* 8, 1918, 26—33 at 33; N. Lewis, *Miscellanea Papyrologica*, *CE* 29, 1954, 288—98 at 292 (on BGU 23); see the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. "collatio" 2 (especially Ulpian, *Dig.* 7.1.27.3). Such a derivation was considered (negatively) by A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* VIII, London 1911, p. 165.

¹⁶ The comment of Robert, *RPh* 1943, 114 = *Opera minora selecta* I 367, "C'est un mot, transporté du latin en grec"... is probably the safest. Mr J. A. Crook suggests to me that it may be a humble colloquialism, given a Latin ending, from words of the κόλλησις kind, meaning "blood suckers".

¹⁷ Garroni, *RAL* 1916, 79—80; F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch* III Absch. 8 s.v. "κολλητίων".

¹⁸ Keil and Premerstein, *DAW* 1914, 44; Rostovtzeff, *JRS* 1918, 33; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* s.v. "κολλητίων"; Cavenaille, *CE* 1951, 397.

¹⁹ οἱ ἀντικαθεστῶτες, Keil and Premerstein, *DAW* 1914, No. 55, 25 cf. line 45 τῶν ἐναντίας.

²⁰ See Robert, *RPh* 1943, 111—119 = *Opera minora selecta* I 364—72.

²¹ Keil and Premerstein, *DAW* 1914, No. 9, 15—24.

arrest of nine tenants by officers claiming to be acting under the authority of the procurator but the peasants protest more generally against the exactions of both imperial officials and municipal magistrates:²² "We are suppliants, most divine of emperors that have ever been, of your divine and transcendent kingship since we have been hindered from attending to the labours of cultivation by the threats of the *kolletiones* and their representatives to put us too, who remain, in danger of our lives, and we cannot, because we are hindered from working the land, even meet the imperial payments and other obligations for the immediate future ..."

The complaint continues at length and the final threat of the peasants, if they receive no support from the emperors, is to leave the imperial estates and to take refuge on independent land where the landowners, "who live a life of wrongdoing" (οἱ τὰ[ν] πονηρὸν ζῶντες βίον), are in a position to protect their tenants. The protection of such landowners might be illegal but it was clearly known to be effective.

In Soknopaiou Nesos most of the peasants did not come under the protection of the sons of Stotoetis; these men protected only their own dependents. Protection against liturgies and other obligations was nothing new in Egypt. *Skepe* of clients against these is known from the third century B.C. onwards.²³ The interest however of the Soknopaiou Nesos case is twofold. Firstly, the connection between those providing *skepe* and the *kolletion* who is in turn backed by the army. And secondly the scale on which *skepe* is exercised. Aion with Pasion behind him, Orseus with his large flocks grazing the *ousia* and his control of the most profitable corn land of the village and their three brothers who work together through fear and force are, on this scale, a new phenomenon, the beginning of an alarming development²⁴ and one especially typical of the eastern half of the Empire.²⁵ As the state lost control both of its own officers and its own strong members, the larger landowners, the peasants looked outside the existing structure and the system of protection came into its own.

Earlier, on the whole, *skepe* had had a place within the system. The state regularly legislated against it²⁶ but nevertheless it was clearly accepted as

²² *Ibid.*, No. 55, 21—30; for the translation cf. N. Lewis and M. Reinhold, *Roman civilization II*, New York 1955, 452—3.

²³ E.g. PSI 440 = P. Cairo Zen. 59451 (third century B.C.); P. Cairo Zen. 59130 (mid 3rd century B.C.); P. Tebt. 750, 17—21 (early 2nd century B.C.); cf. PSI 1406 (A.D. 137—41).

²⁴ Cf. P. Thead. 7 = Select Papyri II 295 (A.D. 332).

²⁵ On the later development see L. Harmand, *Le patronat sur les collectivités des origines au Bas-Empire*, Paris 1957, 421—84; A. H. M. Jones, *The later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1964, 776—7; I. Hahn, *Das bauerliche Patrocinium in Ost und West*, *Klio* 50, 1968, 261—76 stressing the differences in development in the East and West; E. R. Hardy, *The large estates of Byzantine Egypt*, New York 1931, 22—3.

²⁶ BGu 1212, 4 (221—205 B.C.); UPZ 110, 15, 151 (164 B.C.); P. Tebt. 5 = W. Chrest. 65, 60 (118 B.C.); PSI 1406, 6, 12 (A.D. 137—41).

a regular institution, both within the official hierarchy and outside it. In a society such as that of Graeco-Roman Egypt, the exercise of protection in return for a fee was a regular and accepted way for those in a position to do so to supplement their income.²⁷ It was both endemic in the society and part of its structure. The innovation illustrated in the Aion-Orseus dossier, as in the threat of the peasants of Aga Bey, is the stage at which the system of protection comes into direct conflict with the state. It is at this stage that *skepe* becomes *prostasia*, the "protection" of Libanius' vehement complaints²⁸ and of the Byzantine papyri, protection exercised by the army officers and the larger landowners to the detriment of all those outside it and especially the state.

Approximately 100 years after the affair at Soknopaiou Nesos the latest papyrological reference to the functioning of *skepe* takes up the theme of the Aion-Orseus dossier. It is a petition to a *praepositus pagi* in the Arsinoite nome dated to A.D. 309—310 from the archive of Aurelius Isidorus.²⁹ Isidoros son of Ptolemaios complains that Achilles, the village scribe of Karanis and three associates, Heron, Paesios and Horion, have nominated him to the post of *sitologos*, so giving him responsibility for the unproductive lands in the village. They are now attempting to substitute him as chaff-collector in the place of Paesios who had been properly nominated to that post. In addition to this they had taken under their protection thirteen villagers who were thereby evading their obligations in the village. The editors, rightly I think, suggest that Heron, Paesios and Horion are important landholders who have successively solicited the "cooperation" of the village scribe in order to evade their own liturgical obligations. These are the sort of men who are now in a position to lend their protection to the villagers, thirteen villagers who, presumably for a consideration, now escape what would doubtless be heavier state obligations. These men are the direct successors of Aion and his brothers in Soknopaiou Nesos, the *patroni vicorum* of the later empire who functioned apart from the central authority providing, on their own terms, refuge and protection to the harassed peasant.

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²⁷ Such payments were, at least earlier, normally made in kind, e.g. P. Cairo Zen. 59491, 30—2 (3rd century B.C.) *λεία*; P. Ryl. 569, 2—3 (3rd century B.C.) sacred cows; PSI 1313, 9—11 with addenda (2nd century B.C.) dried dates, Syrian dates (cf. BCU 591, 21) and pickled olives; P. Tebt. 9, introduction (119 B.C.) wheat and pulses.

²⁸ Libanius, *περὶ τῶν προστασιῶν* ed. L. Harmand, Paris 1955.

²⁹ P. Cair. Isidor. 68 (A.D. 309—10).