

Prof. Vicente Dobroruka

dobroruka@pej-unb.org

Universidade de Brasília

IHD - Dpto. de História

Brasília -DF-

70910-900

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In the ancient village of Philadelphia in the Fayum territory of Egypt, peasants looking for sebak, or decomposed mudbrick used for fertilizer, discovered a cache of over 2,000 ancient papyri. In the early 1900's these papyri were sold to various institutions around the world, such as the Societa Italiana per la Ricerca dei Papiri, the British and Cairo Museums, Columbia and the University of Michigan. The papyri consist of documents from every rank of society, providing us with information on such aspects of society as politics, trade, travel, local and foreign traditions. Moreover, they give us a glimpse as to the management of personal affairs of the dioketes, or finance minister, Apollonios, by his private secretary, Zenon.

Zenon's records begin in 261 BC, ending in the 240's BC and cover the reigns of Ptolemy II-III. The majority of the documents are in Greek with a few bilingual texts of Greek and Demotic, and even fewer in Demotic alone. Zenon seems to have been well educated in that the documents are well written and easily translated.

We first learn of Zenon when he enters into the service of Apollonios, the finance minister to Ptolemy Philadelphos, in Alexandria. Beginning in 261 BC, and until 256 BC, Zenon was in a sense a commercial agent of Apollonios, managing his affairs in Egypt and abroad. Zenon accompanied Apollonios on his visits to the nome capitals and other important cities. There Apollonios and Zenon would inspect the work going on and hear court cases. It was Zenon's job to assure that they were provided with entertainment on these trips. In P. Mich. 3101, Apollonios orders Zenon to buy hens, most likely for a festival and in 3127, a man in Philadelphia requests Zenon to let him know when Apollonios will be arriving "in order that the house may be made ready for him in good time". In addition Zenon would inspect and discuss the work on Apollonios' personal estates with his agents, such as Panakestor, (see P. Mich. 3199 and 3231), when Apollonios himself could not.



Furthermore, Zenon filtered the important visitors, public and private matters of Apollonios. Letters and various business documents addressed to Apollonios often were received by Zenon to forward if necessary, (P.Mich. 3128). Private matters included the payment of domestic staff, addressing their complaints and acquiring information pertaining to the crops and livestock on Apollonios' personal estates. This led to Zenon's career as a local agent and manager of Apollonios' personal estates in Philadelphia.

Shortly after a journey in the Delta with Apollonios, Zenon experienced a severe illness that might have prompted him to take on a more sedentary role in Apollonios' affairs. He became the overseer of a large plot of land, (10,000 arourai), in Philadelphia, granted to Apollonios by Ptolemy II. Previously, the above-mentioned Panakestor had been the overseer, which explains the acquisition of his documents by Zenon, (see P.Mich. 3199 and 3231). Panakestor, we find, was not completely dismissed. He seems to have taken on other responsibilities in the Memphite region, as Zenon remains in contact with him.

As manager of Apollonios' private estates, Zenon's duties were to reclaim land, (P.Mich. 3199), and to see to the cultivation of it, often sending Apollonios samples of each crop. This included making contracts with various gardeners and cultivators, as found in P.Mich. 3097, 3109 and 3222.

Besides supervising Apollonios' land in Philadelphia, Zenon looked after his other land holdings in the Arsinoite and Memphite nomes, (P.Mich. 3134), aids in the layout of the surrounding city, (P.Mich. 3133 and 3221) and takes on public duties, such as seen in P.Mich. 3139, in which he serves a summons. He also seems to have been very important in the village, in that he settles disputes among the villagers.

Zenon's position under Apollonios probably brought him in contact with many opportunities to procure a profit for himself. We have evidence of Zenon leasing kleruchic land for himself before, (P.S.I. 639), and after, (P.S.I. 390), he was released from the services of Apollonios. While working under Apollonios and the years following, Zenon practiced money lending on the side, (P.S.I. 389, P. Cairo Zen. 59355 and P. Mich. 3117). In addition, P. Mich. 3225 reveals that Zenon owned ships in which he split the profit with the sailors.

Apollonios himself, as we have already seen, was a landowner, but also a merchant. He had agents scattered around the Nile and Mediterranean buying and selling for him. P. Mich. 45 shows Apollonios' agent selling wheat in Aphroditopolis and buying hides in Herakleopolis. P. Mich. 3080 lists an account of goods that were acquired in Syria and Asia Minor.

In 246 BC, after Ptolemy III had succeeded to the throne, it appears that Apollonios' property was confiscated and he was possibly put to death. By this time Zenon had acquired a great deal of wealth and respect in the community at Philadelphia. It is here that he spent the next 20 years of his life in retirement.



We know much more about Zenon's public life than we do of his private life. However, the texts do provide us with some personal details. Zenon was born approximately 285 BC at Kaunos in Karia, located on the southwestern coast of modern Turkey. His father was a man named Agreophon who still lived in Kaunos. He also had at least one brother, Epharmostos, and possibly a second, named Apollonios. We are introduced to Agreophon by his visit to Zenon in 253 BC. At this time he journeys from Karia by boat to stay a couple of months with Zenon and Epharmostos in Alexandria.

Epharmostos, we learn, first received an education and then acquired a career in Alexandria. We hear of this through the many checkups on his younger brother, made by friends of Zenon. Epharmostos, too, makes a visit to Zenon, while Zenon is living in Philadelphia. Shortly after 243 BC, we learn of Epharmostos' death in a letter sent to Zenon.

Zenon might have had a second brother, Apollonios. After 240 BC, Zenon's archives fall into the hands of this man. He is often mentioned in connection with Zenon and Epharmostos in several of the papyri, and letters to Zenon by him are frequently addressed, "Apollonios, to his brother, greetings," (see P. Col. Zen. 2 81; P. Cairo Zen. 3 59.391). Although Zenon's archives were taken over by Apollonios, there is evidence that Zenon is still alive until perhaps 229 BC, due to a mention of him in Apollonios' archives of this same year.

Nowhere in the documents is there mention of a wife and children of Zenon. However, he does seem to have been involved in the education of some Greek youths. These young men may have been orphans to Greek soldiers. One of them, Kleon, appears to have been especially close to Zenon as he addresses him as "father" in many of the letters.

Due to the large extent of the archive, there remains many unpublished and unedited documents. It seems that we will be forever learning more about the life and responsibilities of this man. In addition, the archives will continually reveal more to us about life in Egypt during this period.