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DEKAPROTOI AND EPIGRAPHAI

In a recent article,¹ Bagnall has argued that the *dekaprotoi* served longer terms and were more numerous than has commonly been supposed. These contentions are based principally on evidence from the 290's from Theadelphia and Karanis; it appears that the board of *dekaprotoi* in charge of paired toparchies in the Arsinoite Nome could have as many as six members at a time, and that the term of office was five years in length, as had been suggested before by Grenfell and Hunt. Further, Bagnall accepted a suggestion of Thomas that the year for which the *dekaprotoi* were appointed ran from June to June; that is, that it was timed to begin with the harvest and the payment of taxes on the new crop.

In the present note, we wish to explore further the relationship of these conclusions to the tax-collection system in the reign of Diocletian. First, it has recently been argued by Thomas² that the *epigraphe*, the tax-schedule, was issued each year in the early summer, at the time of the Egyptian harvest, and thus that insofar as the *epigraphe* has any chronological sense, it refers to a period from one harvest to another. The term of office of the *dekaprotoi*, therefore, appears to have been planned to begin at the same time as the *epigraphe*. This is natural enough, since the *dekaprotoi* were responsible for collecting the taxes specified in the *epigraphe*.

Secondly, it seems likely that the five-year term of the *dekaprotoi* adduced by Bagnall coincided with the five-year *epigraphe* cycle.³ The evidence may be briefly reviewed: the two villages for which we have a

1 *Aegyptus* 58 (1978), forthcoming.

2 *BASP* 15:1-2 (1978) 133-45.

3 This possibility was raised by Bagnall in the article cited in n.1 supra, but he did not offer a definite conclusion.

concentration of evidence are Theadelphia and Karanis.⁴ In Theadelphia, the same *dekaprotoi* are attested in charge of the 6th-8th toparchy in 297/8, 298/9, and 299/300. In Karanis, the various *dekaprotoi* known (4th-5th toparchy) are active from 297/8 to 301/2; one of them is actually attested in every year during this period except 298/9.⁵ Now it has recently been argued by Thomas that the *epigraphai* were probably issued in cycles of five beginning in 287/8 and ending in 301/2, giving thus three cycles.⁶ It is evident that the coincidence between the apparent terms of the *dekaprotoi* and the *epigraphae* cycles is very striking. It can be proved that the office of *dekaprotos* was abolished in early summer, 302, which is exactly the point at which the third, and probably final, five-year *epigraphae* cycle ended.⁷

Thirdly, none of the convincing evidence for the five-year term of *dekaprotoi* or the 5-6 man board cited in Bagnall's article comes from before 287/8; rather, it is all Diocletianic. The only evidence of any interest before Diocletian comes from *P. Teb.* II 368 and 581, where an Agathos Daimon is *dekaprotos* of the 2nd toparchy of Polemon in 264/5 and 268/9. It is possible, of course, that this reflects a 5-year term; on the other hand, it may only reflect renomination to a shorter term, such as one year. Since we do not have evidence for the years between nor about his colleagues, we are not entitled to draw conclusions.

Fourthly, there is specific evidence that some change in the nature of the office of the *dekaprotoi* occurred around 287. This evidence is *P. Oxy.* XII 1410, an edict of the *catholicus* Memmius Rufus in the 290's,⁸ which states (lines 5 ff.): τοὺς ἀπὸ τ[οῦ] β[ε] (ἔτους) καὶ α (ἔτους) δεκαπρώτους

4 The evidence is cited in full in the article mentioned in n.1, supra; only a summary is given here. The years quoted for these *dekaprotoi* are those of the middle table there, that based on a June-June year in office, to accord with the conclusions quoted above.

5 This is Sarmates.

6 Supra, n.2.

7 For the abolition of the office, see Thomas, *BASP* 11 (1974) 60-68. As to the coincidence of the *epigraphae* cycles and the terms of *dekaprotoi*, the problem does remain of Philadelphos, who was a *dekaprotos* in 297/8 according to *P. Cair. Isid.* 38 (we equate year 2 of Domitius Domitianus with 297/8; cf. *ZPE* 22 (1976) 253-79 and 24 (1977) 233-40). Is he the same as the Philadelphos who signs a receipt for *adaeratio* of grain in *P. Cair. Isid.* 34.18, of 21.viii.294? If so, and if he is *dekaprotos* in both texts, the hypothesis advanced in this article must be abandoned. The latter official, however, regrettably does not give his title, and the conclusion that he is a *dekaprotos* is not inevitable. Furthermore, the name Philadelphos is so common that there is a very real possibility that we are here dealing with two different persons. The difficulty of a decision here is illustrated by the fact that another collector, also without title, in *P. Cair. Isid.* 34, is named Athanasios; a man of that name appears as *dekaprotos* in the Theadelphia texts from 297/8 and later, in a different toparchy. Such identifications are not very secure.

8 The name of the *catholicus*, damaged in *P. Oxy.* 1410 (where the editors read it as Magnius Rufus) has been completely preserved in *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2717, on which see below. This papyrus also helps give a date for the tenure of office of this man.

μηκέτι μηδείς εἰς δεκαπρωτείαν ὀνομαζέτω. χρῆ γὰρ[ρ] αὐτοὺς τετηρήσθαι το[ῦ] λοιπ[ο]ῦ ἵνα μὴ πληρώσ[αν]τες αὐτοὺς ἀναδοθῆ[σιν]ται τοῖς τῆς δεκα[πρω]τε[ί]αις λειτουργήμ[ασι], "No one is to renominate the *dekaprotoi* from after the 2nd and 1st year⁹ to the *dekaproteia*; for it is necessary for them to be protected in the future from being appointed to the duties of the *dekaproteia* again after having already fulfilled them." Year 2 and 1 is 285/6. *Dekaprotoi* up to that time are not protected from renomination, but those after that time are. We take ἀπό here (τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ β (ἔτους) καὶ α (ἔτους)) to mean "from after," i.e. those appointed after this date. There can be no doubt that this is a possible meaning of ἀπό.¹⁰ What may cause some surprise is that the *catholicus* should use an expression which appears to be ambiguous. Now, if our translation is accepted, the *catholicus* is referring to *dekaprotoi* elected in the year after 285/6, namely 286/7, and it was exactly during this year, towards its end, that the first *epigraphe* cycle began, and at the same time that new *dekaprotoi* would have been named. The *dekaprotoi* named in early summer, 287, would be the first protected by the edict of the *catholicus*.

Some support for our view is to be found in the case of Aurelius Demetrianos, known as *dekaprotos* in the Oxyrhynchite Nome on 12 June 286 (*P. Oxy.* X 1260), 9 August 297 (*P. Oxy.* XII 1571), 13 May 299 (*P. Oxy.* XII 1572),¹¹ and June 299 (*P. Oxy.* IX 1204). It may be, of course, that we are dealing with two men of the same name; but the name is not common, and it has in fact been possible to delineate the personality of a single person in almost all of the contemporary documents mentioning the name.¹² We consider it very likely, therefore, that the same person is meant. In the first of these four texts, Demetrianos is *dekaprotos* in year 2=1. If he is the same man as the *dekaprotos* in 297 and 299, and if the words τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ β (ἔτους) καὶ α (ἔτους) in the edict of the *catholicus* are taken to mean *inclusive* of those who served in year 2=1, we can only conclude that the *catholicus*' instructions were simply disregarded;¹³ this is in itself a most unlikely conclusion, and since Demetrianos appears several times in our documentation as a nominator whose nominations were contested on grounds of illegality, it is scarcely likely that he himself would have served

9 The editors read 8th and 1st; but see the remarks of Thomas, *BASP* 11 (1974) 66.

10 See *LSJ* s.v. II; *Wörterbuch* IV s.v. col.222, esp. the reference there to *P. Cair. Zen.* II 59176.77, ἀπὸ ἢ ἕως ἡμερῶν κβ (i.e., the 8th is *not* included); W. Bauer, *Wörterbuch NT* 171, citing Luke 2.36, ἕτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς, which he translates, "sieben Jahre, seit sie nicht mehr Jungfrau war;" Strabo xvii 1.5, οἱ τε γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ Πτολεμαίου βασιλεῖς ἰσχυροὺς τοσοῦτο, which the Loeb translator is certainly correct in rendering "the kings after Ptolemy [Soter]."

11 As emended in *ZPE* 8 (1971) 278-81.

12 A list and discussion appears in the article cited in n.11.

13 Cf. the editor's introduction to *P. Oxy.* XXII 2343.

for several years unnecessarily.¹⁴ If, on the other hand, our translation of the phrase is adopted, there is no problem, since Demetrianos, along with all other *dekaprotoi* who served in year 2=1, was eligible for renomination.¹⁵

It is our view that these *dekaprotoi* were protected from renomination precisely because they were the first to come under the reformed system, where the five-year term, coincident with the *epigraphe* cycle, was introduced. In what way exactly the duties of the *dekaprotoi* became heavier, other than the probably longer term of office, we cannot say, for the workings of the *epigraphe* system are not fully understood. But it is likely that the *dekaprotoi* had principal responsibility for administering the *epigraphe*.

Further confirmation may be derived from the date of the *catholicus*' edict. The exact date is not given in the papyrus as preserved; but *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2717 is a receipt for *epikephalaion* paid τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος ια (ἔτους) καὶ [ι (ἔτους) καὶ γ (ἔτους)] of Diocletian, Maximian and the Caesars, or 294/5,¹⁶ ἀκολουθῶς τοῖς κελευ[σθε]ῖσ[ιν] ὑπὸ τοῦ διασημοτάτου καθολι[κοῦ] Μεμμειῶ Ρουφῶ, "in accordance with the orders of the most illustrious *catholicus* Memmius Rufus." The date of Memmius Rufus as *catholicus* is thus securely pinned to 294/5, though we cannot say for how long on either side of this date he served in office. The date is, however, in rather close proximity to the time when the question of renomination to the *dekaproteia* would have arisen for the first time after 287, namely in the spring of 292. No one who was *dekaprotos* after 287 would have come up for renomination until the expiration of his term in 292. The language of the last fragmentary sentence of the edict of Memmius Rufus¹⁷ suggests that in some cases reappointment had already taken place; the date is therefore probably after early summer, 292. It seems to us a justifiable inference that the edict was aimed at the first occasion when abusive renomination could have occurred.

P. Oxy. IX 1204 might seem at first sight to be in conflict with the views here expressed, since it relates to nomination to the office of *dekaprotos* in

14 Protest against illegal nomination was regular in all periods, and not least in the late third century. Demetrianos appears three times as nominator of men who contested their nominations, two as *dekaprotos* and one as *agoranomos* (*P. Oxy.* IX 1204, XXII 2343, XIV 1642).

15 It may also be noted that his appearances in 297 and 299 fall within one of the relevant five-year periods and thus conform to the pattern we propose.

16 The date of 294/5 here may seem insecure, since two of the figures for the regnal year are restored and the editor dots the alpha in the first figure. Thomas has examined the original in Oxford, however, and is of the opinion that the broken letter after iota can hardly be read otherwise than as alpha.

17 δστι[ς] δὲ ἐκ δευτέρου ἀνεδέ[δοτο] [α]ῖθις δεκαπρωτ[εία].

299, i.e. in the middle of a five-year term of office as suggested above. We must, however, reckon with the possibility that this single nomination was to fill an extraordinary vacancy which occurred during the normal five-year term of office. In fact, the nomination is explicitly said to have taken place on Pauni 30 (line 23), which is certainly much later than the normal date at which *dekaprottoi* for the incoming harvest would have been elected. The text thus makes very good sense if interpreted as concerning an emergency situation caused by an unexpected vacancy.

To summarize: we propose that in early summer, 287, the taxation system of Egypt was in some way reformed through the introduction of an annual *epigraphe* issued always at this time of year; that the *epigraphai* were numbered in five-year cycles; that the *dekaprottoi* had prime responsibility for administering the *epigraphai*; and that they served for five years, a term coinciding with one cycle of *epigraphai* and starting at the same time of year. This system endured for three cycles exactly, until in the early summer of 302 the office of *dekaprotos* was abolished and the series of five-year cycles of tax schedules came to an end.¹⁸

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18 On the abolition of the *dekaprottoi*, see Thomas, *BASP* 11 (1974) 60-68.