 Contracts Similar to Locatio-Conductio of Work and Services in Graeco-Roman Egypt*

Abstract

In the papyri various leases and rents were designated by the collective term misthosis, which includes so-called locatio conductio rei, as well as l.c. operarum and l.c. operis. In Egyptian legal practice leases had an informal character. Free persons were leased out by their relatives. The papyri contain a variety of agreements which can be considered to be more closely equivalent to locatio conductio operarum. They are conducted by free people, who let out their services. We also know of employment agreements shaped in a manner similar to those relevant to manual labor in which people of relatively high social standing were engaged as professionals. Use of a written form was beneficial to an employee, as it prompted him to give greater consideration to contractual provisions. Although there was no jurisprudence in the Greek system, the complex economy of Graeco-Roman Egypt functioned adequately, and the experience of notaries allowed parties to satisfy their interests.

Key words: history of labour law, law of contracts, ancient economy, Hellenistic law and society, law and papyri.

Słowa klucze: historia prawa zatrudnienia, prawo umów, gospodarka starożytna, prawo i społeczeństwo hellenistyczne, prawo i papirusy.

I. General remarks

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the practical functioning of various employment contracts as they were used in Graeco-Roman Egypt. I try to take into account legal issues as well as economic realities.1 Remarks relating to contracts with the managers of

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* Acknowledgments: I am grateful to Prof. dr. hab. Kazimierz Baran and to the Anonymous Reviewers for their insightful remarks and guidance.

1 Cf. P.J. Du Plessis’ remarks about the “context based analysis” of the law in Letting and hiring in Roman Legal Thought 27 BCE–284 CE, Leiden Boston 2012, p. 5 and J. Banaji, Agrarian change in late antiquity: gold, labour, and aristocratic dominance, Oxford 2007, p. 197. The understanding of misthosis and locatio-conductio as a set of abstract rules, standing apart from the social background is incorrect (Cf. P.J.
agricultural estates should serve to better elucidate their terminology and content relative to the operation of large economic complexes such as the domus gloria of the Apiones family. I also draw attention to the ambiguity and problems of interpretation of certain words used in the papyri.

In his monumental work *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the papyri* the eminent Polish scholar Rafał Taubenschlag characterized the Graeco-Egyptian lease contract as a consensual contract. Still, one should remember that written documentation played an important role in almost every law of the ancient Middle East, thus it seems probable that the majority of employment contracts, even with low-paid labourers, were prepared as written instruments. Roman locatio conductio, as such, was a consensual contract, thus, it was sufficient to establish one agreement for both parties. The preparation of a written instrument was not obligatory. However, conserved documents show that the tendency to record statements of the contract in the so-called lex locationis was common from the late classical epoch of Roman law and thereafter. The Roman jurisprudence also focused on the interpretation of those clauses which resumed the lex privata of the parties. Thus, the adaptation to requirements of the economy, together with a Hellenistic influence, had their effect on Roman practice.

To avoid an anachronistic approach one should remember that the so-called “principle of personality of law” was applied as a rule. Roman provincial legal practice was, however, quite widely influenced by local customs. On the other hand Roman influence on local law was never strong, not even after the Constitutio Antoniniana.

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2 Warsaw 1955.

3 The consensual character of the lease in Graeco-Egyptian law was already disputed in Taubenschlag’s times, see H.J. Wolff, *Consensual contracts in the papyri?*, “Journal of Juristic Papyrology” (hereafter JJP) 1946, Vol. 1, passim.


In the papyri all kinds of leases and rents are referred to by the collective term *misthosis*, which includes contracts traditionally classified as *locatio-conductio rei*, as well as *l.-c. operarum* and *l.-c. operis*, no matter how different their conditions may have been.⁸ Egyptian leases were, according to Taubenschlag, informal agreements and as such they required neither redaction of any written instrument nor any special act of execution before the authorities.⁹

The so-called *locatio-conductio liberarum personarum earumque operarum* (the letting and the hiring of free persons and their workforce) should be seen as bearing certain similarity to *l.-c. rei*.¹⁰ A characteristic feature of this type of contract is that free people were leased out by their relatives who had authority over them (*patria potestas*, the so-called *materna potestas*). An Egyptian *ostrakon* of the 3rd century B.C.¹¹ gives information about a mother hiring out her son as a farmhand at harvest time. A father who let his son out for services or for providing manual labour was mentioned in papyrus BGU 1258 (154–132 B.C. l. 17.). Moreover, a promise that the son would remain with the lessor in a status of *paramone* – a kind of temporary serfdom in the master’s household – was added.¹²

Contracts of a similar character were used among Egyptian Greeks. Several papyri contain agreements in which parents deliver their children to entrepreneurs or artisans in order to provide manual labor for them for a fixed term.¹³ One of those agreements –

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¹² On *paramone* in Ptolemaic times: S. von Reden, *Ptolemaic (Greek) labor contracts* [in:] *Law…*, p. 402–404. 3rd century B.C. Demotic contracts in which a third party provides warranties for specific work were also related to *paramone*. S. von Reden, *Ptolemaic (Greek) labor contracts* [in:] *Law…*, p. 403.


Artykuły – Articles
Oxy. 725 (183 A.D.) – has a “dual nature”, as it begins as a contract of apprenticeship and after some time transforms into a misthosis. We are also aware of a similar document concerning a slave. The formulas used in contracts of letting out free persons and their services are similar to those concerning slaves. The characteristic ἐκδίδοναι (lit. giving out something or somebody, letting something for hire) clause was used, and arrangements were made for the provision of attire and remuneration, and for the violation of the contract. Egyptian Romans were already using contracts of a similar character in the 1st century A.D., i.e. soon after the conquest of Egypt by Augustus. This practice continued in the later empire, also after Justinian’s epoch. For example in the papyrus Wess. Stud. XX 219 of the 7th cent. A.D. a certain woman lets out her son remaining under her materna potestas as a σταβλίτης (official in the posting service) for a determined rent – μισθός – and a settled term. She stipulates not to take the son back before the end of the term, otherwise a penalty is to be paid.

The papyri that are known to us contain a variety of agreements which can be seen as closer to the so-called l.-c. operarum. They were, as far as we know, arranged by free people who let out their physical labour or other services, often of rather menial character. We know about l.-c. operarum with artists, with servants, with overseers of animals, with oil porters, with weavers, barbers, muleteers, and other kinds of workforce. Sometimes it is unclear what kind of service is considered.

No matter how diversified these arrangements may be from the point of view of the economy, as a rule, they contain rather detailed, sometimes casuistic, provisions.
concerning the type of service to be rendered, as well as concerning the time in which the wages are to be paid, whether monthly or daily, whether in money, in species, or in other compensation specified as to their kind, and whether with any extra endowments or not.\textsuperscript{24} Partial payments in advance are infrequent.\textsuperscript{25} It is possible, that the employer had a kind of moral or customary obligation to provide his employee with legal assistance and financial support if necessary.\textsuperscript{26}

From time to time unusual provisions occur. For example, an agreement with dancers mentions the obligation for the hiring party to insure the performers against the loss of their professional equipment, which was probably of substantial monetary value,\textsuperscript{27} and to make arrangements for the delivery and return of the artists.\textsuperscript{28} Due to its special provisions Oxy. 1893 (535 A.D.) is worthy of attention. In lines 14–15 the employer guaranteed certain shipbuilders (l. 7: ναυπηγοῖ) that the authorities would not interfere with their work: καὶ ἀνενοχλητον ὑμᾶς ἐ̣[τίνα] ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίουτῆς [τ]έχνης. Therefore, it is a private obligation to prevent the unwanted or illegal intrusions of public law authorities. Certain provisions in the contracts with physical labourers employed in an oil press required them to perform all the duties of a supplier until the entire manufacturing process is completed.\textsuperscript{29} The agreements with a weaver and with an oil mill worker have penalty clauses inserted. In the latter case the employee agrees to pay the double amount of the sum received in advance in case of improper performance or lack thereof.\textsuperscript{30} It is however unclear what kind of responsibility is meant – whether for \textit{casus} or just for negligence.\textsuperscript{31}

The performance of a contract as such should correspond with its content. However, the determination of proper action could be complicated. For example in Oxy. 138, an employee obliged himself in a very vague way to administer a stable in such a way as to “fulfil all the needs of the owner”\textsuperscript{32} (l. 22: πάσας γεουχικὰς χρείας). Still it is quite probable that the intentions of the parties would not be taken into consideration in case of a court dispute. Only the formulation of a document and literal interpretation would be

\textsuperscript{24} E.g. 36 drachmae per day, and a kind of στρουμετρία: 30 double loaves of bread and 4 small loaves (the old edition of papyrus) or cups of olive oil (new edition) – \textit{Papiri Fiorentini, documenti pubblici e privati dell’età romana e bizantina}: I ed. G. Vitelli, Milano 1906; II ed. D. Comparetti, 1908–1911; III ed. G. Vitelli, 1915 (hereafter: Flor.) 74 (181 A.D.).

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. B.P. Grenfell \textit{et al.}, \textit{Fayûm Towns and their Papyri}, London 1900 (hereafter: Fay.) 91 (99 A.D.). See: J. Banaji, \textit{Agrarian…}, p. 197. SB XII 11239 (418 A.D.) provided, that the worker would be able to leave freely if he repaid the advance money.

\textsuperscript{26} S. von Reden, \textit{Ptolemaic (Greek)… [in:] Law…}, p. 402–405.

\textsuperscript{27} Corn. 9 (206 A.D.), lines 14–15: δασ[α]βα ἐὰν κατανεργήσῃ ἰμα[τ]α ἡ χρυσά κόσμια, ταύτασ[α] η παραφυλάξαμεν.

\textsuperscript{28} E.g. \textit{A Family Archive from Tebtunis}, ed. B.A. van Groningen, Leiden 1950 (hereafter: Fam. Tebt.) 54 (219 or 223 A.D.) l. 17–18: καὶ δόσῳ ὑμῖν ἅπα τοὺς δραχμάς καὶ καταβάζει[σ] εἰς τῷ δαχτυλίῳ δόσιν.

\textsuperscript{29} E.g. Fay. 91 (99 A.D.) l. 21–22: μέχρι ἐγβάσεως πλατύς ἑλευργίας. This kind of clause may signify an attempt to prevent sudden abandonment of work.

\textsuperscript{30} PSI 902 (ca. 48–56 A.D.), l. 15–17, Fay. 91 (99 A.D.), l. 27–30.


relevant. Since the courts used to apply a standard interpretation of contractual clauses, the level of formalism in the drafting of contracts was high.

Among Roman citizens the self-hire of free people for services is worth mentioning. Those who let themselves out refer to themselves as paramonarioi or katadoulot. Those workers enter the hirer’s household and become his familiares. They are obliged to paramone and to obey all the employer’s orders. Like in the agreements discussed earlier, employees’ obligations were strengthened by penal clauses.

In a number of contracts of local Roman legal practice (VI cent. A.D.) there is some acquaintance with paramone documents. This agreement establishes a kind of voluntary serfdom. The small landowner let his land to a patron and pledged to cultivate it for him for remuneration. In a manner similar to a medieval commendatio, the petty holder transferred access to the land in return for protection and becoming colonus adscripticus. The document contains an example of a transaction where a fictitious legal transfer serves as a way to establish a patronage relationship. The duration of some contracts could last for as long as the lord wanted, even to the end of the farmer’s life. Therefore the balance of interests of the parties is compromised and the more powerful person has a very strong position. The declaration of a total or partial payment in advance is quite frequent.

In Byzantine times obligations of the employer were from time to time specified under the influence of Justinian’s legislation. In (514 A.D.) one could

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37 SB 4490, 7th cent. (656?, 641?) A.D. l. 5–6: ὁθόδορος παραμονάριος πρεσβύτερος [...] ὀμολογού ἑκου[σίᾳ γνώ]μῃ μ[εμισθωκέναι ἐμαυτόν; Cf. PSI 1344, 6th cent. A.D., l. 1 v.

38 Strassb. 40 l. 24, PSI 1344 l. 1 r. is worth noticing: ἕσχον εἰς παραμονήν τινα δοῦλον, where both expressions are combined (R. Taubenschlag, *Law*..., p. 375, n. 19), perhaps to avoid any dispute.


41 E.g. SB 4490 l. 25–29; A. Berger, *Strafb Klauseln*..., p. 175, n. 5.


43 SB III 6266 = SB 3 6704, 6th cent. A.D., l. 10: [...] πρὸς ὃν βο(ύ)λεται χρόνον ὁ λαμπρότατος γεωργός.


46 Ibidem.
construe from the form in which the watchmen undertake their obligation that the Greek paraphrase of D.19.2.40 Gaius *libro quinto ad edictum provinciale* preserved in the Basilica served as an inspiration for the drafter. The person *qui mercedem accepit pro custodia alicuius rei* is burdened with *periculum custodiae*. According to Taubenschlag the rule for the *mischthesis* of the custody (παραφυλακή) is evidently applied here. Such regulation was employed from the late 2nd century A.D. on. Moreover, penalties in case of breach of contract are not as frequent as in Graeco-Egyptian law.

II. Examples of contracts of professionals

The aforementioned documents concern mainly manual labour, at least partially analogous to the Roman understanding of *operae*. However, we also know of employment agreements prepared in a manner similar to physical labor or craft agreements, in which people of relatively high social position were engaged as professional employees with managerial duties.

Thus, I would like to focus on selected contracts preserved as a part of the so-called Apion Archive, which was a collection of documents relevant to the day-to-day operation of large agricultural complexes in Egypt in the 6th through 7th centuries A.D. The estates comprised the following types of properties: (a) *epoikia* – properties located in or around villages – *komai*; (b) *ktemata* – landholdings, centered on *epoikia*; and (c) land held and cultivated ‘in-hand’ – *autourgia*. The terms on which the managers of the estates – *pronoetai* – were employed was recorded in two contracts: Oxy. 136 (583 A.D.) and Oxy. 3952 (609/610 A.D.). These functionaries took care of the accounting, the control of expenditure, and the collection of revenue.

The contract conserved in Oxy. 136 declares (l. 11 and ff. ὁμολογῶ ἐγὼ [...] ἑκουσίᾳ γνώμῃ καὶ αὐθαιρέτῳ προαιρέσει συντεθεῖσθαί με πρὸς τὴν ὑμῶν ὑπερφύειαν [...] that a certain Serenus, a deacon (l. 7: Σερῆνος διάκονος τῆς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας), made a rather formal and stereotyped declaration of being employed through “his own free will and deliberate choice”. The functionary was employed as a “supervisor” or “receiver”. His task was to manage a holding, the possessions in villages, and the so-called “*exotikoi topoi*” of the Apiones’ *domus* (see lines 11–17). Moreover the *pronoetes* was obliged to cooperate in this management with the land-laborers of the *ktema* and the villages and *exotikoi topoi* “who were responsible”. This cooperation was to take place on the basis of the register or the schedule of demands. Serenus had to collect the revenue and then

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48 Ibidem, p. 380–381.
49 Cf. ibidem, p. 376 ff.; Oxy. 1894 (593 A.D.), Cair. Masp. 67.304 (Byz. times).
51 P. Sarris, Economy and society in the age of Justinian, Cambridge UK–New York 2006, p. 50–51. The following remarks and translations are based on this book if not stated otherwise.
pay due amounts of money to the employer or his representatives. This was to be done according to the receipts issued by Serenus to all the rural workers subordinated to him.

A few remarks should be made. First, the supervisor belonged to quite a respectable social stratum. He was employed for a single year, probably to ensure efficiency and honesty through the lucrative prospect of future contracts. Secondly, he was provided with a schedule of demands – *apaitesimon* – given by *chartularioi* – the “keepers of archives”. According to our knowledge of ancient accounting techniques, such registers would be rather unsophisticated. Thirdly, the *pronoetes* was obliged to issue receipts – *entagia* – to the rural workforce. Those receipts documented the received sums.

Three categories of land, that is the *ktemata*; the land within villages (*komai*); and *exotikoi topoi* were recorded in the initial section of the discussed papyrus. Those types of estates belonged to two wider categories or “divisions of land” – *ktemata* and *exotikoi topoi*. The administrative regime of each of them was different. In case of any “short fall on the ktemata” the *pronoetes* was “to make it good” to the employer and the sum was to be credited into his own account. Revenues from the *exotikoi topoi* were to be fully transferred by the manager after he collected all the due payments. Economic circumstances were taken into consideration, as Serenus had a certain margin to maneuver in relation to the financial circulation in the *ktemata* and the village domains. Limited arrears of the manager were also allowed. The administrative regime of *exotikoi topoi* seems to be more rigid. The text of Oxy. 136 allows one to deduce, that the revenues from the *exotikoi topoi* were to be entered into a separate register – “the landowner’s account” – *geouchikos logos* – and that no leeway was provided.

The term “*exotikoi topoi*” is discussed in the juristic papyrology. The literal meaning of the term, a reference to which seems to be the simplest solution, is “outlying places”. According to the estate registers and accounting books two types of property could have been considered as “*exotikoi topoi*” in the *ktemata* and the village holdings: the estate *epoikion* settlements and the *autourgia*. In the accounts *epoikion* and *ktemata* revenues are treated in the same manner. Peter Sarris argues, that understanding them as different categories is not justified. The *exotikoi topoi* addressed in Oxy. 136 could be the *autourgiai* belonging to the Apiones’ *domus*. They were associated with the *epoikia* supervised by the manager. Two argu-

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54 *Ibidem*, p. 53.
56 *Ibidem*.
57 *Ibidem*.
58 *Ibidem*.
59 *Ibidem*. According to Sarris the αὐτουργία were directly managed. The terms ἐξωτικαὶ ἄρουραι/ἐξωτικὴ γῆ, however, may have different meaning as we know of papyri in which those estates were rented. This is contrary to Sarris’ argument that αὐτουργία were cultivated directly by the estates’ workforce. A. Benaissa, *An estate overseer’s Work contract and the meaning of Exotikoi Topoi*, “Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists” 2007, 44, p. 83–84; T.M. Hickey (Aristocratic..., p. 289, n. 8) considers Sarris’ conception of the *autourgia* as expounded in an earlier paper (P. Sarris, *The origins of manorial economy: New Insights from Late Antiquity*, “English Historical Review” 2004, Vol. 119, p. 279–311) to be “egregiously unsupported”.
60 P. Sarris, *Economy...*, p. 53.
ments may support this proposition. First, the autourgia revenues were not included in the general estate accounts, nor, according to Oxy. 136, were those of the exotikoi topoi. Second, the income from the autourgia could be more important for the landowner than that from the ktemata. If the terms exotikoi topoi and autourgia were synonymous, it would explain the determination of the owners, reflected in the document at hand, to collect completely the sums owed by the exotikoi topoi.61

If we are dealing with synonyms, one may ask an obvious question: why was the autourgia described as an exotikos topos? Sarris attempts to answer this question with a linguistic argument. He argues that: verbosity in the vocabulary used in the papyrus, is relevant here. He mentions, that it was a usual practice of the epoch to call “a spade a shovel”, and a shovel an “earth-turning implement”. This figure of speech, circumlocutio or periphrasis, was a part of a standard rhetorical curriculum, thus, according to Sarris, it should not be surprising that it entered also notaries’ practice.

Moreover, Sarris argues, that “in the sixth century, the word exotikos carried clear legal connotations. It was used in the Justinianic law to describe an entity or subject that stood outside of or distinct from a particular legal relationship”. This statement is founded on the text of J.Nov. 48.1.7 and J.Nov. 22.20.2. These two laws use the term “ἐξωτικός”, but as a synonym for the Latin word “extraneus” in the context of inheritance law. Combining such specific use of the word “ἐξωτικός” with the papyrus discussed here, which has nothing to do with inheritance law, is unfounded.

Sarris also maintains, that the records let us suppose that the autourgia was under the direct control of the estate officials, but the ktemata were leased out to the inhabitants of the epoikia.65 If the ktemata were to be leased and the autourgia was managed by the staff of the household, the two types of real estate would have had a different legal status. Therefore, in Sarris’ opinion, calling the autourgia an exotikos topos with respect to the ktemata would have been technically appropriate.66

Benaissa, however, remarks, that the expression “ἐξωτικοὶ τόποι” has a different meaning. In the papyrus analyzed by Benaissa the issues of the arrears originating from the management of the ktemata and exotikoi topoi are addressed in one clause. Still their counterparts in Oxy. 136.1.24–25 and Oxy. 395.1.26–27 mention only ktemata. Exotikoi topoi are treated in separate clauses.68

61 Ibidem, p. 54.
63 P. Sarris, Economy..., p. 54.
64 Ibidem.
65 Cf. Oxy. 4615, a contract of lease, in which a peasant took a one-year lease on a field in the possession of his ktema.
66 P. Sarris, Economy..., p. 53–54.
67 A. Benaissa, An estate..., p. 76.
68 Ibidem, p. 75–76, 80.
The *communis opinio* understands *exotikoi topoi* simply as “outlying places”. However, in 1909 M. Gelzer already argued, that the *exotikoi topoi* of Oxy. 136.19 mean “hörige [...], die in vici publici, freien Dorfgemeinden, wohnen.” Ulrich Wilken (W. Chr. 383 introd.) however, pointed that in Oxy. 136.26 “exotikoi topoi” were characterized as *belonging to your excellency*. He supported simple translation: *Also sind auswärtige Besitzungen gemeint.*

70 Benaissa argues, that Apiones’ estate archive demonstrates, that *exotikoi topoi* were just another type of farm, the term does not have juridical meaning.71 Moreover, Benaissa noticed that *exotika* (*neutrum pluralis*) refers to the revenue from the *exotikoi topoi*.72 Such wording supports the simplest interpretation – “external revenue”, not “revenue of a distinct legal category”. Considering the above arguments, the claim that *periphrasis* was used by the drafter and that we are dealing with technical terms borrowed from CIC is unfounded.

Still, a certain degree of practical legal knowledge and attention to the detail of the notarial practice can be noticed in the drafts discussed in this section. In the closing paragraph of Oxy. 136, the manager and his guarantor – Victor (l. 34: Βίκτωρ ὁ ἐγ'γυητὴς) renounced the privilege of sureties, contrary to the new imperial law on sureties and warrantors.74 In considering such a clause one may argue that agreements were aimed at avoiding the application of imperial regulation.75

Oxy. 136 does not seem to be an isolated case. The reference to *ius mandatoris* in line 4 of P. Lond inv. 2219 (496 A.D.) also may concern the *mandator’s* competence to renounce his mandate together with his guarantee. This is, as the Authors remark, permitted by D.17.1.22.11 (*Paulus 32 ad Edictum*). Therefore this clause may also serve as indirect evidence of the use of Roman juristic writing in Egyptian legal practice, at least in the upper classes.76

In Oxy. 3952 (610 A.D.), which illustrates circumstances similar to those of Oxy. 136, the employee, Phoebammon, was a priest, and his guarantor was a teacher or schoolmaster (l. 6–7: Φοιβάμμων[πρε(σβύτερος) τῆς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας]; l. 11: [γραμματωτά] δασκάλου τοῦ Νοτίνου Σχολίου). Therefore, they were both of a similar social standing

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72 A. Benaissa, *An estate...,*, p. 82.

73 Oxy. 136.9, 16, Oxy. 3952 l. 19; cf. Oxy. 136 l. 18–19; A. Benaissa, *An estate...,*, p. 80.

74 L. 37–39 – reference to an unknown imperial law described as [...] τῇ νεαρᾷ διατάξει τῇ περὶ ἐγ'γυητῶν καὶ ἀντίφωνητων.


and background like the aforementioned Serenus – they belonged to the stratum of well-educated lower clergy. As in Oxy. 136, the manager and his warrantor were fully liable for the revenues to be collected. The imperial novel was excluded, just like in the papyrus discussed above (l. 40–45, esp. 44: ἀποτατ'τόμενος τῇ νεαρᾷ διατάξει). The agreement had a duration of a year, for the same reason as in Oxy. 136. The employee was to handle the stewardship of the estates in two villages and certain exotikoi topoi. Proper financial policies were to be controlled by comparing the sums received with receipts (l. 41–43). Also in this contract the overseer enjoyed a certain margin for maneuver in the ktemata: arrears could be paid later.\footnote{L. 26–28, P. Sarris, Economy..., p. 54–55.}

Thanks to Oxy. 3958 (614 A.D.) various details of the administration of the Apion family’s urban properties are known. This papyrus is analyzed here because it is a contract concluded with certain Joseph, a member of the estate staff called enoikologos. His social standing is similar, if not identical, to that of the people encountered above, as he was a psaltes – a psalmist (l. 11–12: ἐγὼ Ἰωσὴφ ψάλτης [...] τοῦ Ἐυστάθιου Θεοδώρου και ἐνοικιολόγος). Just like in Oxy. 136 and Oxy. 3952, he was employed for one year. The one year term seems to be typical in the agreements with estates’ managers (l. 16–17). Joseph was to act as enoikologos for all the real property (including buildings) belonging to the Apiones in Oxyrhynchus. He also agreed to collect the earnings from the premises belonging to the domus pertaining to his “collectorship”,\footnote{L. 20–21: [...] ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνδόξου ὑμῶν οἴκου καὶ ἀνηκόντων τῇ ἐνοικιολογίᾳ.} to pay to the employer 125 solidi and the “small denomination coins” supplied by him to the people attached to the Apiones household in accordance with the pittakia (l. 23–27). Moreover, he agreed to distribute olive oil to the estate staff and to perform other tasks (l. 27–34).

Two additional contracts from Apiones’ archive are worth mentioning: Oxy. 138 (610–611 A.D.), which contains the terms of employment of a contractor for both the racing or riding area, and the riding stable (l. 9–10: πακτάριο ς τοῦ ὀξέως δρόμου [...] καὶ τοῦ βαδιστικοῦ στάβλου), and Oxy. 3641 concerning a millstone cutter. Papyrus’ Oxy. 138\footnote{Cf. Oxy. 140 (550 A.D.) with paramone clause in l. 24–26. In 1906 G. Viteli (in Flor. I 44, note to l. 19) argued that the verb paramenein was a euphemism to express the establishment of a service relation, so also: W.L. Westermann, Paramone..., p. 13–14, 25–27; see: L. Wenger, Die Stellvertretung im Rechte der Papyri, Leipzig 1906, p. 265 ff.; R. Taubenschlag, Law..., p. 376 ff.} composition is similar to the structure of the contracts of the pronoetai and the enoikologos discussed above.\footnote{P. Sarris, Economy..., p. 56.} The principal party to the contract, John (Ἰωάννης), took charge of the management of the horse breeding facilities belonging to the domus of the Apiones for one year (see l. 9–10). The vague way in which his duties were specified has already been discussed above. Apart from the very general clause about “all the needs of the owner”, more precise wording is also used, as John was obliged to provide “mounts for the noble administrators and the most illustrious secretaries and the slaves departing on whatever estate business”.\footnote{L. 21–24: ὁμολογῶ ὑπεισελθεῖν τοῦτο καὶ εἰς τὰς ἀνακυπτούσας πάσας γεουχικὰς χρείας, καὶ στρωσαί τοῖς τε περιβλέπτοις διοικηταῖς καὶ λαμπροτάτοις χριμούλαρίοις καὶ παισίν ἀπερχομένους εἰς οἰκείωσιν γεουργικὴν χρείαν, transl. P. Sarris, Economy..., p. 56–57.}
The stable manager was expected to receive the sum of “one pound” of gold from the employer following the Alexandrian standard “on account of the pakton” (l. 26–28: καὶ δέξασθαί με παρ’ αὐτῆς λόγων αὐτῆς τῆς αὐτῆς χρείας τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ χρυσίου λίτραν μίαν Ἀλεξανδρ(είας)). As one pound – λίτρα – of gold was of substantial value, it is almost impossible that it was transferred as the contractor’s remuneration.82 The description of the paid sum is instructive here. The wording corresponds with that used in the Oxy. 3958, in which it would have represented the sum which Joseph – the enoikologos – had agreed to pay to his employer.83 The hypothesis that prominent landowners like the Apiones outsourced the management of at least some of their properties in return for a lump sum84 is probable. This policy with respect to the estate facilities sheds some light on the proper understanding of the term pakton used in Oxy. 138. John – σὺν θεῷ πακτάριος (l. 8–9) – was going to run the horse breeding enterprise with his own workers, as the contract was signed not only by him but also by his “hireling”, a kind of assistant or secretary (l. 45–47: Φοιβάμμων μίσθιος αὐτοῦ [...]), expense, and the prominent landowner provided the contractor, usually of “middle class” social standing, with a lump sum (the so-called “pakton”) for the costs of managing the enterprise and for the remuneration.85 This “pakton” served as a stimulus for the fair and efficient administration and limited the need for additional financial control etc.86 Stable manager John is in a position similar to a contractor referred to as ergolabos.87

The maintenance of large estates’ agricultural enterprises, however, required also the services of qualified artisans, whose skills and expertise may have been rare. It was to the employer’s advantage to retain them on a longtime basis.88 Thus in Oxy. 3641 (544 A.D.) – an agreement between the Apiones and a millstone cutter – the services of the specialist are hired for his lifetime.89 According to the contract, a certain Aurelius Serenus,
III. Conclusions

In Roman law the transition in labour from servant or bondsman status to a contract of free parties occurred, at least partially, in republican times. A similar process can be seen in the documents from Graeco-Roman Egypt where a contractual basis for workforce recruitment and management was employed in much the same manner. This is an important achievement in human resources management.

Implementation of a contractual basis for employment created mutual claims and duties. It is also worth mentioning that payments in advance could serve as an incentive to make the proposed work more attractive. Still, many contracts, especially those concerning the paramone status, established a kind of subjection, either temporarily or for a long period, therefore they may be regarded as – to some degree – impeding free movement of the workforce.

The use of written documents was beneficial and useful for the employee, especially when he was of lower social standing. It allowed him to think of the conditions of contract and to recall employment conditions, wages, and duties. The use of a written form and signatures also served to deceive the hired person harder. Moreover, the written

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90 Papyrus recto has in l. 6: [μυλοκόποτήντε]χνήν; verso l. 1: Σερῆ[ν][υ] μυλοκόπου τήν τέχνην.
91 The word ‘στρόβιλος’ means here a rotating shaft. Oxy. 1704 (298 A.D.) l. 11 says about μοιλαίου ἀλετικοῦ σὺν στροβίλῳ καὶ λίθῳ.
92 Generally speaking, the non-technical meaning of the word κάλαθος is “a basket narrow at the base”. The parts to be provided by Serenus had similar shape and were aligned with strobili.
93 Cf. the clause establishing a lien on the assets of the craftsman in l. 19–21 of the document.
94 See H. Kaufmann, Altrömische Miete, Böhlau 1964, passim.
96 W.L. Westermann, Paramone…, p. 23.
97 See e.g. Fuad 37 (48 A.D.); Oxy. 725 (183 A.D.); W.L. Westermann, Paramone…, p. 28–29. J. Banaji, Agrarian…, p. 190–192, notices, that the prominent landowners safeguarded availability of the workforce through contractual clauses excluding employment of an agricultural worker (termed as a “farmer for lease” – γεωργὸς μίσθιος) in somebody’s else estate.
98 Since he was often illiterate he was necessarily assisted by the person who could read. Legal papyri frequently declare that the party is illiterate, see O. Montevecchi, La papirologia, Milano 1988, p. 399–401.
document played an essential role in court proceedings. Evidence from a document was
decisive in case of a dispute over a contract’s provisions. The content of an agreement
was preserved in the public register of contracts – ἀναγραφή. Usually the standard
clauses, derived from Greek or Egyptian notaries’ practice, were used. Judges had to be
well versed in their common interpretation.

The contents of the contracts with overseers analyzed in section II support, at least
indirectly, the thesis, that intellectual work was not considered as legally incompatible
with employment contracts. Artes liberales were not a legal category, there was no
juridical exclusion of such services from the area of the law of obligations. A similar
situation is reflected in the papyri discussed here.

Local customary and legal practice was strong and the influence of Roman law in the
analyzed documents is quite weak. Therefore one may conclude that although there
was no Greek jurisprudence, the complex economy of Graeco-Roman Egypt functioned
well enough and the experience of notaries allowed parties to satisfy their interests. The
influence of Hellenistic commercial customs on Roman law and legal practice is another
question requiring further research in large areas.

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100 Cf. Law and Legal Practice..., p. 32–42.
102 Cf. P.J. Du Plessis, Letting..., p. 94; J. Macqueron, Réflexions sur la locatio operarum et le mercen-
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104 Cf. A. Jordens Roman and Byzantine labor contracts [in:] Lawand Legal Practice..., p. 411.


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