

SOME OVERLOOKED ATHENIAN ECONOMIC VOCABULARY (ἀγοραί and λιμένες)

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In his famous *Politeia* that Athens' public revenues are mostly stolen by a tiny class of social and economic insiders – lists as the city's major sources of income outside of the tribute τὰ τέλη... καὶ τὰς πολλὰς ἑκατοστάς (“the taxes and the numerous 1% charges”). In particular, he mentions πρυτανεῖα, μέταλλ', ἀγοράς, λιμένας, μισθώσεις, δημιόπρατα, which can be translated somewhat over-literally as “prosecutors’ fees, mines, marketplaces, harbors, rent-payments, goods sold at public auction”. My interest is in the third and fourth items in this list, ἀγοραί and λιμένες.

The Athenian state did not exploit the silver ore at Laurion directly, but instead sold or auctioned off mining rights to private individuals. There was also a tax of some sort assessed on individuals who sold goods in the Agora, as well as a sales tax on the transactions themselves, although precisely how these levies were assessed and paid is impossible to say¹. In addition, there was a 1% tax on traffic in the Piraeus harbor, presumably levied on goods brought into the city for sale and perhaps to be distinguished from the ἔλλιμένιον or “harbor-access fee”². Given Athens’ almost complete lack of permanent administrative staff, collection of the harbor tax and the Agora tax must have been farmed out, i.e. sold off on an annual basis to the highest bidder, as city taxes ordinarily were³. Translators and commentators therefore routinely take the third and fourth items in Bdeleycleon’s list to have extended meanings, “(revenue from taxes)” – better put “(from the sale of rights to collect taxes)” – “(in) marketplaces and harbors”.

This instinct – unsupported by the standard modern lexica, which recognize no such extended meaning and thus require revision in any case – must be fundamentally correct. But Xen. *Vect.* 4.40 suggests that the solution is inadequate, because there αἱ ἀγοραί are opposed not to αἱ λιμένες but to τὰ ἔλλιμένα, “the harbor taxes”⁴. Cf. Dem. 1.22, where “harbors” and “mar-

¹ For other sales taxes (ἐπώνια), see Stroud 1998, 61-64.

² Cf. Eup. fr. 55 K.-A. *ap. Poll.* 9.30; Ar. fr. 472 K.-A.; [Xen.] *Ath.* 1.17; Hsch. α 584 Latte; ε 3173 L.; Chankowski 2007, 313-319.

³ The crucial text is [Arist.] *Ath.* 47.2 with Rhodes 1981 *ad loc.*, which simply refers to τὰ τέλη generally as sold by the city’s πωληταί. Cf. And. 1.133-4; Aeschin. 1.119 with Fisher 2001 *ad loc.*; Langdon 1994, esp. 260; Fawcett 2016, 174-176. For the farming out specifically of harbor-taxes elsewhere, see Arist. *Oec.* 1350a.16-22; *Miletos* 55.68 τὴν πρᾶσιν τοῦ ἐλλιμένιου (223/2 BCE).

⁴ διὰ τὸ <τὰ> ἔλλιμένα καὶ τὰς ἀγορὰς αὐξάνεσθαι.

ketplaces” are again found together and are most naturally taken to refer in a straightforward manner to tax-revenues drawn in one way or another from those sources: οὐδὲ τοὺς λιμένας καὶ τὰς ἀγορὰς ἔτι δώσοιεν αὐτῷ καρποῦσθαι· τὰ γὰρ κοινὰ τὰ Θετταλῶν ἀπὸ τούτων δέοι διοικεῖν, οὐ Φίλιππον λαμβάνειν. On the basis of these three mutually supporting examples, I suggest that plural αἱ ἀγοραὶ and αἱ λιμένες should be recognized as 5th- and 4th-century Athenian idioms that mean specifically “revenue from the sale of rights to collect taxes levied on marketplaces” and “revenue from the sale of the rights to collect taxes levied on harbors”, respectively.

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ABSTRACT:

Comparison of passages in Aristophanes, Xenophon and Demosthenes suggests that ἀγοραὶ (literally “marketplaces”) and λιμένες (literally “harbors”) should be recognized as 5th- and 4th-century Athenian idioms referring to state revenues generated by the sale of the right to collect taxes from such sources.

KEYWORDS:

Commercial vocabulary, taxes, Athens, harbors, marketplaces.