

## TESSERARIUS AND QUADRARIUS : VILLAGE OFFICIALS IN FOURTH CENTURY EGYPT

Mohamed S. Solieman

Little is known about either the *tesserarius* or the *quadrarius*, who appear in papyri from the end of the third century till the middle of the fourth century AD<sup>1</sup>. Most of the information is scattered in our papyrus sources. I hope in this paper to shed some light on these positions, and at the same time to draw attention to the understanding of some aspects of economic problems during this period. This paper will thus offer a discussion on the beginning and end of both positions, on the criteria for selection as well as duration of the mandate, and finally on the duties of both the *tesserarius* and *quadrarius*.

### *Tesserarius*

The term *tesserarius* is of course of Latin origin, but it appears in Greek under the spellings τεσσαράριος, θεσσαάριος, τεσσαλάριος, θεσσαλάριος and τεκαλάριος<sup>2</sup>. The difference in the spelling in papyri is attributed to individual techniques from one writer to another. For example, P.Cair.Isid. 54 contains a receipt addressed to Antonius Sarammon, *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome, by Isidoros son of Palenios, and Doulos son of Timotheos, komarchs of Karanis, and Isidoros, *tesserarius* of the same village. This receipt was made in five copies, referred to as A, B, C, D, and E. Both A and C are in the same hand ; the title appears as θεσσαάριος. In B, D, and E, the spelling is τεσσαλάριος.

The title *tesserarius* refers originally to a military officer who received and distributed watchwords from the commander on a *tessera*, i.e. a potsherd<sup>3</sup>. Originally a military position, it turns into a liturgy at the level of a village. The original meaning, however, does not clearly appear in every occurrence of the position, even when the term retains its military nature. Thus P.Oxy. I 43, ii, 21 contains military records giving an account of supplies, chiefly of fodder, provided to various troops and officers. There is no mention of either *tessera* or of a watchword.

Although the editors of P.Oxy. XII 1425 mentioned that the *tesserarius* was a village official, they did not decide if this position was a military or a civil one. Jouguet suggested in P.Thead. 32 that the *tesserarius* was known as a military officer, but that in Egypt he was a member of the civilian staff dealing with the military tax (*annona*)<sup>4</sup>. In Roger Bagnall's opinion, the *tesserarius* was a village tax official<sup>5</sup>. From this and other information found in papyri, we will explain more about the duties of the *tesserarius*.

In papyri, the *tesserarius* holds his position alone, without sharing it with a colleague in the same place<sup>6</sup>. The village was his place of duty<sup>7</sup>. He was appointed – like others among village officials in the fourth century – by the *praepositus*, following a nomination by the komarch, who submitted a group of names to the *praepositus* to choose from ; only one person was eventually selected as *tesserarius*<sup>8</sup>. This is clear from P.Oxy. LXI 4128, which

<sup>1</sup> Among papyri which include a mention of a *tesserarius*, only P.Oxy. I 43 dates from the third century (AD 295) ; the other occurrences date from the fourth century. A comprehensive list of occurrences of both offices is provided at the end of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See Mason (1974) s.v. *tesserarius* – τεσσαράριος. For τεσσαράριος : P.Oxy. I 43 ; θεσσαάριος : P.Thead. 32 ; P.Cair.Isid. 54 ; τεσσαλάριος : P.Cair.Isid. 54 ; P.Cair.Isid. 128 ; P.Cair.Isid. 131 ; P.Oxy. LI 3621 ; P.Oxy. LXI 4128 ; θεσσαλάριος : P.Cair.Isid. 71 ; P.Cair.Isid. 54 ; τεκαλάριος : P.Oxy. XII 1430.

<sup>3</sup> See Berger (1935) s.v. *tesserarius* ; OLD s.v. *tesserarius* ; LSJ s.v. τεσσαράριος.

<sup>4</sup> On *annona* in general, see Mitthof (2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Bagnall (1993) 337.

<sup>6</sup> See Lewis (1997) s.v. τεσσαράριος.

<sup>7</sup> See Johnson (1949) 215 ; on the administration in general : Lallemand (1964) 131–134.

<sup>8</sup> On the *praepositus*, see Derda (2001) 19.

contains a declaration presented to the *praepositus* including a list of persons to act in liturgy ; the *tesserarius* was one of them.

P.Got. 6 mentions that, after the appointment of Aurelius Psenponouthos as *tesserarius* in Soknopaiou Nesos, he served for less than a year, that is the last five months of the Egyptian year<sup>9</sup>. As the nomination for this position took place on Pharmouthi 14 (= March 10) and not at the beginning of the Egyptian calendar, it is more probable that this was an exceptional case in the liturgical system, where the office of *tesserarius* was vacant and required the appointment of a new candidate. In Karanis, Aurelius Isidoros served as *tesserarius* in both Tybi and Epeiph of AD 314<sup>10</sup>. It may be assumed that the *tesserarius* held his office for a full year. Also, a *tesserarius* could hold his office more than once : Aurelius Arion in Theadelphia served as *tesserarius* in AD 307, and in the same village in AD 312<sup>11</sup>.

Since the nomination of the *tesserarius* came from the komarch, his position must be hierarchically inferior to the latter's, regardless of whether the name of the *tesserarius* came before or after the komarch in the document. We thus sometimes find the name of a *tesserarius* after the name of the komarch, as in P.Cair.Isid. 54. On the other hand, in a receipt addressed to Antonius Sarapammon, *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome, by Isidoros son of Palenios, and Doulos son of Timotheos, komarchs of Karanis, and Isidoros, *tesserarius* of the same village, the writers acknowledge that they have received payment from the bankers who handle the government funds in the Arsinoite nome ; in the signatures of the officials, the name of the *tesserarius* Isidoros comes before the names of the komarchs. P.Cair.Isid. 128 is a receipt issued by the *tesserarius*, the komarchs and a *demosios* of Buto (Memphite nome) to Aurelius Isidoros as *tesserarius* of Karanis ; here the name of the *tesserarius* Isidoros comes before the names of the komarchs. The same is found in the signatures of the officials<sup>12</sup>.

It is clear from the papyri that the *tesserarius* worked as a representative of his village and handled many duties alone or jointly with other village officials, especially the komarch. In the village of Thmoinepsobthis (Oxyrhynchite nome), the *tesserarius*, together with the komarch, recommends two of the village inhabitants to the *praepositus* for work as *sitologoi*<sup>13</sup>.

In the village of Dositheon (Oxyrhynchite nome), in an official return addressed to the *praepositus*, a *tesserarius* alone and on his own responsibility chooses someone to act as a donkey-driver in Pelusium in connexion with the state transportation service ; he introduces this driver to the *praepositus*<sup>14</sup>.

In Buto, in a receipt issued by the *tesserarius*, the komarchs and a *demosios* of Buto to Aurelius Isidoros as *tesserarius* of Karanis, we learn that some individuals have absconded from Buto and taken refuge in Karanis. They were discovered by the commission from Buto and were formally surrendered by Isidoros as representative of Karanis. In return he was given this receipt against any additional claim against him or his village<sup>15</sup>.

A *tesserarius* together with the komarch, sends a return to the *praepositus*, under their own responsibility, with a list of names of persons who will act as tax collectors in the village of Senekeleon (Oxyrhynchite nome)<sup>16</sup>. A *tesserarius* also works together with the komarch of the village of Sepho in the Arsinoite nome and prepares a register of the

<sup>9</sup> P.Cair.Isid. 131.

<sup>10</sup> See the list below.

<sup>11</sup> P.Thead. 32 ; P.Thead. 33.

<sup>12</sup> See also P.Oxy. XII 1430.

<sup>13</sup> PSI X 1106.

<sup>14</sup> P.Oxy. XII 1425.

<sup>15</sup> P.Cair.Isid. 128.

<sup>16</sup> P.Oxy. LI 3621.

village inhabitants in his area<sup>17</sup>. It is likely that this register was made in order to find suitable candidates for a liturgy<sup>18</sup>.

A *tesserarius* oversaw the delivery of supplies and funds, as well as the estimation of the amount of tax liability imposed on the village for which he was responsible. Aurelius Arion, *tesserarius* of Theadelphia, issues a receipt for the delivery of a load of barley to an ἀποδέκτης κριθῆς<sup>19</sup>. Isidoros, *tesserarius* of Karanis, joins the komarchs in certifying to the *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome that they have received from the public bankers the price of clothing which they have delivered to the appropriate recipients for the *vestis militaris*<sup>20</sup>. In AD 324, Onnophris son of Pekusis, *tesserarius* working together with the komarch of the village of Herakleides in the Oxyrhynchite nome, acknowledges that they have received from a banker of public money, on the *strategos*' order, an amount corresponding to the value of charcoal supplied to the public bath<sup>21</sup>.

In Karanis, Isidoros, *tesserarius* of Karanis, and Palemon, *quadrarius* of the same village, complain to the prefect of Egypt Iulius Iulianus about injustice being inflicted on the people of Karanis by Theodoros, the *praepositus* of the *pagus*, and by the komarchs of Karanis who are represented as acting in collusion with him<sup>22</sup>. In both P.Col. VII 139 and 141, a *tesserarius* was among some other officials in Karanis who acquired property. This property covered an area of between 12 and 48 *arouras*<sup>23</sup>.

In many cases, it is assumed that *tesserarii* could not write in Greek<sup>24</sup>. This appears for instance in P.Cair.Isid. 54, which Aurelius Ision wrote on behalf of other officials, including a *tesserarius*, who did not know how to write Greek.

From this overview of occurrences, we can conclude that the *tesserarius* in fourth-century Egypt was a village official. He was chosen in the first place to monitor the collection of taxes imposed on the village. In addition, some other duties in the village may go back to the military origin of the office. Although we do not have evidence that the *tesserarius* had any duty to control the komarch's actions, it seems that in some cases a *tesserarius* could have made a complaint directly to the prefect, criticizing the actions of komarch<sup>25</sup>.

For the most part, our information on the *tesserarius* dates from the first half of the fourth century AD, which suggests that this position was the outcome of emperor Diocletian's reforms. We lose track of the *tesserarius* in our papyri in AD 346 (P.Oxy. LXI 4128).

### *Quadrarius*

The second official we will discuss in this paper is the *quadrarius* (transliterated in Greek as κουαδράριος). He appears less frequently in our documents than the *tesserarius*. In BGU I 21, the *ephoros*, two of the komarchs, and the *quadrarius* of the village Prektis in the Hermopolite nome send a report to the *praepositus* about tax collection in the village. From the same year, in P.Cair.Goodsp. 12, a statement of taxes sent to the *praepositus* by the *ephoros*, two of the komarchs, and the *quadrarius*, those officials acknowledge by oath the validity of the list of taxpayers.

<sup>17</sup> P.Oxy. LIV 3774.

<sup>18</sup> See P.Oxy. LIV 3774, introduction.

<sup>19</sup> P.Thead. 32.

<sup>20</sup> P.Cair.Isid. 54.

<sup>21</sup> P.Oxy. XII 1430.

<sup>22</sup> P.Cair. Isid. 73 ; P.Cair.Isid. 71 and 72 are notes for drawing up this petition. On the *quadrarius*, see below. The prefect Iulius Iulianus was in office for only one year, *i.e.* 314 ; see Vandersleyen (1962).

<sup>23</sup> See Bagnall (2003) 16.

<sup>24</sup> On ἀγράμματοι, see Youtie (1971) 162.

<sup>25</sup> P.Cair.Isid. 73.

This evidence shows that the *quadrarius*, like the *tesserarius*, was in the first place in charge of taxation at the village level. In both BGU I 21 and P.Cair.Goodsp. 12, the name of the *quadrarius* comes after that of the komarch, which could imply that the *quadrarius* held a position hierarchically lower than the komarch. Like the *tesserarius*, the office of the *quadrarius* could be entrusted to people who did not know how to write Greek<sup>26</sup>. Also, the *quadrarius*' place of jurisdiction was the village. Since he appears in our documents in the first half of the fourth century, he was also presumably a product of the reforms of the Diocletian's reforms in Egypt.

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[= *Scriptiumculae* II 611–627].

<sup>26</sup> See above, n. 24.

List of *tesserarii*

<i>No</i>	<i>Date (AD)</i>	<i>Document</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>
1	295	P.Oxy. I 43, ii, 21 ; iv, 3 ; iv, 6	Iulius Valerius Severus	Oxyrhynchite nome
2	308	P.Sakaon 15, 14 (= P.Thead. 32)	Aurelius Arion	Theadelphia
3	308	P.Sakaon 17, 3 (= P.Thead. 33)	Aurelius Arion	Theadelphia
4	308–310	P.Col. VII 141, iv, 32	Aurelius Phallas	Karanis
5	308–310	P.Col. VII 141, vi, 54	Aurelius Anouphis	Karanis
6	314	P.Cair.Isid. 54, 2	Aurelius Isidoros	Karanis
7	314	P.Cair.Isid. 71, 8 (= SB VI 8991)	name unknown	Karanis
8	314	P.Cair.Isid. 73, 2	Aurelius Isidoros	Karanis
9	314	P.Cair.Isid. 128, 5	Aurelius Isidoros [but what about line 1 ?]	Karanis
10	314	P.Cair.Isid. 131, 1	name unknown	Karanis
11	316	P.Oxy. XIX 2232, 5	Menoxis	Oxyrhynchite nome
12	318	P.Oxy. XII 1425, 5	Hatris son of Herakion	Dositheon
13	322	P.Got. 6, 8	Aureios Psenbothis	Soknopaiou Nesos
14	323	P.Harr. II 213, 3	Pesas Udas	Oxyrhynchite nome
15	324	P.Oxy. XII 1430, 4	Onnophris son of Pekusis	Herakleidou kome
16	329	P.Oxy. LI 3621, 6	Aurelios Pettiris	Senekeleu kome
17	336	PSI X 1106, 4	Aurelius Besas son of Proklos	Thmoinepsobthis kome (Oxyrhynchite nome)
18	336	PSI X 1107, 4	Aurelius Besas son of Proklos	Thmoinepsobthis kome (Oxyrhynchite nome)
19	341	P.Oxy. LIV 3774, 8	Achilleus	Sepho (Oxyrhynchite nome)
20	346	P.Oxy. LXI 4128, 18	Hermion son of Hermias	Mermertha (Arsinoite nome)

List of *quadrarii*

<i>No</i>	<i>Date (AD)</i>	<i>Document</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>
1	308–310	P.Col. VII 141, iv, 32	Aurelius Isidoros	Karanis
2	308–310	P.Col. VII 141, 54	Aurelius Kopres	Karanis
3	314	P.Cair.Isid.71, 8	name unknown	Karanis
4	314	P.Cair.Isid. 73, 2	Aurelius Polemon	Karanis
5	314	P.Cair.Isid.131, 2	name unknown	Karanis
6	331	P.Stras. III 129, 5 (= SB V 7685)	Isidoros son of Ibois	Sesoncha (Hermopolite nome)
7	331	P.Stras. III 149, 5	Isidoros son of Ibois	Sesoncha (Hermopolite nome)
8	before 340	CPR XVIII 31, 10	name unknown	Hermopolis
9	340	BGU I 21, i, 5	Herakles son of Pagenes	Prektis kome (Hermopolite nome)
10	341	P.Cair.Goodsp. 12, 6 = <i>W.Chr.</i> 253	Cornelius Amontas	Hermopolite nome
11	346	P.Oxy. LXI 4128, 17	Petros son of Horos	Arsinoite nome