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NEITHER DO THEY PUT NEW WINE IN OLD SKINS

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NEITHER DO THEY PUT NEW WINE IN OLD SKINS

Several texts in the recently published volume of ostraca from Mons Claudianus¹ deal with water-skins (ἀσκού). These skins were used to transport water from the wells at this army and rock-quarry station, located in the Eastern Desert over a hundred kilometers away from the Nile valley. Being the artery by which water was distributed at Mons Claudianus, these skins were indispensable for the regular operations of the soldiers, work teams and animals stationed there.

O.Claud. 126 is concerned in the first place with the whereabouts of 140 water-skins that were expected at Mons Claudianus:

Γράτα Couκκέσσω τῶι ἀδελφῶι πλείστα χαίρειν. |² μετέδωκα Ἄρτειμῶ ὑπὲρ τῶν ρ̄μ̄ ἀσκῶν |³ καὶ ἀπεκρίθη μηδὲ εἰληφέναι αὐτοὺς μη⁴δ' ἑωρακέναι. ἔπεμψα Γέταν πρὸς τὸν |⁵ σησκούπλικα καὶ αὐτὸς εἶπε μὴ εἰληφέναι. |⁶ ἐφώνησε δὲ Ἄλέξανδρον τὸν ποτε |⁷ κουράτορα καὶ εἶπε ἐκεῖνος εἰληφέναι |⁸ καὶ πάλι Κατορῶτι αὐτοὺς παραδεδωκέναι. |⁹ [ὄρ]ῶν Ἄρτειμῶς ἃ ἔπεμψες ἐγόνγυσε |¹⁰ [λέγ]ων "οὐαί μοι τῶ ἐλειδίῳ χορηγῶν |¹¹ [οὐ]κ ἔχω." ἀσπάζου Καβεῖνον τὸν |¹² [ἀδ]ελφόν μου καὶ πάντες. |¹³ [ἐρρ]ῶται ἡμῶις εὐχόμεαι.

9 r. ἔπεμψα 10 r. χορηγῶν 12 r. πάντας 13 r. ἐρρῶσθαι ὑμῶς εὐχόμεαι

Editor's translation: "Grata to Successus, her brother, many greetings. I notified Artimas about the 140 water-skins and he answered that he had neither received them nor seen them. I sent Geta to the *sesquiplicarius* and he said he had not received them. He called Alexander, the former *curator*, and he said he had received them and in turn had passed them on to Castoras. Seeing what you had sent, Artimas said grumbling: 'Woe on me, poor man, I am not able to supply them.' Greet my brother Sabinus and everyone. I pray for your health."

Do lines 9-11 still concern the water-skins? Already in 2-4 Grata describes Artimas' reaction to her inquiry about the water-skins ("he answered that he had neither received them nor seen them"), and she then proceeds to explain how she traced them down to Castoras. Since the whereabouts of the water-skins is now known and since Artimas has been freed from blame, it seems pointless for Grata in 9-11 to cite Artimas lamenting that he has no water-skins to supply. These lines also contain a specific surprise. This is the hitherto unattested word ἐλειδίον. The editor explains it as a diminutive of ἔλεος and assigns to it the meaning 'object

¹ *Mons Claudianus. Ostraca Graeca et Latina I (1 à 190)*, edd. J.Bingen, A.Bülow-Jacobsen, W.E.H. Cockle, H.Cuvigny, L.Rubinstein, W.Van Rengen (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, Documents de Fouilles XXIX, 1992).

of pity'. But while diminutives are common in the Koine, those based on abstracts are rare, and something so personally expressive as this one is hardly at home in a documentary ostrakon. The lexicographical novelty disappears, however, if in place of ἐλείδιον we understand ἐλάδιον.² This diminutive, which gave rise to modern Greek λάδι, is frequently attested in the papyri. It also occurs in a yet unpublished, fragmentary ostrakon from Mons Claudianus (inv.1404) in the phrase δαπανῆ ἐλαδίου.³ Lines 9-11 of the ostrakon under consideration should probably be given as follows:

[ιδ]ῶν Ἀρτεμιᾶς ἃ ἔπεμψε (r. -ψαα) ἐγόνγυσε | [λέγ]ων "οὐαί μοι τῷ ἐλειδίῳ
(r. ἐλαδίῳ), χορηγῆν | [οὐ]κ ἔχω."⁴

"When Artimas saw what you wrote, he groaned saying 'Alas for me because of the oil, I cannot supply it'."

The passage, then, is no longer superfluous, for Grata has turned to a different, practical topic.

Since the ostrakon deals with supplies destined for Mons Claudianus, it would seem that it was written in the Nile valley (as the editor assumes, cf. also O.Claud. 160 intr.) somewhat over a hundred kilometers to the southwest of Mons Claudianus, i.e. roughly a three-day caravan journey away.⁵ A single order of 140 water-skins suggests that they were manufactured in great quantities at one or more of the towns—Apollonopolis Magna, Koptos, Kainopolis and Tentyris⁶—which catered to the needs of those who traveled through or worked in the Eastern Desert. Such a manufacture will probably have resembled the large open-air water-skin tannery that existed early in this century at the town of Hebron in Palestine.⁷

² For the interchange of α (αί) and ε (εί), see Gignac, *Grammar* I, pp.260, 278-287. Cf. in the present ostrakon ε for α (9 ἔπεμψε, 12 πάντες, though the latter may be nom. for acc.) and αι for α (13 ἡμᾶς for ἡμᾶς). Given these phonetic confusions, ἐλείδιον should probably be regarded as a misspelling of the form of the diminutive that is usually found in the papyri, i.e. ἐλάδιον (cf. LSJ s.v. ἐλάδιον, Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. ἐλάδιον). There is no compelling reason to posit ἐλάιδιον, ἐλαίδιον or ἐλαίιδιον, though each of these is possible. Only PSI IV 418, 11 (III BC), however, attests the spelling ἐλαιδ-.

³ As we learn from the editor's commentary on O.Claud. 134 (on this text see below, pp.63-65).

⁴ This assumes οὐαί μοι + dative of cause. I have not been able to parallel this, but the construction seems possible, since οὐαί μοι can be followed by the cause expressed in other grammatical ways (ὅτι or ἀπό, see Bauer, *Wörterbuch* s.v. οὐαί). One can also interpret the words as follows: οὐαί μοι, τῷ ἐλειδίῳ(ν) (r. τῷ ἐλάδιῳ) χορηγῆν [οὐ]κ ἔχω. "Alas for me, I cannot supply the oil." This could be explained either as dative for accusative by attraction, or as involving further phonetic mistakes: ω written for ο twice (cf. 13 εὐχόμεαι) and omission of final ν.

⁵ See R.E.Zitterkopf-E.Sidebotham, "Stations and Towers on the Quseir-Nile Road," *JEA* 75 (1989) 170.

⁶ See Zitterkopf-Sidebotham, p.156.

⁷ G.Dalman visited this open-air factory in 1912 and describes it in *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, Bd. V: *Webstoff, Spinnen, Weben, Kleidung* (Gütersloh 1937), p.188. He provides a photograph of it, with about a hundred water-skins in sight, in plate 39.

In Egypt the use of water-skins persisted nearly to the present day. From E.W.Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1895 edition; repr. 1978 [ed.pr. 1836]), pp.322-323, we learn that in the 19th century water was still transported in water-skins from the Nile or one of its canals into the city of Cairo.

Presumably the water-skins that had gone astray were not filled, but were empty—to be used for water transportation at Mons Claudianus, which had its own large fortified well (ὕδρευμα) about a kilometer to the southwest and seemingly several other local wells.⁸

The oil which Artimas is unable to deliver was not necessarily olive oil. Since ἔλαιον can denote vegetable oil of any kind with the possible exception of castor oil (κίκι),⁹ the same can be supposed of the diminutive ἐλάδιον. We immediately think of vegetable oil in connection with the preparation of food. But since no other victuals are mentioned, the urgency of this delivery of oil is curious. Grata devotes more than two lines to it. Successus had written about the matter, and Grata informs him that Artimas himself had seen this communication and that he was filled with consternation: ἐγόνγυσε [λέγ]ων "οὐαί μοι κτλ. The fact that οὐαί appears here for the first time in documentary texts from Egypt is probably an indication of the importance of the matter.

It can hardly be due to mere chance that also O.Claud. 134 deals exclusively with oil and water transportation:

Δομίτις κουράτωρ Cουκ(κ)έσσωι χ' ἀ' (ίρειν).¹² ἔδωκές μοι ἔλαιν ἐξ οὐ
ἐκθές μετὰ τῆς¹³ ἐργαζομένης δεκανίας κατέβην καὶ¹⁴ ὃ ἔπενψά σοι
`[το]` ἀνγίον, ἵνα καταμάθης¹⁵ ὃ ἐδαπάνησα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν. αὐτὸς
δὲ¹⁶ καταβὰς χήμερον ἵνα μίαν ὕδροφορίαν¹⁷ ἀπολύσει, δὺς ἤδη
τοιαῦτα ἐδαπάνησεν.¹⁸ εἰ δὲ ἐμοὶ οὐ πιτεύεις, ὅτι τοῦτο μόνον¹⁹
δαπανῶ, πέμψον τινὰ τῶν κῶν καθί¹⁰σαι μίαν ἡμέραν ἵνα πιράσης.¹¹
ἔρρωσο.

2 r. ἐχθές 4 r. ἔπεμψα 7 r. δίκ

"Domitius *curator* to Successus, greetings. You gave me oil when yesterday I went down with the working *decania* and the bucket which I (now) send you (back),¹⁰ in order that you see what

These skins were conveyed by camels or asses or, when the distance was small, by human water-carriers called *sakkas*. The camel's load was three or four such skins, the latter being the same as at Mons Claudianus (see below, p.65 with n.16). In the city, the *sakkas* distributed the water in the individual skins. Lane provides an illustration of a *sakka* carrying a water-skin on his back; the outer side is the hair-side (see below, p.64 with n.12). The same practice is still reported in H.Ammar, *Growing up in an Egyptian Village. Silwa, Province of Aswan* (London 1954), p.19. The water-skin was the standard water-carrying device used by Bedouins still later, see J.J.Hobbs, *Bedouin Life in the Egyptian Wilderness* (Austin, Texas 1989), p.54: "Perhaps the greatest revolution in Bedouin material culture occurred about 1970 with the introduction of the plastic jerrycan (*jarrican*). Inexpensive and durable, it has largely replaced the waterskin, and with some cloth and cord can be made almost as comfortable for transport by camel and man. If you drop a waterskin, the Arabs note, it will break open and your precious water will be lost; but the jerrycan will not break."

⁸ See T.Kraus *et al.*, *MDAIK* 18 (1962) 97-98; *idem*, *MDAIK* 22 (1967) 135-140; also O.Claud. 134 intr.

⁹ See D.Brent Sandy, *The Production and Use of Vegetable Oils in Ptolemaic Egypt* (BASP Suppl. 6, 1989), pp.18-24.

¹⁰ In 3-4 I have kept the editor's text κατέβην καὶ¹⁴ ὃ ἔπενψά σοι `[το]` ἀνγίον, but altered his translation slightly. Domitius has sent an oil-bucket (ἀνγεῖον) back to Successus, so that Successus could check how much oil Domitius had used, i.e. how much oil was still left in it. The verb ἔπεμψα is an epistolary aorist here (past time from the point of view of the recipient of the letter). Successus probably received this ostrakon and the bucket at the same time. Perhaps something obvious to the writer and recipient

I used during the whole day. When he came down today to carry out just one trip of water-carrying, he used twice as much. If you do not believe me, that he alone uses this,¹¹ send one of your men to sit here for a single day so that you may learn. Farewell."

Once again, there is agitation on account of the oil, and this ostrakon shows why: it was used in large quantities during the water-carrying. The editor states that it is uncertain whether the oil was used for nourishment during the work or had a special function. But now that O.Claud. 126 connects a delivery of oil with a delivery of water-skins, we need not look far for the objects that had to be oiled, and we do not have to rely on our own experience, e.g. with a wet pair of shoes, to support the inference. *RE* IV.2 s.v. *Culleus*, col. 1745-46 refers to D.Hessel, *Methoden der Weinveredelung* (Marburg 1856), p.42, which I cite here (underlining mine):

"Bei den Schläuchen für Wasser wird die Haarseite aussen, bei den Weinschläuchen dagegen nach innen gekehrt. Die Wasserschläuche pflegen auf der inneren Seite eingeölt zu werden, und es ist auffallend, dass die europäischen Reisenden, weder über solche eingeölte, noch über die mit Theer präparierten Schläuche Klage führen, im Gegentheil eher sich darüber verwundern, dass die Flüssigkeiten darin sich frisch erhalten, und keinen unangenehmen Geschmack erlangen."¹²

Impregnation with oil will have decreased the skins' porosity and prevented evaporation of the water.¹³ Possibly also, after water-skins had been emptied, they required special care. On the one hand they might dry and crack, on the other the tanned hide combined with oil and residue water could putrefy.¹⁴ Emptied water-skins might have been turned inside out, dried

was omitted in the phrasing, e.g. καὶ ὃ ἔπενψά σοι ἀγγίον (ἔπεμψα or ἔστιν) ἵνα καταμάθῃς κτλ. or καὶ (δέξαι) ὃ ἔπενψά σοι ἀγγίον ἵνα καταμάθῃς κτλ. It could also be that the lines should rather be transcribed καὶ {ὃ} ἔπενψά σοι `το' ἀγγίον, ἵνα καταμάθῃς κτλ. This {ὃ} might anticipate the following ὃ ἐδαπάνησα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν, and `το' might be a somewhat bungled addition rather than a deletion; cf. O.Claud.I, plate XVIII.

¹¹ This assumes that μόνον is adverbial or a mistake for μόνος. Also possible: "that he uses this at least." Less likely: δαπανᾶ written mistakenly for δαπανῶ ("that I use only this").

¹² Water-skins with the hair-side out: see Lane, *cit.* (n.7). For the oiling/tarring of water-skins, see also: W.Creyaufmüller, *Nomadkultur in der Westsahara* (Stuttgart 1983), p.84, describing the preparation of water-skins after tanning, "Nach dem Auswaschen wird auf die *gerba* ein Gemisch aus 2 Teilen Öl plus 1 Teil Pech aufgetragen." O.Lenz, *Timbuktu. Reise durch Marokko, die Sahara und den Sudan* II (Leipzig 1892), p.41 "Eine Büchse voll Theer sollte gleichfalls mitgenommen werden, um die Schläuche öfters austheeren zu können." The greasing of a leather yoke-band is mentioned in P.Fay. 121 (*cit.*, n.15).

¹³ Cf. Lenz, *cit.* (n.12), p.40 "Diese Ziegenschläuche sind in jenen Gegenden überall gebräuchlich und man kennt überhaupt nichts anderes zum Transport. Sie sind auch im allgemeinen ganz praktisch, nur ist das Wasser zu sehr der Verdunstung ausgesetzt." A.H.W.Haywood, *Through Timbuctu and Across the Great Sahara* (London 1912), p.294 " ...for a camel in hot weather cannot exist more than about eight days without water; moreover, the water-skins are calculated to leak to the extent of one-tenth per diem, from which it is evident that a full water-skin would have lost the whole of its contents by the tenth day, even if none of the water in it had been drunk."

¹⁴ Cf. Lenz, *cit.* (n.12), p.40 "Die Betheerung der Innenseiten der Schläuche hält nicht lange an, und sowie ein Fleckchen diesen Ueberzug verliert, beginnt rasch eine Verwesung der Haut und das Wasser bekommt einen abscheulichen Geschmack." Haywood, *cit.* (n.13), p.309 "At first I used to carry a water-bottle on my own camel, but latterly I rejected this in favour of a small 'guerba', which carried about a gallon of water and kept it

and oiled again to keep them fresh and supple to the extent possible. This must have applied to old water-skins that were kept as a back-up reserve.

Reserves of old water-skins are mentioned in O.Claud. 129:

Λεοντᾶς Κοῦκ(κ)έ(ς)ω χαίρειν. γεινώ[ς][κ]ειν σε θέλω ὅτι οἱ ἄσκοί μου πάντες ἄχρηστο(ι) γέγοναν καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ (r. ὕδωρ) σπανί[ζε]ται. καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις ἐὰν θέλῃς [πέμ]ψαι μοι ἄσκοὺς καινοὺς καὶ γράψον μ[οι.] | ἐὰν δὲ μὴ θέλῃς, διάλεξόν μοι ἐκ τ[ῶν] | παλαιῶν ἕως Ἐπαφρόδειτοσοῦν[αβῆ].

"Leontas to Successus, greetings. I wish you to know that my water-skins have all become useless and the water is sparse. Please send me new water-skins if you will, and write to me. If you will not, choose for me some of the old ones until Eraphroditus comes up."

These old spares were not expected to last long. A chest in which skins were stored is mentioned in a papyrus from the archive of the gentleman farmer Lucius Bellenus Gemellus.¹⁵

O.Claud. 128, in which the same Leontas writes to the same Successus, shows that other measures were taken to protect the water-skins:

Λεοντᾶς Κοῦκ(κ)έ(ς)ω χαίρειν. | καλῶς ποιήσεις ἀλλάξαι | τοὺς δὲ ἄσκοὺς καὶ | πέμψαι μοι αργάνα' ε' | δύο ἵνα μὴ πάσχωιν | οἱ ἄσκοί. | ἔρωσο.

"Leontas to Successus, greetings. Please exchange the 4 water-skins and send me two baskets so that the water-skins do not suffer. Farewell."

The editor remarks that "four water-skins and two baskets suggest a water carrying harness for one camel, since we know from the accounts of water-carrying that four skins constituted a camel-load,"¹⁶ and he points out that the water-skins were protected in wicker baskets instead of being tied directly to the camel. Haywood, *cit.* (n.13), p.308 may serve as additional commentary:

"Our chief source of anxiety was always the water. The skins, or 'guerbas', in which this is carried are extremely susceptible to injury. Thorns, which are so common in the Sahara, penetrate the soft goatskins with ease, causing a puncture which very soon empties the bag of its precious liquid. For this reason great precautions are necessary, when a halt is made, that the water-skins shall not be placed on the bare ground on being taken off the camel's back. It is

far cooler. I never used a filter, and sometimes was obliged to drink the most filthy water, which under ordinary circumstances one would not have washed in."

¹⁵ P.Fay. 121, 3-9 εὖ ποιήσεις δοὺς Οὐρητείνωι εἰς τὸν ζυγὸν αὐτοῦ ζυγόδεσμον καινὸν στερεόν, ὃ καὶ ἀλείψεις ἐπιμελῶς, ἐκ τῶν ἐν τῇ κειβωτῶι τῶν ἄσκῶν ἧ ἔχει παρὰ σοί κτλ. "Kindly give Vestinus for his yoke a new strong yoke-band, which you will carefully grease, from those in the chest of skins which you have with you etc." We do not know whether these skins were new or old, nor whether they were for water, wine or oil.

¹⁶ Four water-skins per camel: cf. Lane, *cit.* (n.7).

essential to place something firm underneath. Further, the 'guerba' should be covered over in the daytime to prevent it from perspiring unduly on account of the heat. In the desert one gets to care for one's water supply with extraordinary solicitude. But this is hardly to be wondered at, since it is the very soul of existence there."

Similar conditions prevailed at Mons Claudianus. It would seem that the baskets protected the water-skins from sharp objects, especially thorns, and from direct exposure to the light of the sun. The baskets will also have steadied and supported the filled water-skins while they were being carried by the camels and so reduced the risk of their bursting.

The animal skins that were used for the storage and transportation of liquids were vulnerable. Their longevity was limited, that of old skins more so. In the LXX translation of the Book of Job 13, 28 is written ὁ παλαιούται ἴσα ἀσκῶ ἢ ὥσπερ ἱμάτιον σητόβρωτον "which¹⁷ grows old like a skin or like a moth-eaten garment." Didymus the Blind comments on the first metaphor as follows: [ἀσ]κὸς δὲ παλαιωθεὶς ἀνερέ[ργ]ητός ἐστιν πρὸς τὴν χρεῖ[α]ν ἣν κατεκεύ[α]ται· οὐ γὰρ κα[τ]έχει τὰ ἐ(μ)βαλ[λ]όμενα ὑγρά.¹⁸ "A skin that has grown old does not serve the purpose for which it was made; for it does not hold the liquids that are put in it." The ostraca from Mons Claudianus document this, and they also allow us to see Matthew 9, 17 (~Mark 2, 22, Luke 5, 37-38) with fresh eyes:

οὐδὲ βάλλουσιν οἶνον νέον εἰς ἀσκούς παλαιούς· εἰ δὲ μήγε, ῥήγνυνται οἱ ἀσκοὶ, καὶ ὁ οἶνος ἐκχεῖται καὶ οἱ ἀσκοὶ ἀπόλλυνται· ἀλλὰ βάλλουσιν οἶνον νέον εἰς ἀσκούς καινούς, καὶ ἀμφότεροι συντηροῦνται.¹⁹

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¹⁷ The Hebrew has "he."

¹⁸ Tura-Papyrus, p.361, lines 12-16 (*Kommentar zu Hiob*, Teil IV.1, edd. U.&D.Hagedorn - L.Koenen, [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 33.1, 1985], p.122).

¹⁹ That the new wine continued to ferment in the sealed containers, also plays a role, cf. LXX Job 32, 19-20 ἡ δὲ γαστήρ μου ὥσπερ ἀσκὸς γλεύκουσ ζέων δεδεμένος... / λαλήσω, ἵνα ἀναπαύσωμαι... Olympiodorus comments ὥσπερ τις ἀσκὸς οἴνου νέου καὶ θερμοῦ πεπληρωμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀναβρασμοῦ καὶ τῆς ζέσεως ἐκτραγῆναι μέλλων (*Kommentar zu Hiob*, edd. U.&D.Hagedorn, [Patristische Texte und Studien 24, 1984], p.278).