

HERAKLEOPOLITE MERIDARCHS IN THE FIRST CENTURY BC ?

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It is a well-known fact that the Arsinoite nome was divided into μερίδες which occur in the administrative terminology of the nome during both the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. The *Duke Data Bank of Documentary Papyri* yields a total of 22 occurrences of the official called μεριδάρχης and a tax called μεριδαρχική out of which sixteen originate in the Arsinoite nome. All the remaining six occurrences derive from the Herakleopolite nome and are dated to the first century BC². The aim of this paper is to scrutinize the extant evidence of the Ptolemaic meridarchs in detail. Even though the explicit sources of this office are scarce, I believe that careful examination of the texts that have been preserved can improve our understanding of the administrative system of the late Ptolemaic period.

On the basis of the Arsinoite occurrences, it has been concluded that the office of the meridarch would have been associated with the *merides* into which only Arsinoites was divided. As most of the occurrences are dated to the Roman period, several scholars studying the administration of Roman Egypt have touched upon the role of the meridarchs in the Arsinoite nome. Fabian Reiter, for example, concluded that during the third century AD, the meridarchs were responsible for collecting similar tax-like payments in the same manner as the nomarchs. He has further noted that the Roman meridarch was more likely to be a colleague of the nomarch than his subordinate since the meridarch was also appointed by the *boule* in the Arsinoite nome during the third century AD³.

Out of the Arsinoite attestations of meridarchs, only three are dated to the Ptolemaic period. The earliest of these is a register of crown land from Kerkeosiris dated to February / March 120 BC (P.Tebt. I 66). Of the land in question in line 55 and following, there is a reference to the farmers from the village in question having sworn to the meridarch called Dionysios to sow the land. P.Tebt. I 183 (late II BC) attests a petition of a farmer to an official called κωμομεθωτής, and the petitioner refers to a payment of (probably) 45 artabas of wheat to the meridarch called Apollonios. Finally, P.Bingen 57 is a petition addressed to the meridarch Artemidoros from a certain Onnophris, a priest of the temple of Soknebtynis in Tebtynis. The content of the petition evades us, but the editor of the document, Frédéric Colin, has discussed the role of the addressee in detail. He, too, concludes that the meridarch was an Arsinoite officer, and he further suggests that meridarchs mentioned in the Herakleopolite documents BGU VIII 1828, 1856, and 1872 could, in fact, have been in charge of a *meris* in the Arsinoite nome, but that their jurisdiction might have been extended over the border into the Herakleopolite nome. Thus, he suggests that Artemidoros in P.Bingen 57 could, in fact, be the same person as the one mentioned in the Herakleopolite document BGU VIII 1856, 11–12.

This last document, dated to the mid-first century BC, is a complaint against a woman to whom the petitioner has leased some farmland, but who has not paid the proper rent or other charges on behalf of the land. The petitioner refers to a letter written to the meridarch Artemidoros, and finally asks the person to whom the letter is addressed – but whose name is not preserved – that the matter be directed to this same Artemidoros in order for him to collect the rent from the lessee.

It is, I think, impossible to say for sure whether these two Artemidoroï are identical or not. Be that as it may, Colin has made another suggestion which I would like to discuss

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² See Tables 1 and 2 *in fine*.

³ See Reiter (2004) 90, 276 and 285.

further. He has proposed that the meridarchs Herakleides attested in BGU VIII 1828, and Herakleios attested in BGU VIII 1872, could, in fact, be one and the same person. He gives as a parallel the names of the pair of detectives Dupond and Dupont (or Thomson and Thompson) in the comic series of Tintin. This suggestion is based on the similarity of the names and the close dating of the documents. I think, however, that the dating of BGU VIII 1872 should be revised.

BGU VIII 1872 is a letter which a certain Sokrates writes to a certain Heliodoros⁴. I find it likely that this Heliodoros is the same person who John Oates concluded was first the royal scribe of the Herakleopolite nome from 61/60 until at least December 13th, 57 BC. After his tenure as royal scribe, he succeeded a certain Paniskos in the office of the strategos. Oates places the *strategie* of Heliodoros with reasonable certainty between that of Paniskos and that of Seleukos, that is, between the years 55 and 51 BC⁵. The letter of Sokrates to Heliodoros is dated to Pachon 10th, year 2, which in the *editio princeps* was understood to be the second regnal year of Kleopatra, that is, May 3rd, 50 BC. But, as Oates has already noted (see note 5 above), this letter could just as well be dated to the second year of Berenike IV, that is, to May 4th, 56 BC. In fact, the successor of Heliodoros, Seleukos, is attested as *strategos* in year 30 (BGU VIII 1826), year 30 = 1 (e.g. BGU VIII 1827) and year 2 (BGU VIII 1761), that is, from 52/51 to 50 BC. Soteles, the successor of Seleukos, is attested as *strategos* in years 2 (e.g. BGU VIII 1760) and 3 (BGU VIII 1794), that is, 50/49 BC⁶. This sequence, in my opinion, indicates that Heliodoros should have disappeared from the scene of the official archives attested in BGU VIII by the second regnal year of Kleopatra, and that BGU VIII 1872 should be dated to 57/56 BC. The only other possibility, that is, that Heliodoros in BGU VIII 1872 would be someone other than (first) the royal scribe and then the *strategos* attested in the archives of the eighth volume of BGU, is extremely unlikely.

With the revised date for BGU VIII 1872, I find Colin's suggestion, that is, that the meridarch Herakleios mentioned in BGU VIII 1872, and Herakleides (attested as meridarch in BGU VIII 1828) were one and the same person, unlikely. With approximately five years in between these two meridarchs, and taking into consideration the fact that both names seem to have run in the families in Herakleopolite context, I find it very doubtful that these two names might have been confused in any official correspondence in the Herakleopolite nome⁷.

Thus, so far, we have three meridarchs mentioned by name who occur in Herakleopolite documents : 1) Herakleios in year 56 BC, of whom it is said that because he is in Herakleopolis, it should be written to his subordinate not to be idle but to look after the winnowing (BGU VIII 1872, 3–9, see n. 4 above). 2) Herakleides, attested in BGU VIII 1828, dated to 52/51 BC. The document is a petition to the *strategos* Seleukos in which the petitioner, Ptolemaios son of Epinikios, who is a guard of the prison in a village called Phebieus, claims that during the current 30th year which is also the first, he has cultivated nine arouras of land, and that the rent paid in kind for this land was set at five artabas of

⁴ BGU VIII 1872, 1–17 : Σωκράτης Ἡλιοδόρῳ | τῷ ἀ[δελ]φῶ[ι] χάρειν | καὶ ἔρρωσθαι. ἐπεὶ] Ἡράκλειος ὁ μεριδ[ά]ρχης | ἐν Ἡρακλέους πόλει | ἐστίν, γρανάτωι | τῶι παρ' αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι ἀργ[ή]σας τὰ | λοιπὰ λικμήσαι. | μόλις δὲ χ[θ]ῆ|ε παρακληθεῖ|ς ὑπ' ἐμοῦ | ἐπέταξε λι[κ]μήσαι | τὴν κριθήν. ἐπιμελὲς οὖν ἦ[γ]ησαι, | ὡς τὰ λοιπὰ λικμήσει. σουτοῦ ἐπιμ[έ]λου) | ἴν' ὕ(γιαίνης)· ἔρρωσο (ἔτους) β Παχ(ῶν) ι.

⁵ See Oates (1995) 111–112.

⁶ On the basis of the *stratego*i who succeeded one another without a break, BGU VIII 1810, 7 was dated to (ἔτους) α in the *editio princeps*. I believe this date is correct, as the sender of BGU VIII 1810 is Seleukos. In BL VIII 49, it has been suggested that the letter could have been written in year 4 (ἔτους δ), but Seleukos should have been succeeded by Soteles (or by Eurylochos) by the fourth year. Eurylochos, the successor of Soteles, is attested as *strategos* in at least years 5 (BGU VIII 1811) and 5/6 (BGU VIII 1769), that is, 47/46 BC.

⁷ In BGU VIII alone, we have two persons called Ἡρακλείδης τοῦ Ἡρακλείδου (in BGU VIII 1774, 2–3 and 1832, 3), and two called Ἡράκλειος τοῦ Ἡρακλείου (BGU VIII 1736, 8–9 and 1775, 4).

lentils per aroura by a certain Soteles. Presumably, the point is that the petitioner had already paid the amount of 45 artabas of lentils as he asks Seleukos to write to the meridarch Herakleides about the matter⁸. 3) Artemidoros, mentioned in BGU VIII 1856, 11–12, who may or may not be identical with the Arsinoite meridarch of the same name to whom P.Bingen 57 is addressed.

There are three further Herakleopolite documents which mention a meridarch: BGU VIII 1808 (written on the verso of 1828 and thus dated after 51/50 BC) and BGU VIII 1855, and – last but not least – BGU XIV 2370. As a matter of fact, the last mentioned document has recently been used as evidence that the Herakleopolite nome was also divided into *merides*, just like the Arsinoite nome, by the early first century BC⁹.

BGU XIV 2370 is an account of tax arrears of various toparchies of the Herakleopolite nome, dated on the basis of the mention of the 33rd and 34th regnal years to some time after 84/83 BC. The sums of still missing taxes are calculated according to the tax and sometimes according to a village. The document does not mention what would happen if the locals were not able to collect the missing sums by the required dates which are also indicated after the sums of the taxes. Three toparchies, Peri Polin, Peri Tilothin and Kato (Agema) are required to pay the taxes listed in two instalments within eight months. There is certainly something missing from the beginning of the document as the first preserved lines of the first column read: « the aforementioned sums make 75 talents, 5315 drachmas ». Then follows a poorly preserved line and, after that, something which is most likely meant as a kind of title: « which (sums), as he writes, the below mentioned meridarchs have not been able to collect »¹⁰.

We do not know the title or name of the person whose report is referred to, but the reference to meridarchs is clear. After the first three lines there follows, again as titles or headings in lines 4, 16 and 26, the names of three known Herakleopolite toparchies with three personal names: Sarapion in Peri Polin, Alexandros in Peri Tilothin, and Imouthes in Kato (Agema)¹¹. The editor of BGU XIV, William Brashear, interpreted these three persons as the meridarchs. I quote his commentary on line 3: « μεριδάρχων: Man kennt Meridarchen im Herakleopolites bereits in BGU VIII 1828, 1872, u.a. Wenn schon nirgendwo von μερίδες ausdrücklich die Rede ist, scheint es doch, daß die Toparchien in μερίδες zusammengruppiert wurden. Obwohl man sonst geneigt wäre, die unten genannten Beamten für Topogrammateis der einzelnen Toparchien zu halten (Z. 4, 16, 26), sind sie laut dieser Überschrift Meridarchen, und die erwähnten Toparchien sind wohl jeweils eine von mehreren unter ihrer Jurisdiktion. »

In other words, Brashear assumed that, analogous to the neighbouring Arsinoite nome, the Herakleopolite toparchies would have been arranged into μερίδες by the early first century BC, and that the jurisdiction of the Herakleopolite meridarchs would have extended over several toparchies. There is, however, one other document that attests a meridarch in connection with only one Herakleopolite toparchy, that is, BGU VIII 1808. This document

⁸ BGU VIII 1828, 1–20: Σελεύκωι συγγενεῖ καὶ στρατηγῶ[τ]ι | καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν προσόδων | παρὰ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ Ἐπινίκου | δεσμοφύλακος τοῦ ἐν Φνεβιεῖ δεσ|μωτηρίου. γεγεωργηκός μου | ἐν τῷ ἐνεστῶτι λ τῷ <καὶ> α (ἔτει) | ἀπὸ τῆς πρότερον Ἀπικκίου προσ|όδου περὶ Φνεβιεα ἐν τῷ πρό|τερον Ἀγελάου κλήρωι ἀρούρ(α)ς θ | ἐκφορίου τοῦ σταθέντος ἐκάτης | ἀρούρας φακοῦ (ἀρτάβας) ε παρὰ Σωτέλου | προήγμαι τὴν τοῦ ὑπομνή- ματος ἐπί|δοσιν ποιήσασθαι. ἀξιῶ ἐὰν | φαίνηται συντάξει γράψαι Ἡρακλείδῃ τῷ μεριδάρχη κομικά|μενον τὸ προκειμένον τῶν ἐκφορίων κεφάλαιον μὴ παρενοχλεῖν με, | ἵν' ὧ τετευχῶς τῆς παρὰ σοῦ | βοηθείας. | εὐτύχει. The mention of Soteles in line 11 may be an indication that Soteles, like Heliodoros before him, was first in the office of the royal scribe under the *strategie* of Seleukos and then succeeded Seleukos in the office of *strategos*; see Oates (1995) 115.

⁹ See Falivene (2009) 529.

¹⁰ BGU XIV 2370, 1–3: γίνεται τὰ προ[κ]είμενα (τάλαντα) οε Ἐτιε | καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πρὸς τας [. . . .] τ[| ἂ γράφει διῶσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων μεριδάρχων.

¹¹ BGU XIV 2370, 4, 16 and 26: Περὶ Π[όλ]ιν [C]αραπίωνος (...) Περὶ Τι[λῶ]θιν Ἀλεξάνδρου (...) Κάτω τοπαρχίας Ἰμούθου.

is a draft of an official account listing sums, probably due or collected in money, from various villages and officials. Line 14 reads : Πέραν μεριδάρχο(υ) κ. Πέραν is unambiguously a toparchy, as are most likely the entries that follow (15 : Τεκθὼ γ | Κώϊτου ι)¹². The reason for the occurrence of a meridarch could be analogous to line 1, for example, where the responsible persons for the sum mentioned are indicated as the *logontai* of Tekmi. Thus, we have altogether four Herakleopolite toparchies in which a meridarch was responsible for payments of some kind. However, evidence for Brashear's assumption that the meridarchs' jurisdiction extended over several toparchies is difficult to find.

All the above considered, I find it possible that by the mid-first century BC, there were meridarchs in the Herakleopolite nome and that their jurisdiction could have been one toparchy. If this is the case, I find two ways of explaining the situation.

First, it is possible that during the first half of the first century BC, toparchs were replaced by meridarchs in the Herakleopolite nome. The reason for this suggestion is that even though *topogrammateis* are abundantly attested in the first century, I have not been able to trace any toparchs in the Herakleopolite nome at this time. As a matter of fact, the only toparch attested anywhere in the first century BC is mentioned in P.Tebt. I 189, an account in which it is noted that a certain Koprias has paid something « through the toparch » (Κοπρίας διὰ τοπάρχου ἀργυρίου κδ ἀνὰ Αχν ω). This account is dated to the early first century, and in fact, I would not be surprised if the toparchs were also removed from the administrative hierarchy in Arsinoites some time during the first half of the first century.

Another possibility is that the meridarchs had nothing whatsoever to do with the Arsinoite *merides* or jurisdiction based on topographical divisions. In an article that appeared in 1991, Maria Rosaria Falivene has discussed, among other things, the jurisdiction of the Ptolemaic nomarch, and suggested that the title of this official was not derived from the topographical term nome but from the verb νέμω, that is, from the responsibilities of being the supervisor of the distribution of crops¹³. In a footnote, she adds : « On the analogy of νομάρχης / νέμω, μεριδάρχη may well derive from μερίζω “to assign one's share” to each of the parties, e.g. king and lessees in land-leasing contracts, or king and tax-farmers, especially in that fixed rates had to be readjusted as a consequence of various possible kinds of disruption. »¹⁴ As Thomas Derda quite recently noted, Falivene's article attracted little attention from historians, but I agree with him that we should take her suggestion seriously¹⁵. At least in the light of the contents of the Herakleopolite first century BC documents mentioning meridarchs, the idea that the foremost duty of this official was to be in charge of « assigning shares » that often dealt with farmland and / or taxes levied upon land seems perfectly possible.

I would like to conclude that a careful examination of the extant evidence of the meridarchs shows that the office is only attested in 1) the Arsinoite and 2) the Herakleopolite nomes both during the Ptolemaic and Roman times. This does not mean, however, that the office would necessarily have been connected with topographical divisions of nomes into *merides*, but it could have been connected with administrative adjustments of the toparchies, which are attested throughout Egypt during the late Ptolemaic period. The functions of the meridarchs seem to have often been connected with payments that were levied upon farmland, and thus, the office may even have been introduced during the first half of the first century BC in order to administer the « assigning of shares », that is, administering both expenses and revenue of the highly important source of income, the land.

¹² See Falivene (1998) s.v. Πέραν, Τεκθὼ (Νῆσος), Κώϊτης.

¹³ See Falivene (1991) 203–227.

¹⁴ See Falivene (1991) 217, n. 57.

¹⁵ See Derda (2006) 65, n. 10.

Table 1, Arsinoite occurrences of meridarchs and *meridarchike* in chronological order :

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Date (HGV)</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Passage</i>
P.Tebt. I 66, 60	Feb. – March 120 BC	Tebtunis (Ars.)	Διονυσίωι τῶι μεριδάρχηι
P.Tebt.I 183, 4	Late II BC	Tebtunis (Ars.)	Ἀπολλωνίωι τῶ μεριδάρχηι
P.Bingen 57, 1	2 nd half of I BC	Tebtunis (Ars.)	Ἄρτεμιδώρωι μεριδάρχηι
P.Grenf. II 54, 2–4	Aug. 8 th , AD 150	Arsinoites	διέγρ(αψε) Παβούε Ἀπολλ() ὑπέρ μερ[ιδ]αρχ(ικῆς) προ(κό)δ(ου)
P.Flor. II 278, col.5, 14	Later than Sept. 24 th , AD 203	Memphis or Heliopolites	Ἄντιόφω μερ[ιδ]άρχη Ἄρσινοεΐτου]
SB XX 14583, 8	July 24 th , AD 215	Ibion Eikosipentaruron (Ars.)	μεριδαρχικῶν κυ (ἔτους)
P.Louvre I 38, 5	Dec. 27 th , AD 216 – Jan. 25 th AD 217	Soknopaiou Nesos (Ars.)	μεριδ(άρχη) Ἡρακλ(εΐδου) μερίδ(οε)
P.Strasb. V 438, 5–6	Sept. 28 th , AD 227	Polydeukia (Ars.)	τῶν τῆ νο(μαρχία) διαφερόν[τω[v] με[ρ]ιδ[αρχικῶν]
P.Strasb. V 438bis, 6– 8	Oct. 28 th , AD 227	Polydeukia (Ars.)	τῶν τῆς νομ[α]ρ[χ]ίας διαφε]ρόν(των) Πολυδευ κεία[c] μ[ε]ρ[ι]δαρχικῶν
P.Strasb. V 439bis, 8– 11	Feb. 25 th , AD 228	Polydeukia (Ars.)	τῶν τῆς νομαρ[χ]ίας διαφερόντων Πολυδευκεία μερ[ι]δαρχικῶν
P.Strasb. V 451, 5–6	June 24 th , AD 229	Polydeukia (Ars.)	μεριδάρχου Παχῶν ὄμ[ο]ίωε
P.Strasb. V 441, 9–10	Nov. 26 th , AD 229	Polydeukia (Ars.)	ὄμοίωε] Φαῶφι λ οί αὐτοὶ μεριδαρχικ[ῶν]
P.Strasb. V 441bis, 8– 9	Feb. 24 th , AD 230	Polydeukia (Ars.)	ὄμ[ο]ίω(ε) Τῆβι λ μεριδαρχικῶν οί αὐτοὶ (...)
P.Strasb. V 454, 1	ca. AD 227–230	Polydeukia (Ars.)	.[. μερ]ιδάρχου
P.Flor. I 76, 16	Later than Jan. 17 th , AD 266	Arsinoites	μεριδάρχαι (?)
BGU III 771, 3–5	III AD	Karanis (?) (Ars.)	δι(ἄ) Αὐρηλ(ίου) Ἄμμωνίου μεριδ(άρχου) Ἡρακλ(εΐδου) μερίδ(οε)

Table 2, Herakleopolite occurrences of meridarchs in chronological order :

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Date (HGV)</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>passage</i>
BGU XIV 2370, 3–4 ; 16 ; 26	Later than 84/83 BC	Herakleopolites	ἃ γράφει διῶσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ὑπογεγραμμένων μεριδάρχων· Περὶ Π[όλ]ιν· [C]αραπίωνος· . . . Περὶ Τι[λω]θιν· Ἄλεξάνδρου· . . . Κάτω τοπαρχίας· Ἰμούθου
BGU VIII 1872, 3–6	Year 2, Pachon 10 = May 4th, 56 BC not 50 BC (<i>ed. pr.</i>)	Herakleopolites	ἐπ[ε]ὶ Ἡράκλειος ὁ μεριδ[ά]ρχης ἐν Ἡρακλέους πόλει ἐστίν, (...)
BGU VIII 1828, 14– 15	52/51 BC	Phnebieus (Herakl.)	(...) γράψαι Ἡρακλείδῃ τῷ μεριδάρχει
BGU VIII 1808, 14	Later than 52/51 BC	Herakleopolites	Πέραν μεριδάρχο(υ) κ
BGU VIII 1855, 2–3	64–44 BC	Herakleopolites	Φνεβίεως ὁ ἀνε . [ca. ?] μεριδάρχει
BGU VIII 1856, 11– 12	64–44 BC	Herakleopolites	ἔγραψας Ἄρτεμιδώρ[ωι μερι]δάρχει (...)

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