

Οἱ παρὰ τοῦ οἰκονόμου

In Ptolemaic Egypt.

By

Aboulyosr FARAH

Before dealing with the agents of the oikonomos it seems relevant to throw light on the functions of the oikonomos in brief.⁽¹⁾ Fortunately, we have good material about this official from the sources of the period. Mainly from the Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus and the Papyrus of Tebtunis 703, which contains the instructions of the dioiketes to the oikonomos. We are able to know the important role played by the oikonomos in all the activities connected with the royal revenues. From his office in the capital of the nome he had to supervise such activities in every part of the nome.

If we try to follow the functions of the oikonomos we find him involved in the various economic and financial activities. In irrigation he was one of those to whom the dioiketes was to report when a new engineer was appointed, in order to cooperate with him.⁽²⁾ He also instructed him to devote much effort and care to the water-supply.⁽³⁾ In many other cases he was mentioned in matters related to irrigation and keeping of embankments.⁽⁴⁾

(1) The functions of the oikonomos were discussed in detail see:
A. Farah, The functions of the oikonomos in Ptolemaic Egypt.
Unpublished dissertation (in Arabic) Ain-Shams University.
Cairo. 1980.

(2) P. Petrie II 42 (a).

(3) P. Tebt. 703 11.29-40.

(4) P. Petrie III 42 f, a 1 3, II 43-2 verso col II, P. Paris 66,
P. Cairo-Zenon. 59109.

The royal land was being completely under the supervision of the oikonomos: from the sowing to the harvest season. First, the royal cultivators had to sign contracts with him. He had to keep an eye upon them during the agricultural season. If any of them complained of the village-scribe or comarch about any matter touching agricultural work, he should make an inquiry into the matter and forbid such infringements. The oikonomos was equally requested to see into pressure on the peasantry regarding rents. In several cases the oikonomos had to interfere to protect the peasants against other officials.

Tools and animals used in agriculture were being lent to the cultivators by the permission of the oikonomos. Not only tools and animals, but also seeds had to be received from him. The oikonomos was informed by the dioiketes to regard as one of his most indispensable duties to see that the nome be sown with the kinds of corps prescribed by the sowing-schedule. When the sowing was completed the oikonomos should make a careful round of inspection

(5) P. Petrie 61 (b).

(6) P. Tebt. 703 11.49-57.

(7) P. Tebt. 703 11.40-9.

(8) P. Tebt. 703 11.60-3.

(9) P. Tebt. 701 11.337-41, P. Petrie III 32 recto (6).

(10) P. Cairo-Zenon. 59247, SB. III 7203, P. Col-Zenon. II 90.

(11) P. Tebt. 701 11.73-84.

(12) P. Tebt. 703 11. 57-60.

to see the sprouting of the crops, to know those who have neglect their duties, and also to make sure that the seeds had not been used for other purposes. In the harvest time the cultivators should call the oikonomos, and he must be present on collecting the crops. Then the crops must be transported to the threshing flour. There, the oikonomos would be able to take the dues of the crown and allow the cultivator to take the rest.

The oikonomos was involved also in other kinds of land, he took part in assigning lands to the soldiers. During their absence the soldiers used to leave their lands to others, such matter must be organized by the oikonomos in order to keep the rights of the crown towards the clerouchic land. In case of the death of any one of those who have a clerouchic land, the oikonomos immediately put his hand upon the land until the matter was settled by the authorities. Beside the land the soldiers used to receive a dwelling "stathmos". Such dwellings were distributed by the oikonomos. The royal houses which were prepared for the visitors of the nome, were subject to the office of the oikonomos.

(13) P. Tebt. 703 11.49-57.

(14) P. Tebt. 789, P. Petrie III 75.

(15) Rostovtzeff, A Large Estate in Egypt in the third century B.C. P.76.

(16) P. Lille. 30-38.

(17) P. Lille. 4.

(18) C. Ord. Ptol. 24.

(19) P. Tebt. 703 11.211-14., P. Mich-Zenon. 13., P. Cairo-Zenon. 59096.

In one of the documents of P. Enteuxis we see that the procedure of confiscating a plot of private land "ktemata" was carried out by the oikonomos⁽²⁰⁾. He was responsible for the pasture land, as⁽²¹⁾ is evident in the instructions of the dioiketes and in other documents.⁽²²⁾ planting and cutting of trees was organized by the oikonomos.

For the domestic animals, the oikonomos had to take care of⁽²³⁾ the royal calf byres and ensure supply of fodder for them. He was⁽²⁴⁾ also involved in bee-keeping and in fishing.

We have detailed informations concerning the part played by the oikonomos in oil monopoly, and this is revealed in the Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus. In participation with the antigrapheus,⁽²⁵⁾ he had to set up oil factories, and supply them with their⁽²⁶⁾ requisite amount of sesame, croton and cneus. Those who produced oil in the temples ought to declare to the contractors and the agent of the oikonomos and the antigrapheus the number of oil factories in each temple, and produce oil in their presence. The oikonomos and the antigrapheus ought to send to the king a written account of the oil required for the consumption of each

(20) P. Enteuxis. 61.

(21) P. Tevt. 703 11.165-74., P. Hib. 168.

(22) P. Tebt. 703 11.191-211., P.S.I. 382.

(23) P. Tebt.703 11.183-91.

(24) P. Cairo-Zenon, 59368., P.S.I. 524., P.Tebt.701.11.86-91.

(25) Rev.Laws. col. 45 11.13-18.

(26) Rev. Laws. col.44 11.5-7.

(27) temple. He was informed by the dioiketes to have all the oil presses in operation as much as possible, those implements which were not in operation were to be collected and sealed up in the store-houses. (28) During the season of oil manufacture the oikonomos had full authority over the workmen. He had to compel them to work every day, and to supervise them in person. (29) He should not allow the workmen appointed in each nome to cross over into another nome. If any of them dared todo so he was liable to arrest by the oikonomos. (30) He was also responsible for paying the workmen their wages and profits. (31) If the contractors wished to make search, on the ground that some persons had concealed oil or oil-presses, they should hold the search in the presence of the agent of the oikonomos or the agent of the antigrapheus. (32) In textiles, the oikonomos should visit the weaving- houses and to do his utmost to have the largest possible number of looms in operation, and to take especial care that the lines were in perfect order. (33) The wages of the workmen here also must be paid by the

(27) Rev. Laws. col. 50 11.20-25, col. 51.11.1-19.

(28) P. Tebt. 703 11.134-164.

(29) Rev. Laws. col. 46.11.8-11.

(30) Rev. Laws. col 44.11. 8-13.

(31) Rev. Laws. col. 45. 11.1-12.

(32) Rev. Laws. col. 55. 11. 17-26.

(33) P. Tebt. 703 11.104-113.

(34)
oikonomos. He had to register the monthly quantity of
pieces of linen. (35) We have some data by which we can argue
that the oikonomos was engaged also in wool industry. (36) For
bear - brewery which was managed by the crown, the oikono-
mos was the supposed official who used to make the contract
with those who wished to make beer. (37) In several cases we
find him involved in such industry. (38) We know that stone-
cutting which was regulated by the state was under his control. (39)

In the field of trade and transportation, it was the
first concern of the oikonomos to load the corn on the
ships, and ship it to Alexandria. (40) His agents in the harbours
were in charge of this obligation. (41) In connection with
transport the oikonomos had some responsibilities related to
security. This was evident in the instructions of the dioi-
ketes, when he informed him to catch the native soldiers
who absconded their work, and to send them to Alexandria. (42)
His agents were sent to arrest the thieves. (43)

(34) P. Hib. 67.

(35) P. Tebt. 703 11.104-113.

(36) P. Enteuxis 1, p.S.I. 449

(37) Preaux, L'economie Royale des lagides, p. 154.

(38) P. Petrie, II 14.

(39) P. Petrie, II. 14

(40) P. Tebt. 703 11.70-87.

(41) Clarysse, Harmachis agent of the oikonomos: an archive
from the time of philopator. Ancient society. 1976 vol.
7 pp. 185-207.

(42) P. Tebt. 703 11.215-22.

(43) P.S.I. 359.

The oikonomos should supervise the selling of goods, and see that they were not sold at prices higher than those prescribed. He had to interfere to fix prices to goods which had no fixed prices. the agents of the oikonomos should register the names of the dealers and of the retailers in each city, and arrange with them in conjunction with the contractors how much oil they should receive and sell from day to day .

In taxation, the oikonomos played also an important role. Those who wished to become chief tax-farmers were requested to register themselves before the oikonomos. He held the auction in participation with the royal scribe. then the oikonomos with the antigrapheus had to examine the lists of the tax-farmers, after dropping the names of those not eligible, the lists were to be put on the logisterion. After the auction the oikonomos did not make the contract with the highest bidder immediately, but first he should ask him to bring a surety. The surety had to mortgage his property before the oikonomos. This property would be confiscated in case of deficit.

(44) P. Tebt. 703 11.174-82.

(45) P. Col. zenon, 55.

(46) Rev. Laws col. 47 11.10-15.

(47) rev. Laws. col. 14 11.2.5, U.P.Z. 112.

(48) Rev. Laws. col. 20 11.11-12.

(49) Rev. Laws. col. 11 11.11-17.

(50) Rev. Laws. col.34 11.2-6, see Harper, the relation of Archones, Metochoi, Engoi to each other, the government and to the tax contract in Ptolemaic Egypt. *Aegyptus*. 1954 XIV pp. 269-285.

(51) U.P.Z.112 col.II 11.2-5.

The oikonomos had full authority upon the whole matter touching tax-collecting. In case of dispute between the cultivator and the tax farmer around the assessing of the rate of the tax, the oikonomos had to arbitrate between them. (52) Even disputes among the tax-farmers themselves (53) were to be settled by the oikonomos. Moreover royal banks were subject to him. sometimes he had to check books in person. (54) Taxes in kind were being paid under his supervision. He had to establish the royal repositories in which the taxes were deposited. (55) Overseers of these repositories were subordinates of the oikonomos. They had to take his permission to deliver any quantity of seeds. (56)

The oikonomos held a balancing of accounts with the tax-farmers every month. (57) At the end of the year he had to call the farmer to hold a general balance with him. (58) Afterwards he drafted a final balancing of account and sent the report to the dioiketes. (59)

(52) Rev. Laws. col. 28 11.5-16.

(53) P. Petrie, III 32 f.

(54) P. Gourob. 20 P. Tebt. 839, P. Hib. 69.

(55) Rev. Laws. col. 31 11.17-25.

(56) P. Petrie. I 16 (2).

(57) Rev. Laws. col. 16.

(58) Rev. Laws. col. 18, 19.

(59) Rev. Laws col. 19.11.5-16.

It is necessary to mention the role of the oikonomos in the corvee, which was revealed by a report introduced to the oikonomos of Thebes concerning the liturgy. Added to all these responsibilities the oikonomos had to supervise over the public baths, and this function is frequently mentioned in the documents.

From the foregoing, it is evident how far the oikonomos was involved in all the economic and financial activities in the nome; especially those connected with the royal revenues. We know that there was an oikonomos in every nome, except the Arsenoite nome which had an oikonomos in every division beside the central oikonomos in the capital of the nome.

It is difficult to believe that an individual would be able to undertake such numerous duties without being supported by a staff of assistants. It is note-worthy that in the Revenue Laws joined by the antigrapheus. Although the latter was inferior to the oikonomos, yet he was not his subordinate.

The oikonomos was the only official whose agent was mentioned with him on the general edicts. The best example for this is to be found in the edict of Euergetes II of 118 B.C. We also notice that while the agent of the oikonomos was

(60) U.P.Z. 157 = P.Paris. 66.

(61) P.Cairo-Zenon. 59371, P. Col-Zenon. 57, P.Mich-Zenon.65, P. Ryl. 70.

(62) P. Tebt. 5 11.139-143, 155-161.

frequently mentioned in the Revenue Laws, the instructions of the dioiketes of P. Tebt. 703 was free from any hint to him.

The agents of the oikonomos were mentioned in different forms. Sometimes as follows: ὁ παρὰ τοῦ οἰκονόμου (63), or referred to with the name of their superior Ἄρενδότης ὁ (64) παρὰ Ἀγχώφιος (65). In one of Zenon Papyri he was mentioned as ὁ παρὰ αὐτοῦ (66), the pronoun in this case denotes Philiscus the chief oikonomos of the Arsinoite nome who was mentioned frequently in the Zenon Papyri.

The question now, what were exactly the functions of the agents of the oikonomos? If we try to answer this question, we have to look at the sources to see the duties carried out by the agents of the oikonomos. We are told that an agent expelled a person from a royal house. We are not able to know the circumstances of such procedure, whether it was taken by the agent himself or according to the instructions of his superior. A plot of a private land was confiscated by an agent of the oikonomos. The agent of the oikonomos Hermolaus was sent to Zenon to receive croton from him. The duty was held by another agent in another document.

(63) e.g. P. Tebt. 839.

(64) P. Hib. 153.

(65) P. Cairo-Zenon. 59787.

(66) e.t. P.S.I. 359, 402, 419, see: Rostovtzeff, op.cit.p. 150.

(67) P. Petrie. II 20 col I 11.12-13.

(68) P. Enteuxis. 61.

(69) P.col.- Zenon. 40

(70) P. S.I. 358.

In a document dated 235 B.C. contains the various activities of the office of the oikonomos, we find that the agents were responsible for giving the fishermen nets and wages. (71)

In oil monopoly we have frequent mention of the agents of the oikonomos in the Revenue Laws. The clerk appointed by the oikonomos and antigrapheus had joint authority over all the workmen in the nome, and over the factories. The same clerk had to register the names of the dealers and retailers in each city. (72)

Those persons who had implenets used in the manufacture of oil were to register themselves before the contractors and the agent of the oikonomos. And in the same manner, those who made oil in the temples throughout the country would report the number of the oil factories in each temple to the contractor and the agent of the oikonomos. (73)

(71) P. Tebt 701. 11.86-91.

(72) Rev. Laws. col. 46.

Such agent can not be excluded from our study for he was appointed by the antigrapheus beside the oikonomos. Since he was responsible before the oikonomos, we have to look at him as one of his agents.

(73) Rev. Laws. col. 47.

(74) Rev. Laws . col. 49.

(75) Rev. Laws. col. 50.

Another agent was called ἀντιγραφεὺς τῆς ὄνης, who was appointed by the oikonomos only, and probably different from that mentioned in the Revenue Laws col. 40 1.8 who was appointed by both the oikonomos and antigrapheus. This functionary was to hold a balance of accounts every month with the chief contractor in the presence of the antigrapheus. The agent of the oikonomos must be present if the contractors or their subordinates wished to make search on the ground that some persons had concealed oil or oil presses. In a papyrus dated 114 B.C. an agent of the oikonomos was present when a contractor wanted to make search about smuggled oil. This papyrus contains a complaint raised by the oil contractor to Menches the village scribe of Kerkeosiris, when he discovered that somebody had smuggled oil. He wanted to make search, so he took with him Trochamos the agent of the oikonomos "who came for payment" as he said, he declaring "since you and other officials refused to come with me". We don't know whether Trochamos came to the village in response to letter from the contractor after the refusal of the officials to go in search with him, or he came by chance during a regular tour. We

(76) Rev. Laws. col. 54 11.20-24.

(77) Rev. Laws col. 55.11.17-21.

(78) P. Tebt. 39.

have to ask also, why the contractor asked the officials of the village to go him? . We know very well that the search of oil was the responsibility of the agent of the oikonomos. Is it possible to think that the other officials had to authority to be in the place of the agent of the oikonomos in some urgent cases? In the same concern, an oikonomos ordered his agent to arrest a woman accused of having smuggled oil. It is noteworthy here also that the oikonomos instructed his agent to abstain from any grievances against the villagers, or he would be in a regretful situation. (79) It is to be questioned whether this agent was a local agent of the oikonomos, or was he just a customary agent sent to the village to settle some matters?

As we have mentioned before, corn transport was one of the most important duties of the oikonomos. A group of documents show that such duty was undertaken by his agents in the harbours. They were responsible for the corn transport from the villages to the harbours, they supplied those who were in charge of transport with their needs and received receipts from them. (80) Another papyrus bears a request of Horus the oikonomos (114 B.C) to his agent Harmachis urging him to send the corn. Then Harmachis ordered his men to load the ships. One of these men sent a report to Harmachis stating that he had some difficulties in carrying out such duty. Unfortunately we are not able to know

(79) P. Hib. 59.

(80) P. Petrie II 25 (a), (b), (c).

the status of the writer. Clarysse in his comment pointed out
 (81)
 that he must be inferior to Harmachis. It is possible to say that
 he was an agent of the agent of the oikonomos? After loading the
 ships the agents of the oikonomos had to take receipts from the
 (82)
 captains of the ships.

In taxation, Harper pointed out that the agent of the oikonomos
 (83)
 had the authority of holding the auction of tax-contract. It is
 (84)
 evident that he was able to make contracts. He also had full
 authority in dealing with the tax-contractors and their sureties.
 One of the tax farmers complained that Nikanor the agent of
 (85)
 the oikonomos disturbed him and insulted his surety.

The owners of orchards were register themselves before the
 (86)
 tax - farmer and the agent of the oikonomos and antigrapheus.
 When the cultivators wished to make wine, they would summon the
 tax-farmer in the presence of the oikonomos and antigrapheus or
 (87)
 their agents. But if the tax-farmer failed either to come in

(81) Clarysse, op.cit. p. 201.

(82) P. Strassb. 563, P. Tebt. 825.

(83) Harper, Tax Contractors and their relation to tax-collection
 in Ptolemaic Egypt. Aegyptus. XIV. 1934 p. 51.

(84) Rev. Laws. col. 25 11.13.ff.

(85) P. Cairo-Zenon. 59459.

(86) Rev. Laws col. 29 11.2-4.

(87) Rev. Laws. col. 25. 11.4-16.

person or send representatives, the cultivators would be allowed to make wine in the presence of the agent of the oikonomos and antigrapheus. Afterwards, when the oikonomos came to examine the produced wine, he ought to take with him the tax-farmer, the antigrapheus and his own agent.

It seems that the report submitted to the oikonomos of Thebes about the forced labour was written by one of his agents. We find the agent of the oikonomos involved in the affairs of public baths. Another agent was sent to arrest a thief who went in hide in Philadelphia.

Having dwelt upon the duties were held by the agents of the oikonomos, we have to point out to some remarks concerning this official. In fact, we are not able to estimate the number of those agents in every office. But it is logical to presume that their number must have been different from one nome to other. The functions of the oikonomos were numerous and variant. Some of these functions needed technical experience, except the agent appointed for the oil manufacture we are not able to know whether there were agents appointed for the other industries or for agriculture and trade.

(88) Rev. Laws. col. 30 11.3-19

(89) Rev. Laws. col. 33.11.2-8.

(90) U.P.Z. 157=P. Paris. 66.

(91) P. Mich - Zenon. 65.

The agents, I think, were present in the office of the oikonomos in the capital of the nome. In order to be able to undertake their duties they had to move from one part of the nome to the other. But we do not know whether they used to go to villages on regular tours or according to the necessities of the job? It is clear that some of those agents had to stay in some places for a long time, like those who were engaged in loading the ships at the harbours. It is difficult to know whether they were situated at the harbours permanently or only during the season of shipping the corn to Alexandria. The same could be said about the agents of the oikonomos appointed for oil manufacture.

Although our sources are not adequate enough to answer such questions, it would seem that the oikonomos used to send his agents to the various parts of the nome to pursue his responsibilities. After fulfilling their duties the agents ought to report back to the central office to submit reports to their superior. At last, we notice that in the Revenue Laws some of the duties were undertaken by the agents of the oikonomos, while the others by the oikonomos himself without mention to his agent. Does this mean that the agents were not able to undertake such duties without being authorized by the oikonomos? or were they completely forbidden from holding such particular responsibilities.

It is clear that most of the functions of the agents of the oikonomos were secondary in nature as compared to those held by the oikonomos himself.

Aboulyosr Farah