A COMMON MARKET ON SYROS. TWO IMPERIAL LETTERS (IG XII.5 658)

A badly damaged inscription from the island of Syros records two imperial letters, one from Septimius Severus and Caracalla (IG XII.5 658–20), the other from Caracalla alone (20–42). Both letters are in poor condition and their subjects difficult to discern. As to the second, Hiller von Gaertner remarked (IG XII.5 p. 184), "Auch per die probe kühler, der ist ein spät. (vs. 30). Cetera obscura." Oliver amplified: "Perhaps Septimius Severus had deprived Athens of priority in respect to the importation of grain and established at Syros a common market ... for the Aegean area."

At 23 Hiller restored οἱ καλοίμενοι σήμερον γευταὶ τῶν σιταὶ (vs. 30). Cetera obscura. Oliver amplified: "Perhaps Septimius Severus had deprived Athens of priority in respect to the importation of grain and established at Syros a common market ... for the Aegean area."

Without the dubious οὐς [twin at 23, the restoration would] 0 [twin at 15 lines 13]. So too the phrase restored at 30–31, which flows free of any clause and was the basis for Hiller and Oliver's interpretations: τὴν καὶ [twin] γευταὶ τῶν σιταὶ τούτων. Now, we know of no specialized agorai, so that the existence of an agora τῶν σιταί is not inherently impossible. None, however, is attested and as we have noted όστιεν is not a figure of epigraphic vocabulary. The restoration stands without any apparent internal justification with the result that one can only posit influence from οὐς [twin at 23. But again the grain is a ghost. We are on the island of Syros where reason and efficiency suggest not τῶν σιταὶ but simply δῶν Σιτ[ν]ο[ύ][ρ].

1 J. H. Oliver, Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri (Philadelphia 1989) nos. 257–258.
2 Oliver, Greek Constitutions (as in n. 1) p. 492, and on the first letter: "The text is so fragmentary and so uncertain that not much emerges. The first epistle mentions grain and the colossal name of Asia."
3 Grain: AE (1925) 162b (Antioch in Pisidia, ca. a.d. 93); bankers: I. Ephesians II:214; bankers: OGIS 484 (Pergamum, under Hadrian); export: IG II 1100 (under Hadrian); Oliver, Greek Constitutions (as in n. 1) 237.9–239 (a.d. 42).
4 Archék (1971) p. 139 line 6 (400–375); IG II 1672.i.a.6–7, 8 (329); restored at OGIS 104.13.
5 Oliver follows Hiller in printing τὴν καὶ [twin], but τὴν is absent from Hiller's manuscript transcription, which he took from Le Bas, Voyage archéologie II 4:1892.30–31; ... ON... I ΆΓΙΩΠΑΝΤ... C... ΙΩ. It is difficult to know from what stage the excerpt correct. (Cf. n. 50 below.)
6 Ἀγορᾶ τῶν σιταί, SEG XXXII 1220.11–12 (Tetrapagia) a.d. 253/4); Syll. 799.22–23 (Kyriakes, a.d. 37–41); τῶν ιμπορτάντων, SB XVIII 13654.5–7 (Hawara, Roman); τῶν σιταί, TAM V 943.7–11 (Thyatira, ca. a.d. 41). Against restoring 30–31, τὴν [twin] τῶν σιταί τούτων, stand the facts that markers so-called are not in evidence and the word οἰκίς is almost absent from inscriptions: Rehm, Milet i.3 149.40–41; SEG XXII.12:20; for specialized sections of the Athenian agora see E. M. Harris, "Workshop, Marketplace and Household: The Nature of Technical Specialization in Classical Athens and its Influence on Economy and Society," in P. Cartledge et al. (eds.) Money, Labour and Land: Approaches to the Economies of Ancient Greece (London and NY 2000) 67–99, at 75.
7 Cf. SEG XXXII 1302.2 (Karabuyuk, Cilicia, AD III) for a σεβαστή (see. ύποταξιν).
The two cities had quarreled previously, in the third century, again in the early second, and once again ca. 143 B.C. Who, or not Melitaia was accused to employ third-party arbitration as a tool of territorial expansion, it is clear that in the Hellenistic period the cities of Achaian Phthiotis fought hard to acquire and maintain territory.

The large swallowed the small, Melitaia absorbed Përeia, which had subdued two communities called Karandai and Phthiotades. Stahlin's notion that Phthiotades was home to the Phthiotites who allied with Përeia against Panaea decades before may be correct, either way his suggestion that Karandai and Phthiotades were once-autonomous communities that were absorbed by Përeia is attractive.

In adjudicating the boundary dispute between Melitaia and Chalai, and Përeia, the judges referred to a topos called Kuriolilia, no doubt a rural district that was to some degree subordinate to one or the larger local cities. The numerous territorial settlements from Achaian Phthiotis refer to a great many named places, any number of which are likely to have been small villages that were accorded varying degrees of autonomy by the larger polis, such as Melitaia or Përeia, whose territories encompassed them. I suggest that the Herakleotês who shared an agora with Melitaia inhabited such a village on Melitaia’s eastern outskirts, and that this Herakleia, like other villages in the region, had been absorbed by the larger city.

Events on Syros may have been analogous. It is clear that the circumstances were extraordinary: something prompted two imperial letters. If two communities on the island decided to forge a common market, boundaries would have to be drawn and imperial sanction might be sought. The text is in poor


19 T. Quinctius Flamininus: Interstate Arbitrations 224. Significance Deseat (eds.), a ltvta 55.2–6 (163–155):

20 IG XII 565.31–32: [ltpoal!!!>v lCai oocrrov itTTt xpeilav ta Achaian Phthiolis fought hard to acquire and maintain territory.

21 IG XII 565.31–32: [ltpoal!!!>v lCai oocrrov itTTt xpeilav ta Achaian Phthiolis fought hard to acquire and maintain territory.

22 The senate found for Nanhakion, invoking a prior cause du conflit: IG IX 2.10.16, 12–16; IG IX 2.12.23–25.

23 The senators found for Nanhakion, invoking a prior cause du conflit: IG IX 2.10.16, 12–16; IG IX 2.12.23–25.

24 Perhaps a command (IG XII 565.31–32: [ltpoal!!!>v lCai oocrrov itTTt xpeilav ta Achaian Phthiolis fought hard to acquire and maintain territory.

25 While much is lost in the lacunas, a plausible syntax is apparent: ["Septimius Severus?] commanded that ... a common agora of the Syrians ... be demarcated." Perhaps the "common agora of the Syrians" was not a redundancy, but the very subject of the correspondence.

26 The site is unexcavated and Syrian inscriptions are few. Without descending into the quagmire of Odyssean geography we might note that in antiquity Eumaius was thought to hold Syros in mind when he spoke of a certain island called Syros (Od. XV 194–216). Any number of which are likely to have been small villages that were accorded varying degrees of autonomy by the larger polis, such as Melitaia or Përeia, whose territories encompassed them. I suggest that the Herakleotês who shared an agora with Melitaia inhabited such a village on Melitaia’s eastern outskirts, and that this Herakleia, like other villages in the region, had been absorbed by the larger city.

27 Events on Syros may have been analogous. It is clear that the circumstances were extraordinary: something prompted two imperial letters. If two communities on the island decided to forge a common market, boundaries would have to be drawn and imperial sanction might be sought. The text is in poor


29 T. Quinctius Flamininus: Interstate Arbitrations 224. Significance Deseat (eds.), a ltvta 55.2–6 (163–155):


32 Positive evidence for such a village does not appear to exist elsewhere. One can only wonder at the significance of the three words that survive the publication (Preserved IG IX 2.128 [Halos, ?] – Melikeris, "Η αρχική τών γενεαλογιών του Παρθένου —

33 The large swallowed the small, Melitaia absorbed Përeia, which had subdued two communities called Karandai and Phthiotades. Stahlin’s notion that Phthiotades was home to the Phthiotites who allied with Përeia against Panaea decades before may be correct, either way his suggestion that Karandai and Phthiotades were once-autonomous communities that were absorbed by Përeia is attractive.

34 The senators found for Nanhakion, invoking a prior cause du conflit: IG IX 2.10.16, 12–16; IG IX 2.12.23–25.
cities. Whatever Homer meant, Galëssos, along with its harbor, stood in classical antiquity, and stands today, in the shadow of its larger neighbor to the east. I suggest that the Syrian story was not unlike the Melitaian, that the city Syros absorbed the smaller community. Perhaps this was an amicable merger, the one granting the other joint ownership of its agora. While the walk across the saddle in the hills between the two places is not very strenuous, the creation of a common market may have been attractive to both parties. It would have conferred prestige on Syros as the principal partner and allowed Galëssos a greater measure of economic freedom. The island is small and the gesture would be understandable.

On the other hand, the process prompted not one but two imperial letters, which suggests rather more than simple imperial ratification of local redistricting. Thus, we might conjecture that this union grew from a dispute, as may have been the case with the sympoliteia of Melitaia and Përeia. Perhaps Galëssos launched an independent bid for economic freedom. The island is small and the gesture would be understandable.

Whatever Homer meant, as may have been the case with the sympoliteia of Melitaia and Përeia. Perhaps Galëssos launched an independent bid for market rights, circumventing Syros and going directly to the emperor. Dependent communities are known to have done so, but only very rarely, for such maneuvers risked provoking the anger of the neighboring polis. Is this the sort of instigation that might have prompted a dispute on Syros? Boundaries had to be drawn, so that Syros may not simply have admitted Galëssos to its existing agora. Instead, both seem to have submitted to the demarcation of new, common, ground. If this interpretation is warranted then Caracalla's mention of the common agora of the Syrians was not a simple passing reference, but a declaration, affirmation, or enforcement of status.

If these suggestions are correct then IG XII. 658 gives no cause to think that Syros was attempting to set grain prices; still less to think that in diverting trade in grain from the wide, deep, protected harbor at Peiraeus and re-directing it to a smaller, more exposed harbor in the middle of the Aegean, the emperor sought simultaneously to punish Athens and create a new common grain market for the entire Aegean basin. Whatever the stone said, there is no evidence to suggest that Syros' port was able at any point in antiquity to bear such a burden. Anyway, to understand the episode we need not resort to the politics of revenge or pan-Aegean markets. This looks like a familiar story: a local quarrel that made its way to the top.

Duke University, Durham, NC

Joshua Sosin

[B.Q.] Suda, s.v. Pherekydēs (214), would appear to concur that Syra is Syros: Φερεκυδης, Βάθυς, Σύριος ἐστὶ δὲ νήσος μία τῶν Κυκλάδων ἢ Σύρα, κλησιν Δήλου.

It has been suggested that Homer's Syriē was not Syros, but Syria, which some early traveler is alleged to have mistaken for an island; on this view: H. L. Lorimer, Homer and the Monuments (London 1950) 80–84. S. Reinaech, Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure (Paris 1888) 14–17, esp. 14 n. 10, followed I. N. Ballettá, Γεωργία τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀρχαίας καὶ νεωτέρας (1841) 108–109 [non vidit] and L. Ross, Reisen auf den griechischen Inseln des Ägäischen Meeres (Stuttgart 1843) II 25–27, in conjecturing that Syros' second city lay south of Galëssos, near modern Phoinikas or Dellaragázia; this is also a possibility, although no inhabitants are attested from this place in antiquity, as they are from Galëssos.

38 For a somewhat later imperial grant of market rights to what may have been a dependent village in the territory of Philadelphia: J. Nollé, Nundinas instituire et habere: epigraphische Zeugnisse zur Einrichtung und Gestaltung von ländlichen Märkten in Afrika und in der Provinz Asia (New York 1982) 59–86 (SEG XXXII 1220).


41 G. Rege, Regionalism and Change in the Economy of Independent Delos (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1994) 114 n. 86, includes IG XII. 658.30–31 in a list of various interventions by the state in grain markets, including public purchase and price-setting.

42 Oliver, Greek Constitutions (as in n. 1) p. 492.