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Did the Ptolemaic postal system work to a timetable?

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DID THE PTOLEMAIC POSTAL SYSTEM WORK TO A TIMETABLE?

Introduction

For almost ninety years the study of the Ptolemaic postal system has rested on one page from the day-book of a post office (*P. Hibeh* I 110) and Preisigke's influential analysis of it. See F. Preisigke, 'Die ptolemäische Staatspost', *Klio* 7 (1907), p. 241-277. Scholars have unanimously applauded this article and to a large degree have merely repeated its results in their own works.[1] In all that time the assumptions and methods of this analysis have largely remained unchallenged. Why this should be so is unclear. Perhaps there was a certain deference to Preisigke's authority to speak on this matter, for as well as being a renowned papyrologist he was also a postal official. The first section of this paper will offer a restatement of Preisigke's analysis and the second section a critical discussion of it.

Hibeh 19.4 x 30.5 cm 259-253 BC (verso)

Edd. pr. — B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, *P. Hibeh* I 110 (London 1906), pp. 286-294 (= *WChr* 435 and *Select Papyri* 397).

The papyrus was recovered from a mummy cartonnage. The text on the recto with the exception of *ll*.51-53 was written earlier (*c*. 270 BC) and contains what appears to be a private account. The verso and *ll*.51-53 of the recto are from the day-book of a postal station. Only three columns of a much larger roll survive. The verso and *ll*.51-53 of the recto are written by the same hand.

Col. III recto

51 κυλιστοὶ $\bar{\varsigma}$, (τούτων) βασιλῖ $\bar{\gamma}$ κα[ὶ ἐπισ]τολήν, Θ̣ε̣υ̣γέ̣ν̣ι̣ χρηματαγωγ̣[ῶι .], 53 Ἀπολλωνίῳ[ι] [δ]ι̣ο̣ι̣[κ]ῃ̣[τῆ]ι̣ [. . . . .]

Col. II verso

54 [ῑ]$\bar{\varsigma}$. [. .]. ν̣[. . . . .]. [. . .]. . .[. . . . .]. [.] 55 [Ἀλ]εξάνδρωι $\bar{\varsigma}$, τ[ο]ύ̣τ̣ῳ̣ν̣ [βασι]λ̣έ̣ῖ̣ 56 Πτο[λ]εμαίῳι κυ(λιστὸς) $\bar{\alpha}$, Ἀπολ[λ]ων[ί]ωι δ[ιοι]κ[κη]τῆι κυ(λιστὸς) $\bar{\alpha}$, ἐπιστολαὶ δύο πρὸς τῶι 58 [κυλ]ι̣σ̣τ̣ῶι προσδεδεγμ(έναι), Ἀντιόχωι Κρητὶ κ̣υ̣(λιστὸς) $\bar{\alpha}$, Μ̣η̣ν̣[ο]δ̣[ώρω]ι κυ(λιστὸς) $\bar{\alpha}$, Χελ[.]ω̣.[. .]αι ἐν ἄλλῳι κυ(λιστὸς) $\bar{\alpha}$, 60 Ἀ[λ]έξανδρος δὲ παρέδωκ[εν Ν]ικοδήμωι.

61 $\overline{\iota\zeta}$. ὥρας ἐωθινῆς παρέδωκεν Φοίνιξ Ἥρα κλείτου ὁ νεώτερος Μακεδὼν 63 (ἑκατοντάρουρος) Ἀμίν‹ον›ι κυ(λιστὸν) $\bar{\alpha}$ καὶ τὸ ἄξιον Φανία[ι,] Ἀμ̣[ί]ν̣[ω]ν 64 δὲ παρέδωκεν Θευχρήστωι.

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[1] U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge*, p. 372, describes Preisigke's interpretation of the text as foundational (*grundlegenden Interpretation des Textes*). W.L. Westermann, 'On Inland Transportation and Communication in Antiquity', *Political Science Quarterly* 43 (1928), pp. 376, speaks of Preisigke's 'keen analysis of this document'. E.J. Holmberg, *Zur Geschichte des Cursus Publicus* (1933), p. 24, considered that the papyrus had been 'fully explained' (*ausführlich erläutert*) by Preisigke. H.-G. Pflaum, *Essai sur le Cursus Publicus dans le Haut-Empire Romain, Mém. de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles Lettres* XIV, 1 (1940), p. 206, describes the analysis as magisterial (*article magistral*). E. Kornemann, 'Postwesen', *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* XXII, 1 (1953), 991, describes *P. Hibeh* I 110 as 'outstandingly commented on' (*hervorragend kommentiert*) by Preisigke. E. van 't Dack, 'Postes et télécommunications ptolémaïques', *Ptolemaica Selecta* (Leuven 1988), p. 97, states that the papyrus was exhaustively studied (*étudié exhaustivement*) by him.

65 τ̄ῑ̄. ὥρας πρώτης παρέδωκεν Θεύχρ[η]σ 66 τος ἄνοθεν Δινίαι κυ(λιστοὺς) γ̄, (τούτων) βασιλῖ 67 Πτολεμαίωι κυ(λιστοὶ) β̄, Ἀπολλωνίωι 68 διοικητῆι κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Δινίας δὲ παρέ 69 δωκεν Ἱππολύσωι.

70 τ̄ῑ̄. παρέδωκεν ὥρας ϛ̄ Φοῖνιξ Ἡρακλείτ̣ου 71 ὁ πρεσβύτερος Μακεδὼν (ἑκατοντάρουρος) 72 Ἡρακλεοπολίτου τῶν πρώτων Εσ̣π̣[.].[..] 73 κυλιστὸν ᾱ Φανίαι, Ἀμίνων [δ]ὲ παρέ[δ]ωκ̣(ε) 74 Τιμοκράτηι.

75 ῑ̄θ̄. ὥρας ῑ̄ᾱ̄ πα[ρ]έδ[ω]κ[ε Νι]κ̣όδημ̣ος 76 κάτοθεν Ἀλεξάνδρωι κ̣υ̣(λιστοὺς) ., παρ[ὰ] 77 βασιλέως Πτολε‹μαί›ου Ἀντιόχωι εἰς 78 Ἡρακλεοπολίτην κυ(λιστὸν) ᾱ, Δημητρίω[ι] 79 τῶι πρὸς τῆι χορηγία[ι τ]ῶν ἐλεφάντω̣[ν] 80 εἰς τὴν Θηβαίδα κυ(λιστὸν) ᾱ, Ἱππο̣τ̣έλ̣[η]ι 81 τῶι παρ' Ἀντιόχου κατὰ Ἀνδ̣ρο̣ν̣[ί]κ̣ο̣υ 82 ἐν Ἀπόλλωνος πόλι τῆι μεγάλη̣ι 83 κυ(λιστὸν) ᾱ, παρὰ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίο[υ] 84 Θευγένηι χρηματα[γω]γῶι κυ(λιστὸν) ᾱ, 85 Ἡρακλεοδώρωι εἰς τὴ[ν] Θηβαίδα [κυ(λιστὸν) ᾱ,] 86 Ζωίλωι τραπεζίτηι Ἑρμοπολίτ[ου] κ̣υ̣(λιστὸν) [ᾱ,] 87 Διονυσίωι οἰκον‹όμ›ωι εἰς τὸν Ἀρσινοίτη[ν κυ(λιστὸν)] ᾱ̣,

Col. III verso

Vestiges of three lines

91 κ̄. ὥρας [.] π̣αρέ[δω]κ[εν Λ]υκοκλ̣ῆς Ἀμ[ίνονι] 92 κυ(λιστοὺς) γ̄, (τούτων) [β]α[σι]λῖ [Πτο]λεμ[αί]ωι [...] τῶν ἐλεφά[ντων] 93 τῶν κα[τ]ὰ Θα̣[..].σ̣σου κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Ἀπολλω[νίωι] 94 δι[ο]ικητῆι κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Ἑ[ρ]μίππ̣ω̣[ι] τ̣ῶι ἀπ̣[ὸ τοῦ] 95 πληρώματος κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Ἀμίνων δὲ π[αρέδω] 96 κεν Ἱππολύσωι.

97 κ̄ᾱ̄. ὥρας ϛ̄ παρέδωκεν [.]ε̣ναλε̣.[.....] 98 κάτοθεν Φανίαι ἐπιστο[λὰ]ς̣ δύο [.....,] 99 Ὧρος δὲ παρέδωκεν Δ̣ιο̣ν̣[υ]σ̣ίω̣ι..[.....]

100 κ̄β̄. ὥρας πρώτης πα[ρ]έδωκεν Α̣[..]ω̣ν̣ [Δινίαι] 101 κυ(λιστοὺς) ῑ̄ϛ̄, (τούτων) βασιλεῖ Πτολεμαί[ω]ι κ̣[υ(λιστοὶ).] 102 παρὰ τῶν ἐλεφάντων τῶν κατὰ Θα̣[...σσου,] 103 Ἀπολλωνίωι διοικητῆι κυ(λιστοὶ) δ̄.[.....,] 104 Ἀντιόχωι Κρητὶ κυ(λιστοὶ) δ̣̄, Δινίας δὲ [παρέδω] 105 κεν Νικοδήμωι.

106 κ̄β̄. ὥρας ῑ̄β̄ παρέδωκεν Λέων Α̣[μίνονι] 107 ἄνοθεν βασιλῖ Πτολεμαίωι [κυ(λιστοὺς)..,] 108 Ἀμίνων δὲ παρέδωκεν [Ἱ]π̣π̣[ολύσωι.]

109 κ̄γ̄. ἐωθινῆς ἄνοθεν πα[ρέ]δω[κεν.....] 110 Τιμοκράτης κυλιστοὺ̣[ς. Ἀλεξάνδρωι,] 111 (τούτων) βασιλῖ Πτολεμαίωι κ̣[υ(λιστοὶ)., Ἀπολλωνίωι] 112 διοικητῆι κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Π̣[.....χρηματα] 113 γωγῶ̣ι κυ(λιστὸς) ᾱ, Παρι̣κ̣[.....κυ(λιστὸς). ,] 114 Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ πα[ρέδωκεν.....]

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51. *SP* 397 reads the symbol at *ll*.51, 66, 92, 101 and 111 as (τούτων), whilst *WChr* 435 reads it as (ὧν). The former reading seems preferable in view of τ[ο]ύ̣τ̣ω̣ν̣ at *l*.55. 58. *SP* 397 reads προσδέδεντ(αι) for προσδεδεγμ(έναι). 59. For .]αι ἐν ἄλλωι *BL* I, p. 195 suggests reading κ]αὶ Ἐνάλ‹‹λ››ωι 81. For κατὰ Ἀνδρο̣ν̣[ί]κ̣ο̣υ *BL* I, p. 195 (= *SP* 397) suggests reading καταλε̣λιμμ̣έ̣νωι.

A restatement of Preisigke's analysis

P. Hibeh I 110 represents a page from the day-book of a Ptolemaic postal station. By way of summary of the movements through the postal station I reproduce below Preisigke's Summary Table.[2] It will be noted that all names in the document are Greek, which, as Wilcken[3] observes, at this period is an indication of Greek nationality. Dispatches designated by ἄνωθεν send items

2 F. Preisigke, 'Die ptolemäische Staatspost', *Klio* 7 (1907), p. 245.

3 U. Wilcken, *Chrestomathie*, p. 513. See also E. van 't Dack, op. cit., p. 98, and A.E. Samuel, 'The Greek element in the Ptolemaic bureaucracy', *Proc. of XIIth Int. Congr. of Pap.* (Toronto 1970), p. 448.

to the king and his financial minister in Alexandria (i.e. south ⇒ north) whilst those designated by κάτωθεν bring items from them (i.e. north ⇒ south). Of those entries which lack such a designation, the direction of nos. 1, 6, 8 and 11 can be ascertained to be ἄνωθεν (south ⇒ north) as the items are addressed to the king. Two other entries remain uncertain, i.e. nos. 2 and 4. Since no.2 is given to Θεύχρηστος and no. 4 to Τιμοκράτης and since both appear to operate along the southward route (see nos. 3 and 10), Preisigke (p. 244) suggests that the items travelled southwards. The origins of these entries remain unclear. Preisigke (pp. 245-246) also notes the difference between nos. 2 and 4 and the other entries in the day-book, i.e. (a) the full designation of the two brothers and (b) the lack of details concerning the addressee and destination of the items. He concludes that the brothers could not have been ordinary couriers but were instead higher officials. The fuller designation occurred out of respect. However, as they bear no title, he assumes that they are officials who hold a liturgical position. Further, Preisigke suggests that the position was that of postal director. Further confirmation is suggested by:

(a) The mention of ἄξιον in *l*.63. As it cannot be a charge on the postage of private items (high officials would have used the system gratis and the state-post was not available to private individuals)[4] nor a tip (a tip would not be recorded in the day-book) and as the amount is given to Phanias, a station-official, Preisigke concludes that it was a payment in compensation for service (pp. 246-247).

(b) The fact that the two brothers appear to serve at the same time. Cf. the practice of shared liturgies in the Roman period (pp. 247-248).

(c) The use of the verso of a private account to record the day-book. In other words, as the liturgists had to bear the cost of running the office, they made use of what papyrus they had available to reduce expenditure (p. 248).

Summary Table

No.	Lines	Day	Hour	Incoming postal items			The same outgoing postal items		
				Received from	Courier	Delivered to the official	Issued by the official	Courier	Dispatched to
1	54-60	16	?	(south)	[ ]	Ἀλεξάνδρωι	Ἀλεξανδρος	[N]ικοδήμωι	(north)
2	61-64	17	ἐωθινή	—	—	Ἀμίν‹ον›ι	Ἀμ[ί]ν[ω]ν	Θευχρήστωι	(south)
3	65-69	18	1	ἄνωθεν	Θεύχρ[η]στος	Δινίαι	Δινίας	Ἱππολύσωι	(north)
4	70-74	18	6	—	—	Φανίαι	Ἀμίνων	Τιμοκράτηι	(south)
5	75-87	19	11	κάτωθεν	[Νι]κόδημος	Ἀλεξάνδρωι	[ ]	[ ]	(south)
6	91-96	20	?	(south)	[Λ]υκοκλῆς	Ἀμ[ίνονι]	Ἀμίνων	Ἱππολύσωι	(north)
7	97-99	21	6	κάτωθεν	[ ]εναλε.	Φανίαι	῾Ωρος	Δι̣ον[υ]σίω̣ι	(south)
8	100-105	22	1	(south)	Α̣[ ]ων	[Δινίαι?]	Δινίας	Νικοδήμωι	(north)
9	106-108	22	12	ἄνωθεν	Λέων	Ἀ[μίνονι]	Ἀμίνων	[Ἱ]π̣π̣[ολύσωι]	(north)
10	109-114	23	ἐωθινή	ἄνωθεν	Τιμοκράτης	[Ἀλεξάνδρωι]	Ἀλέξανδρος	[ ]	(north)
11	51-53	?	?	(south)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(north)

The names of the station-officials can be ascertained from columns 7 and 8 of the above table. These officials saw to the receipt of in-coming items and the dispatch of out-going items

[4] The argument that the postal system was intended for government use only is ascertained from the fact that all items sent north (i.e. to Alexandria) are addressed either to the king or to his officials and all items received from the north are, at least in name, from the king (Preisigke, op. cit., pp. 257-263). Preisigke concludes: 'the postal system, as this also brings home, was created only in the interest of government service, above all, however, to facilitate the communication of the sovereign and the central government in Alexandria with the regional authorities'.

(p. 255). The items are designated as either κυλιστοί (larger rolled documents) or ἐπιστολαί (folded letters).[5] Preisigke (p. 247) suggests that Phanias was perhaps the technical manager of the station who also kept the day-book. The only evidence in support of the suggestion is that he received the ἄξιον. From the coincidence in the routes travelled by Nikodemos (day 16 ⇒ north; day 19 ⇐ north; and day 22 ⇒ north) and Hippolysos (day 18 ⇒ north; day 20 ⇒ north; and day 22 ⇒ north), Preisigke further concludes that each courier operated on a fixed stage of the relay. From the days on which these two couriers travelled he concludes that the journey was one day north with the return journey being made the following day (see below).

Day	Nikodemos	Hippolysos
16	⇒ north	(⇒ north)
17	(⇐ north)	(⇐ north)
18	(⇒ north)	⇒ north
19	⇐ north	(⇐ north)
20	(⇒ north)	⇒ north
21	(⇐ north)	(⇐ north)
22	⇒ north	⇒ north
23	(⇐ north)	(⇐ north)

Further from the coincidence in the days travelled (both Nikodemos and Hippolysos travel on the same days in the same direction), the assumed improbability that they would have travelled together, and the difference in recorded times of arrival (i.e. the 1st and 12th hours on day 22) of items then delivered (assuming no delay) to Nikodemos and Hippolysos, Preisigke (pp. 249-250) concludes that there was more than one postal service a day. Moreover, he surmises that there were other couriers who also travelled on the same northern route but on each day in the direction opposite to that travelled by Nikodemos and Hippolysos. On the basis of the data concerning Theuchrestos (early on day 17 ⇒ south; early on day 18 ⇐ south – assuming a day's rest before the next journey south on day 19) and Timokrates (day 18 ⇒ south; day 23 ⇐ south – assuming journeys in alternate directions each other day) Preisigke suggests a similar structure for the southern route, i.e. day x ⇒ south; day x+1 ⇐ south (pp. 250-251). However, from the occurrence of the names of at least 6 couriers on the southern route, he suggests that more than just two journeys may have been made in each direction each day (p. 251; perhaps another arriving at midnight, p. 254). Further, from the recorded times of receipt/dispatch (1st hour four times, 6th hour twice, 11th and 12th hours once each) and the assumption that both the northern and southern services were articulated, Preisigke (pp. 251-252) further concludes that the system operated according to a six-hour plan with at least four journeys passing through the station each day, i.e. from the south to the north at the 1st and 12th hours and from the north to the south at the 6th and 12th hours.

Hour	Day	Direction
1	18 22 23	south ⇒ north
6	18 21	north ⇒ south
11/12	19 22	north ⇒ south south ⇒ north

[5] F. Preisigke, op. cit., p. 263-264, and U. Wilcken, *Chrestomathie*, p. 513.

Assuming that adjoining postal stations will have operated with a somewhat similar six-hourly structure and that there would be little delay between the receipt and dispatch of postal items, Preisigke argues that the journey between stations was six hours.[6] A twelve-hour journey would have been too long and one would have expected in the day-book a more frequent occurrence of the same names if the journey were shorter, e.g. two hours for the Roman *cursus publicus* (pp. 253-254). Assuming a six-hour journey with receipts at the 1st hour and dispatches at the 12th hour, Preisigke argues that the relay system operated at night. He also entertains the possibility that there may have been another receipt/dispatch through the post office of *P. Hibeh* I 110 at midnight (p. 254).

Preisigke recognises that the small quantity of correspondence presents a problem for his hypothesis. From the small amount of correspondence between the central government and local officials recorded in the day-book, he concludes that it can have recorded only part of this correspondence. He assumes that it records items sent by express post (p. 265). Other less pressing correspondence between the central government and local officials will have been sent by other means. But the problem persists. Why would a system operate four times a day if there was so little to carry? To answer the difficulty Preisigke postulates that the postal system was used for other official correspondence and that these postal items were recorded in another day-book. The surviving day-book only recorded correspondence between the central government and its local officials; the other day-book will have recorded correspondence between local officials (pp. 264-266). The postulation of the hypothetical document is prompted by the following considerations:
(a) The postal system does not appear to have operated as need required. If it had, then one would have expected dispatches at times other than at the 1st, 6th and 12th hours. In other words, the times at which dispatches occurred suggest a regular service at set times. This in turn highlights the problem posed by unrecorded journeys and the difference between the frequency of the service and the quantity of postal items conveyed.
(b) Since Hippolysos makes journeys north on days 18, 20 and 22, it must be assumed that he returned on days 19 and 21. As it is highly improbable given the practically-minded inhabitants of Egypt that couriers would have returned empty-handed, why are these returns unrecorded?
(c) If the postal station only handled the small quantity of correspondence between the central government and local officials, it is difficult to explain the relatively large number (five are recorded) of officials in attendance at the station.

Preisigke (pp. 266-269) next compares his reconstruction of the Ptolemaic postal system with what is known and can be conjectured of the Persian system. Similarities include the following: (a) at each station there was a person in charge of the receipt and dispatch of items; (b) each station employed more than one person; (c) operation was by night also; (d) stages were a day's journey apart; and (e) the receipt and dispatch of items was immediate. Though the evidence does not permit Preisigke to conclude that the Persian system also operated on a regular schedule, various considerations lead him to postulate that it did, i.e. (a) the need to make return journeys; and (b) the need to articulate one stage with others which fed into it. He concludes then that the need to maintain communications along the entire length of Egypt will have caused the Persians to establish the postal system and it was this system that the Greek rulers found and perpetuated out of the same need.

From the assumption that the postal system whose operation is recorded in the day-book was an express service, and from analogy with the Persian system, Preisigke (p. 269) postulates

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[6] According to H.-G. Pflaum, op. cit., p. 208, four relays of six hours would have covered an average distance of 180 kilometres in a day.

that journeys were made by horse.[7] He (pp. 269-271) further suggests that the horses were provided in turn by the military settlers (i.e. cleruchs) as a liturgy. In support of this he offers no direct evidence but instead the possibility that this suggestion offers to explain two rather obscure taxes, i.e. the ἀνιππίας (paid by cleruchs who could not or did not want to supply a horse) and βύρσης (paid by cleruchs for bags in which the letters and rolls could be placed).

As observed above, Preisigke had concluded from the small quantity of items to and from the central government that another method was probably used to convey less urgent correspondence. Evidence for this is found in *P. Oxy*. IV 710 (Oxyrhynchus, 111 BC). The papyrus appears to record a payment advice directed to a bank. Preisigke (pp. 271-273) concludes from the mention of a camel-driver (assuming the express post only used horses) that the text does not concern the express post; from the number of βυβλιοφόροι that the traffic was considerable; from the presence of an ἔφοδος that the operation was official; from the qualification ἐν τῷ Ὀξυρυγχίτηι that the employment of the forty-four men encompassed the entire nome. Preisigke suggests that all persons were employed in a second and slower postal system, the ὡρογράφος being the official in charge of the station and performing a function similar to that of the official in charge of the express postal station; the βυβλιοφόροι being couriers journeying by foot and maintaining communication between the nome and village officials;[8] the camel driver carrying heavier items between nome capitals. Preisigke further postulates that such journeys will have formed a second and slower postal system linking the nome capitals with Alexandria. This network of camels (but not the βυβλιοφόροι) may also have operated according to a fixed timetable, much as the express post did. In this regard Kornemann[9] points to the title of the official in charge, i.e. ὡρογράφος. Items which were not sent by express post travelled by means of this second system. As there was only one camel it is further postulated that it could have travelled only along one stage of the system, i.e. always between Oxyrhynchus and the same, next station. Assuming that the camel-driver will have needed to return the same day, Preisigke suggests that the distance between stations was less than six hours. Preisigke thinks this second postal system to be of Egyptian origin.

A discussion of Preisigke's analysis

Preisigke's analysis and reconstruction depends on an assumed model of the postal operation, namely that it was an efficient, express post which operated in many ways like the Persian system. The model causes him at various points to opt for one assumption or explanation without an exhaustive analysis of other possibilities. Homberg states: 'As we see, this postal system is so good as identical with the Persian ἀγγαρήιον and probably also established after its model'.[10] Pflaum observes that the Persian postal system is 'absolutely the same as that which Preisigke has restored to life from *P. Hibeh* I 110, which confirms for us the exactness of the data which Xenophon supplies us'.[11] The question, however, is whether Preisigke has not implicitly assumed

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[7] On the less than efficient use of horses in antiquity see L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London 1974), pp. 181-182. There were no stirrups; saddles were 'rudimentary'; and the horse was unshod.

[8] For a similar system operated on foot in the Persian empire see Pseudo Aristotle, Περὶ κόσμου 6, and discussion by H.-G. Pflaum, op. cit., p. 201.

[9] E. Kornemann, op. cit., 993.

[10] E.J. Holmberg, op. cit., p. 24.

[11] H.-G. Pflaum, op. cit., p. 195.

Xenophon's description in his choice between competing reconstructions.[12] There is a clear under-determination in the evidence and, as I hope to show, Preisigke's reconstruction is but one possible interpretation of the evidence.

a) Were horses used?

The alleged use of horses by the Ptolemaic postal system is an example of the apparently controlling influence of the Persian model. There is nothing in *P. Hibeh* I 110 to suggest that horses were used. Also Preisigke's conclusion that the service was an express one (and thus presumably one requiring the use of horses) very much begs the question. It relies on the assumptions that the change-over of mail was immediate and that there were at least four dispatches through the post office daily. But these assumptions are open to question (see below). In support of the employment of horses in the Ptolemaic postal system Preisigke also makes use of the supposed power of this hypothesis to explain two obscure imposts, the ἀνιππίας and βύρσης. In part Preisigke's argument also rests on the analogy of an impost mentioned in *BGU* III 969 (AD 142), where in lieu of the πενθήμερος ὄνων a grain payment was delivered to a granary. Those who owned a donkey had to allow it to serve the five-day corvée, whilst those who did not made a substitution payment. Preisigke suggests that the ἀνιππίας was a similar type of impost which operated in relation to the supply of horses for the postal system. The arguments are, however, problematic; for though the hypothesis may offer an explanation of these imposts, there is no reason to associate them with the postal system and to infer that revenue from them was used to finance it.[13] Mention should also be made of the chronological

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[12] The reconstruction which Preisigke makes of the Ptolemaic express post equally influences his understanding of the Persian postal system. An example of this can be seen in Pflaum's discussion. Despite the claim that the Persian postal system was 'absolutely the same', Pflaum questions whether the postal system of the Persian empire actually operated to a regular time-table. Such an operation would have required an 'extremely vast and onerous organization' (e.g. the number of horses to be provided by the state) which would not have been consonant with the intentions of the system. In this regard Pflaum, op. cit., pp. 204-205, contrasts the comparatively greater decentralization of the Persian empire which would have limited to a considerable degree the number of dispatches to the king and his government with the 'totalitarian' nature of the fiscal administration of the Ptolemies with its constant flow of documents and correspondence. In other words, it was the introduction of a regular system to serve the fiscal administration of the kingdom which was the greatest innovation of the Ptolemaic postal service (Pflaum, op. cit., pp. 207-209).

[13] On the basis of *P. Petrie* II 39, III 110, *PSI* IV 388, *P. Tebt*. I 99, and III 1036 (cf. also *P. Petrie* III 54b and *P. Tebt*. III 1061) it may be concluded that the ἀνιππίας was an impost placed on cleruchs which was paid annually in grain. Opinions have varied as to the purpose of the ἀνιππίας; see J.P. Mahaffy, *P. Petrie* II 39, p. 130, U. Wilcken, *Griechische Ostraca*, I, pp. 344-345, J.G. Smyly, *P. Petrie* III 110, pp. 277-278 and A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire des Lagides*, III (Paris 1906, reprinted 1978), p. 236. *P. Petrie* II 39 and *P. Med. Bar.* 5 (*Aegyptus* 66 [1986], pp. 24-30) associate the payment (though not exclusively, cf. *P. Tebt.* I 99) with cleruchs designated as orphans (i.e. minors in possession of a cleruchy) and thereby offer tentative support for the hypothesis that the ἀνιππίας was an impost raised on those either who were unable to ride (i.e. *P. Petrie* II 39, III 110 and *P. Med. Bar.* 5) or who did not support a mount (*P. Petrie* III 54b, *P. Tebt*. I 99 and III 1036). C. Préaux, *Le économie royale des Lagides* (Brussels 1939), pp. 214-217, points to both the military importance of the horse and its relatively high cost. No doubt it was in the government's interest to place an impost on those who benefited from their privileged position but could not fully meet their obligations. There is no reason, however, to associate the payment with the postal service. The βύρσης appears to have been an impost paid by cleruchs in cash annually. There is no indication of an association between it and the ἀνιππίας. The purpose of the βύρσης (= 'hide' or 'tanned skin') is obscure; see J.P. Mahaffy, *P. Petrie* II 39, p. 130, and U. Wilcken, *Griechische Ostraca*, I, p. 352. The term appears to be too general to support Preisigke's more specific interpretation of it. Indeed, the use

span encompassed by the analogy (i.e. *c*.250 BC and AD 142) and the difficulty that this causes, especially in view of the changes wrought in the area of liturgies by the Roman administration.[14]

Westermann[15] uses *SB* 7263 (= *P. Lond*. VII 1973), a letter of Apollonios to Zenon, dated Mesore 1 (= 21st September), 254 BC, to confirm Preisigke's reconstruction and to illustrate the efficiency of the Ptolemaic postal service. The letter was received and docketed by Zenon the next day at the 10th hour.[16] Westermann notes that the recording of the time is unique in the extant correspondence of the Zenon archive. Where other letters from Apollonios are docketed by Zenon (e.g. *P. Cair. Zen*. II 59203 and 59204) only the year, month and day are recorded. Westermann suggests that the difference can be explained by the fact that the former letter came via the express post whereas the other letters by private messengers. As further support for the use of the express postal service Westermann notes the distance between Alexandria and Philadelphia, some 200 miles, and concludes that the letter must have travelled both day and night by relays of horses to reach its destination on the next day.

There are essentially two problems with Westermann's analysis of the text of this papyrus. First, the assumption that the unique docketing of the time was the result of the use of the express post is not the most plausible explanation. Times were noted in the day-book of the postal official but it does not follow that it was similarly noted by the letter's recipient. The most probable explanation is to be found in the contents of the letter itself. Since Zenon was commanded to send the required transport immediately on receipt of the letter, it follows that he may have noted the hour of receipt as an indication of his compliance. The second problem is discussed more fully by the editor,[17] and it concerns the assumption that the letter was written and sent from Alexandria. He notes that: (a) the use of the verb ἀνεπεπλεύκεισαν does imply that the travellers had left from Alexandria. Indeed, the editor suggests that if the verb is construed as an epistolary tense and translated 'they have this moment (ἤδη) sailed up', then Apollonios may have just left their company; and (b) if they had set sail from Alexandria (perhaps a leisurely journey of 10 days to Ptolemais including stops at Heliopolos and Memphis to see the sights there) and Zenon had acted immediately on receipt of the letter, then the transport would have reached Ptolemais (25 miles or a day's journey from Philadelphia) 'several days, and possibly a week or more, before they were required'.[18] The editor also notes that from the use of the definite articles in *ll*.3-4 it is reasonable to assume that Zenon had already received notice of the intending travel requirements and that this may have been dispatched by special messenger from Alexandria, a journey of 4 days, e.g. *PSI* 514, cf. also *BGU* 1680 *ll*.3-4 — εὖ καὶ καλῶς γέγονα εἰς

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of hides was so extensive even in military circles that it seems to stretch credibility to suggest a particular purpose for this impost.

[14] See J.D. Thomas, 'Compulsory public service in Roman Egypt', *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten*, edd. G. Grimm, H. Heinen and E. Winter (Mainz am Rhein 1983), pp. 35-39. It should also be noted that the more commonly attested *penthemeros* (= personal liturgical service on the irrigation system) is a Roman institution; see P.J. Sijpesteijn, *P. Lugd.-Bat*. XII, pp. 4-7. The earliest certificate dates from AD 45.

[15] W.L. Westermann, op. cit., pp. 364-387, especially pp. 376ff.

[16] The editor of *P. Lond*. VII, p. 66, uses the tables of F. Ginzel, *Handbuch der mathematischen und technischen Chronologie* II, p. 166, to calculate that the 10th hour on the 22nd September at Philadelphia (lat. 29° 27′) was almost exactly 4 pm. According to Westermann, Apollonios would have had to have his letter dispatched by the earliest mail of the 21st September.

[17] See *P. Lond*. VII, pp. 63-64.

[18] *P. Lond*. VII, p. 64.

Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἐν τέσσαρσι ἡμέραις. The above letter was thus written later when Apollonios left their company, perhaps at Memphis, wishing to inform Zenon of a change of plans. The travellers were now to start their tour of the Arsinoite nome from Ptolemais rather than Philadelphia. The letter was thus sent so that Zenon could dispatch the transport to Ptolemais in time for the travellers to continue their journey by land on Mesore 3. Whether one accepts the editor's reconstruction or not, the important point is that uncertainty over the letter's point of origin makes its use risky in any argument as to the efficiency and regularity of the Ptolemaic express post.

The assumption that the couriers of *P. Hibeh* I 110 made use of a relay of horses is essential to Preisigke's argument that they constituted an express post. However, as the above discussion has shown, there is no evidence to indicate that horses were in fact used.

b) Rounding of time and the length of time between receipt and dispatch

Preisigke simplifies the data to support his case that the system operated to a regular timetable. The two entries ἑωθινῆς are equated with the 1st hour and the entry at the 11th hour is considered either an accident or an exception. The argument also rests on the assumption that the recording of time is reasonably exact. The evidence, however, is a little ambiguous. The recording of an 11th hour implies a degree of precision. But the two entries ἑωθινῆς indicate a use of approximation also. Indeed, as the system was unlikely to have worked like clock-work some rounding of times is only to be expected. The question is the extent to which rounding occurred. Frequently time was approximated either to the 1st hour or to the nearest hour divisible by three. Was this the case with entries to the day-book also? One has, nevertheless, to account for the rather anomalous entry of the 11th hour on day 19. The problem is that the whole entry for this day is anomalous because of its greater detail (sender and place of destination are always recorded) and the fact that it is the only correspondence in eight days which is designated as coming from the king. Whether the king was the actual author of the correspondence or not is of little importance to the keeper of the day-book.[19] Preisigke (p. 263) suggests that the postal items simply carried the words παρὰ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου on their outer sides. It is apparent that the post official was somewhat more meticulous in his recording of the details of this correspondence.[20] May not this care have also extended to a more accurate recording of its time of arrival and dispatch? If this is so, we find that on the one occasion when a more accurate time is recorded it does not fall within Preisigke's schema of the post office's regular timetable. In turn this entry for day 19 confirms the possibility that the hours recorded for the other days are rounded.

Related to the question of the regularity of the timetable is that concerning the length between the time when the correspondence was received into the post office and the time when it was dispatched. Preisigke (p. 251) assumes that there was no delay between them with the result that the timetable was able to be maintained. However, it is of interest to note that on both occasions where the 6th hour is recorded there is a difference between receiving and dispatching officials. Preisigke (p. 247) suggests that Phanias may have been the manager of the station (cf. *l*.63 where both Phanias and Aminon are present in the station — Aminon received the correspondence and Phanias the ἄξιον). If so, Phanias may have been on duty at the same time as the other official and just so happened to receive the correspondence. However, this is only one

[19] On the possible composition of the correspondence in the king's name by the finance ministry and other departments in Alexandria see Preisigke, op. cit., p. 262.

[20] Cf. the docket of receipt on the verso of *P. Lond.* VII 1973. Here as the message requires transport to arrive on time, Zenon is careful to note the exact time of arrival, no doubt, in order to cover himself.

possible solution. If the recorded times are only approximate, as suggested above, then it follows that the change-over may not have been immediate. Moreover, the two entries recorded for the 6th hour may actually suggest a delay of some time as different persons handle the receipt and dispatch of the items. If one looks at the data for days 18 and 22 and considers the number of persons employed in the office (five are named), it is not unreasonable to suggest that different persons served in the office at different times of the day, e.g. in the morning and afternoon. If so, the fact that the entries for the 6th hour record differing names for the receipt and the dispatch of the items implies that there may have been a delay here. Again Preisigke's model has hindered a fuller examination of other possibilities.

Preisigke argues that the Ptolemaic system operated at night. However, the day-book of our post office offers no direct evidence that this was so; there is no entry for a dispatch occurring during the night. Instead, night dispatches are argued from (a) the times of receipts (1st hour) and of dispatches (12th hour) to and from our post office and (b) the assumed duration of each journey (six hours). Again, the underlying assumption in this argument is that the change-over times were immediate, i.e. that the courier, who arrived at the 1st hour, had just arrived and that the courier, who departed at the 12th hour, made his journey immediately. Such an assumption begs the question as to whether the postal service was an express one or not. However, supposing the service not to have been an express post in the sense that Preisigke had understood it, then there is no reason to dismiss the possibility that the receipts recorded for the 1st hour actually arrived the preceding evening when the office was closed and there was no official on duty. The change-over was then effected the following morning when the office opened again. Tentative support for this argument may be found in the frequency of entries either denoted by the numeral 1 or ἑωθινή (four of the eight recorded times are for this hour). Similarly, it may be argued that the courier, who received a dispatch at the 12th hour, may not have travelled immediately and without a stop to the next station. At least part of the journey may have been made in the cool of the following morning to arrive at the next station ἑωθινή. Of course, such a reconstruction of the evidence raises serious doubts over the assumed time that each journey took and must throw into doubt the rigid six-hourly timetable. It also explains to a considerable degree why the ὡρογράφος may have only approximated the times of dispatch.

c) The alleged second day-book

Another problem in Preisigke's analysis is encountered in his argument for a second day-book. According to this argument it will have contained a record of correspondence between local officials which was of an urgent nature; the day-book of which *P. Hibeh* I 110 is a page contained a record of urgent correspondence between the central government and local officials only. It is here that a difficulty occurs, for it is not at all clear that *P. Hibeh* I 110 contained only such correspondence. Preisigke draws his conclusion from the number of rolls and letters which concern the king or his *dioiketes*, Apollonios. However, he must infer from this that even when the names of individuals are apparently given without title, the persons are officials of the central government, e.g. Antiochos the Cretan, Menodoros and Xel[.....] on day 16; Antiochos the Cretan on day 22; and Parik[.....] on day 23. That the name of Antiochos occurs twice may suggest only tentative confirmation of the hypothesis. The real problem, however, is posed by southward moving dispatches on days 17, 18 and 21. The dispatch of day 21 is undefined both as to origin and to destination. It cannot be decided whether it concerns correspondence from the central government nor, for that matter, whether the correspondence was official at all; cf. Preisigke's table on p. 265 which classifies the correspondence as 'from other high officials', i.e. other than king or *dioiketes*. Turning to days 17 and 18, Preisigke in his table on p. 258 suggests

that the dispatches of these two days concern the postal service. The suggestion, I think, rests on his conclusion that the two brothers, Phoenix the elder and Phoenix the younger, were directors of the Ptolemaic postal service. However, both Oertel and Wilcken rightly question whether the two cleruchs could have held the liturgical position of director of the postal system.[21] In the Ptolemaic period the civil service was professional, i.e. officials held their post by free candidature; it was not until the first century AD that official positions began to be made liturgical.[22] Thus if the two cleruchs were liturgists at all, they would have only been such by virtue of the fact they had been compelled to supply horses to the postal service, for liturgies of this general type are known to have existed in the Ptolemaic period. If so, the question naturally arises as to the nature of the rolls which these two cleruchs handed over. If the postal service was official, in what capacity could these brothers send correspondence through it? Was it in their military capacity (so Oertel) or was it because as suppliers of horses for the postal service they were granted this privilege (so Wilcken)? The document does not permit one to answer the question. But it does allow one to raise the question as to whether this correspondence should have properly been registered in this day-book, whose alleged purpose was to register correspondence between the central government and local officials only. It thus appears that the postulation of a second day-book is not without certain difficulties by virtue of the undefined contents of some dispatches recorded in *P. Hibeh* I 110.

d) The number and frequency of the postal service

There is a degree of inconsistency and selectivity in the way Preisigke treats the data in other ways as well. For example, he concludes that at least two journeys northward (1st and 12th hours) and two journeys southward (6th and 12th hours) passed through the station daily. The evidence for day 17 (southward at the 1st hour) is dismissed as its direction is ascertained from the name of the courier (p. 252). But surely this is not a good enough reason as the evidence either implies that there was another journey southward at the 1st hour or that couriers did not traverse the one route only. Preisigke (p. 252) considers another possibility also, namely that the dispatch of day 17 is 'another exception', i.e. like the possible exception of the time of the entry of day 19 (p. 251). The argument initially strikes one as *ad hoc* and it is unclear whether Preisigke has fully realised its implications, for there are now two exceptions (one might even increase this to four exceptions given the indefinite nature of the time indicated by ἑωθινή) in a total of eight dispatches whose times are recorded. If he really entertained the thought that the two dispatches were exceptions, such a statistic should surely lead Preisigke to question the hypothesis that the post office operated to a fixed daily timetable. Another point can also be made. The uncertainty of the direction of the dispatch of day 17 which Preisigke expresses on p.

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[21] F. Oertel, *Die Liturgie* (Leipzig 1917, reprinted 1965), pp. 55-56, and U. Wilcken, *Chrestomathie*, p. 513. Oertel also questions whether the evidence of *P. Oxy*. IV 710 can be drawn on to support the liturgical nature of the various positions.

[22] F. Oertel, *Liturgie*, pp. 382-388, dates the innovation to the second half of the first century. Wilcken, *Grundzüge*, pp. 339-341, suggests the reign of Tiberius. J.D. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 35-39, sides with Wilcken's earlier dating and in support offers *P. Mich*. X 582 (AD 49/50). *P. Tebt*. I 27 (113 BC), in which the appointment of γενηματοφύλακες was by compulsion, has been raised as a possible exception; however, the circumstances which pertained in this papyrus were exceptional as its wording is alleged to show; see Wilcken, *Grundzüge*, pp. 339-340. See further H. Cuvigny, 'La surveillance des récoltes (γενηματοφύλακες)', *CE* 59 (1984), pp. 123-135. According to Cuvigny's analysis of the data the Ptolemaic γενηματοφύλακες were only occasional and probably unpaid appointees who assisted the φυλακῖται.

252, is not reflected in his discussion on p. 250, for here it is stated that Theuchrestos travelled south on day 17 and completed the return journey on day 18 (*ll*.65-69). Indeed, the evidence functions in his argument for the regularity of the postal system. Also the uncertainty expressed over the direction of Theuchrestos' journey of day 17 is not equally expressed with regard to that of Timokrates on day 18, for here also the direction is determined by the courier's name and it likewise plays a part in Preisigke's argument for the regularity of the postal system (p. 251). Given the conclusion that couriers made their return journeys the day following their outward journey, Preisigke should conclude that on day 17 there was a southward journey at the 1st hour. Why he does not draw this conclusion is unclear. After all, he does entertain the possibility of more than just two journeys in each direction every day. He even goes so far as to postulate a possible dispatch passing through the station at midnight. However, it may be noted that his position does not appear to be consistent throughout the article. For example, on p. 252 Preisigke speaks of at least four posts passing through the post office during the day. On p. 264 the postal dispatches are said to have been undertaken at most four times a day. The latter regularity is then assumed on p. 265 with no further qualification. Perhaps a reason why Preisigke does not consider an early dispatch southwards is that it results in a picture of the postal service which is unbalanced for there is no evidence for a third dispatch moving north from the station which would restore equilibrium to the system. The evidence does, however, permit one to postulate the third northward moving journey, for (a) in the eight journeys recording a time of arrival and dispatch the probability of this journey not being recorded is not significant (approximately a 23 in 100 chance of occurring randomly); and (b) the three journeys which do not mention a time are all northward. In other words, it might be one or more of these journeys whose time of arrival and dispatch is now lost. Thus there could have been three services operating daily through the post office in each direction. No doubt, such a frequency might be seen to justify the number of couriers (= six) evident on the southern stage and the number of officials (= five) working in the office itself. Why then does Preisigke not conclude that there were at least six journeys passing through the post daily? Perhaps the reason is that it is difficult to justify such a high frequency service given the small quantity of correspondence carried. The problem is further compounded if one accepts the argument of Wilcken and Holmberg that in addition to this service a parallel postal service also ran along the eastern side of the Nile.[23] These considerations in turn lead one to question whether one is justified in using the evidence of distinct days to argue the number of daily dispatches, as Preisigke does. In other words, from the evidence that on days 18, 22 and 23 there is a northward journey at the 1st hour, on days 18 and 21 there is a southward journey at the 6th hour and on days 19 and 22 there are journeys both northward and southward at the 12th hour (or there abouts) can one conclude that there were at least two journeys northward (1st and 12th hours) and two journeys southward (6th and 12th hours) every day? What justification can be found for so treating the evidence?

Preisigke argues that the day-book only recorded items sent by express post between the central government and its local officials. A second book, it is postulated, existed which recorded items sent between local officials by express post. The difficulties with this reconstruction of the

[23] U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge*, p. 373, and E.J. Holmberg, op. cit., pp. 24-25. The argument rests on fairly tenuous points: (a) the coincidence between the name given to the relay stations by Xenophon (ἱππῶνες) and the name of a town (Ἱππώνων attested in the Hibeh papyri for the third century BC) on the eastern side of the Nile; and (b) the possible identification of Ἱππώνων with Hibeh where the page of the postal day-book was found. E.J. Holmberg, who seems to disregard Preisigke's hypothesis of a second day-book, also notes the problem posed by the small quantity of correspondence, but justifies the maintenance of the postal service by the importance of the correspondence and the urgent need to convey it quickly.

evidence are numerous. If we reckon that the express post operated into Alexandria twice a day, then *P. Hibeh* I 110 does not show that this stage of the system was well used, for all such correspondence would need to be entered in the day-book. To justify the alleged regularity of the service one must also assume that much other correspondence was added along the way between this post office and Alexandria. But another difficulty presents itself. The day-book records are entire for a period of at least eight days. In that time sixteen southward trips from Alexandria would have been made according to Preisigke's hypothesis; however, only one such entry is made in the day-book. Again, one must assume that if the regularity of the service from Alexandria itself was justified, then the vast bulk of correspondence would have concerned local officials between Alexandria and this post office. Both these assumptions entail a third assumption. Given the infrequency of correspondence between the central government and its local officials recorded in the day-book of this post office, the existence of a regular service could only be justified here if the majority of correspondence was between local officials themselves. However, such an assumption lacks supporting evidence. Indeed given the central bureaucratic administration of Egypt by the Ptolemies, this assumption seems unlikely. An even more telling difficulty for the hypothesis of regularity is the size of the one definite dispatch from Alexandria. It contained seven distinct items (i.e. they are addressed to different individuals and according to Preisigke probably originate in different departments of government in Alexandria) which are carefully noted in the day-book. To defend Preisigke's hypothesis of regularity one must assume that by coincidence all the correspondence from Alexandria to officials in the higher districts of Egypt just so happened to have been prepared at the same time which would then account for their dispatch on the same day. A far more plausible assumption seems to be that they had been prepared over several days awaiting dispatch whenever that may be.

e) The couriers and their routes

From the coincidence that as far as the evidence goes the same persons only ever journey along the same route Preisigke concludes that the couriers only worked along the one route. The coincidence may be accounted for in other ways. For example, if Nikodemos and Hippolysos were actually attached to the station immediately north of this station, though they made journeys both to the north and to the south of their station only the latter would be recorded in our papyrus. Such an assumption seems to make better sense of the records concerning Nikodemos. On days 17-18 there is no record of his movements in the day-book. This may be explained if the movements had been recorded in the day-book of the next station as movements to its north. In other words, on day 16 Nikodemos made the journey north to the next station. After a period of rest and with a new batch of correspondence newly arrived at the station he made a further journey north on day 17. On day 18 he returned from this station making the recorded journey again south to our station on day 19.

Preisigke's argument is cumulative and rests heavily on the observation that Hippolysos made journeys north on days 18, 20 and 22. The regularity also is important to his argument. The difficulty is, however, the insecurity of the reading of his name for day 22, i.e. [Ἱ]ππ̣[ολύσωι] at *l.*108. Preisigke's analysis also appears to be based on arguments which need to be qualified by subsequent conclusions. For example, against the possibility of a shorter journey of two hours Preisigke makes two observations (pp. 253-254). First, he points to the evidence which suggests that an outward journey was made on one day and the return on the next (cf. pp. 249-250). Second, he states that if the journeys were shorter the names of the couriers would appear more frequently than they do, as they would soon return. Both arguments do not necessarily follow if one assumes, as Preisigke does, that there was a second day-book recording the receipt and dis-

patch of other types of correspondence. The postulated existence of a second day-book means that it is impossible to decide whether the couriers actually returned on the subsequent day or earlier. Moreover, the frequency with which names were recorded in the extant day-book is a function not of the length of the journey but of the nature of the correspondence carried.

f) The second postal system

One must question the extent of the description of the slower postal system which is sketched from *P. Oxy*. IV 710 (Oxyrhynchus, 111 BC). From this order to pay forty-four papyri-carriers, a précis-writer, an escort/overseer and a camel-driver, Preisigke is able to offer a rather full description of this second system. The argument rests on the assumption that the persons listed are in some way associated. At the time of his writing this assumption found its only support in the apparent lexical cohesion of the terms (all titles imply that the persons are concerned with transport in some form or other) and the fact that the payment is common. However, to draw any inference from this last point is hazardous as the purpose of the payment is unclear. Preisigke himself observes that a payment of one talent for a month is too high (especially if the post was supported by liturgies) to represent wages or compensation paid to the post's employees.[24] In other words, caution is required, for until the purpose of the payment can be ascertained, the nature of the association is unclear. Nevertheless, a group of papyri published after Preisigke's article do appear to offer support for an association between the titles. The papyri are the letters *P. Hal.* 7 and 8, *SB* 7165, and *P. Strasb*. 621a and b. They are all addressed to Pythonikos and thus must have come from his archive. In these letters we find the following titles mentioned:

(a) *P. Strasb*. 621a verso: Pythonikos bears the title ἔφοδος on the address of the letter.

(b) *P. Strasb*. 621b *l*.7 and verso: the letter is addressed to Pythonikos but appears to have been delivered to the ὡρογράφος, supposedly in Pythonikos' absence (cf. *P. Hal.* 8 *ll*.4-5).

(c) *P. Hal.* 7 *l*.6: an ἔφοδος is mentioned in conjunction with a βυβλιοφόρος.

(d) *P. Hal.* 8 verso: the docket appears to note that the letter was delivered by a βυβλιοφόρος.[25]

The most probable construction to place on the evidence is that Pythonikos was an official connected to the postal service. Cf. also *P. Hal.* 7 where mention is made of a letter which Demokrates sent to Pythonikos and which was to be delivered to Pausanias.

Preisigke considered that the ἔφοδος either escorted the καμηλίτης or was more generally a control official of the second postal system. *P. Hal.* 7 concerns in part an order to send a quantity of dates packed in jars to the writer. The text continues: [Π]τολεμαίωι δὲ διά[σ]τειλαι, εἴπερ μὴ τὸν βυβλιαφόρον καὶ τὸν ἔφοδον ἐκπέπει[κα]ς — 'Give (them) to Ptolemaios, if you

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[24] Also relevant to the question of payment are the contemporaneous texts of *BGU* VI 1232 (Oxyrhynchus, 111/110 BC). For the date of *BGU* VI 1232 see E. van 't Dack, op. cit., p. 101. Here the secretary of the βυβλιοφόροι writes to the subordinate of the *basilikogrammateus* acknowledging receipt of payments in grain for the βυβλιοφόροι. Payments were made through the subordinate (διὰ σοῦ) and covered periods of two months (70 artabas for Tybi and Mecheir, 65 artabas for Pachon and Pauni and an advance of 22 artabas for Epeiph). The second text is dated Pauni 13.

[25] Cf. also *P. Hal.* 7, p. 201, concerning the verso of that letter. Βυβλιοφόροι are also mentioned in the papyri *P. Ryl*. IV 555 (257 BC) and *CPR* XIII 11 (third century BC). *CPR* XIII 11 is of interest in that it lists two persons dwelling in Athenas kome as βυβλιοφόροι, one male and one female. It is suggested (*CPR* XIII, p. 57) that the assertion '2 couriers' is to be taken cum grano salis (the papyrus contains a list of professions which was used to calculate revenue from the salt-tax) and that the one female was the wife of the βυβλιοφόρος and thus not a courier herself.

have not persuaded over the courier and ἔφοδος'.[26] The editors surmise that ἐκπέπει[κα]ς is a euphemism for a bribe to get the courier to transport the dates. Two considerations appear to weigh against this interpretation, namely (i) that Pythonikos was probably an official of the postal system, though presumably not at that time the ἔφοδος (*P. Strasb*. 621a verso); and (ii) that the letter itself was probably official.[27] Be that as it may, the letter is otherwise of importance in that it indicates to the editors and Holmberg that: (a) this second type of postal service was not confined to the Oxyrhynchite nome (*P. Hal.* 7 comes from the Apollinopolite nome); and (b) the ἔφοδος was probably a control official, for he is found in association with a βυβλιοφόρος (not a καμηλίτης) and it appears that one had to persuade him also.[28] The editors thus suggest that the ἔφοδος of *P. Oxy*. IV 710 was probably located in the metropolis and had the forty-four βυβλιοφόροι under his supervision.

Of more concern to Preisigke's reconstruction are *P. Tebt*. III 951 (third centrury BC) and *SB* XIV 11308 (251 BC, = *P. Hibeh* I 146). Though fragmentary, the texts indicate that the βυβλιοφόροι did not necessarily travel on foot. *P. Tebt*. III 951 is a petition to the king from a cavalry officer (δεκανικός) and appears to concern wages for a two month period (cf. *BGU* VI 1232) when he acted as a βυβλιοφόρος. Clarysse observes that he 'probably used his horse when acting as a βυβλιοφόρος'.[29] *SB* XIV 11308, also fragmentary, is considered as possibly either a declaration of property (in this instance the declaration of a horse) or a military report.[30] Alexandros, the declarant, describes himself as [Π]έρσης ἰδιω̣[τὴς] τῶν Ζωίλ̣ου, i.e. as a 'Persian' and ordinary soldier in Zoïlos' company. Of interest is the occurrence of βυβλιαφορουντ[ ] in *l*.11. Again the association between the declaration of a horse and the use of the term βυβλιοφορέω indicates that the βυβλιοφόροι of the Ptolemaic postal system did not always travel on foot. To these papyri one can also add *P. Strasb*. 621b. In the body of this letter is found the sentence μ[ελησάτω?] σοι καὶ ἔμπροσ[θεν] τῶ[ν κατοίκ]ων ἱππέων (*ll*.10-11). Unfortunately, the fragmentary condition of the letter does not allow one to make much sense of it. However, the association between cavalrymen and personnel of the postal system (the letter is addressed to Pythonikos, the ἔφοδος) is significant, the more so in view of *P. Tebt*. III 951 and *SB* XIV 11308. One might also note *SB* 7165, a letter also addressed to Pythonikos which concerns the delivery of a horse's harness (στρῶμα).

Now these papyri create a serious difficulty for Preisigke's reconstruction. If the βυβλιοφόροι were sometimes mounted couriers and the official in charge of them carried the title ὡρογράφος, what is there to differentiate this second postal system from the express post of *P. Hibeh* I 110? Indeed, Preisigke's differentiation of the postal systems is based on the slightest evidence; he takes the mention of the καμηλίτης in *P. Oxy*. IV 710 as proof that the papyrus does not concern the express post which according to his hypothesis was operated only by horse. The interpretation appears to be guided by his hypothesis. Moreover, if one removes this distinction, certain advantages accrue. First, an explanation for the number of couriers operating the north

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[26] On the use of βυβλιοφόροι to carry objects other than letters and documents see *P. Ryl.* IV 555.

[27] The tone of the letter (*P. Hal.* 7, p. 200) and the possibility of its being delivered by a βυβλιοφόρος (*P. Hal.* 7, p. 201, and also the dockets on the verso of *P. Hal.* 8 and *SB* 7165) indicate to the editors that the letter may have been official.

[28] See *P. Hal.* 7, pp. 199-200, and E.J. Holmberg, op. cit., pp. 26-27. On the role of the ἔφοδοι as supervisors of tax-farmers and tax-collectors see *P. Rev. Laws* col. X and XII (259 BC). See also *P. Tebt*. I, pp. 424 and 550-551, and G.M. Harper, 'Tax Contractors and their Relation to Tax Collection in Ptolemaic Egypt', *Aegyptus* 14 (1934), p. 52.

[29] W. Clarysse, 'Notes on Three Papyri concerning Ptolemaic Clerouchs', *Anc. Soc*. 6 (1975), p. 73.

[30] W. Clarysse, ibid., p. 72.

and south routes in *P. Hibeh* I 110 can readily be given; they were only some of a number of βυβλιοφόροι acting as couriers in the postal system. Second, one no longer needs to postulate a duplication of postal systems. Whether correspondence was carried by horse or on foot, it was, nevertheless, handled by the same postal system. Third, the identification of the postal systems facilitates a better understanding of *P. Hal.* 8. The papyrus is a letter from Zenobios to Pythonikos and concerns a petition (?) given to Pythonikos by an unnamed Syenian alleging that he could not perform his duty (χρεία) because of an inability to see at night. Zenobios orders Pythonikos to bring the petitioner to him next time Pythonikos comes in order that a test of his condition might be made. The letter took fifteen days to reach Pythonikos and was thus presumably written from outside the Apollinopolite nome. At the time of publication it was unclear what office Pythonikos held in the nome, but on the basis of the petitioner's condition it was suggested that he was seeking exemption from the duty of guard. Since it now appears likely that Pythonikos was a control official in the postal system at the time of Zenobios' writing, the duty of courier (assuming that the duty involved travelling at night as well as during the day)[31] suggests itself as another possibility. *P. Hal.* 8 also presents a problem for Preisigke's hypothesis. If Pythonikos was an official in a second postal system which functioned within the Apollinopolite nome, why was his superior located outside that nome.[32] The difficulty ceases to exist when one removes the distinction between the two postal systems and considers Pythonikos as a nome official in a postal system extending throughout the Ptolemaic kingdom.

Conclusion

Clearly the evidence as it now stands permits numerous reconstructions to be made. That offered by Preisigke is but one possible reconstruction. Even so, it is burdened with numerous problems and uncertainties. In view of these, one may reasonably entertain doubts concerning the regularity of the express post and the existence of two distinct postal systems. We can only hope that in time more evidence will become available, but until then the under-determination of the extant evidence presents a problem for the reconstruction of the underlying postal system.

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[31] Cf. above for Preisigke's hypothesis that the express post operated at night.

[32] One enters here into the difficult area of the administrative structure of the Thebaid and especially into the question concerning the competence of some officials over several nomes. See E. van 't Dack, 'Recherches sur l' Administration du nome dans la Thébaîde au temps des Lagides', *Aegyptus* 29 (1949), pp. 3-44. It is not impossible that Zenobios was a higher official responsible for the operation of the postal system in a number of nomes in the Thebaid. However, there is no evidence to support this conjecture and its acceptance leads to a further questioning of Preisigke's description of the second postal system, namely that the nome's metropolis was its organizational centre.