

## Indictions and Dating Formulas in the Papyri from Byzantine Egypt

A. D. 337—540

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*Wolfgang Müller zum 65. Geburtstag*

In an original and important article published in 1961 H. J. Wolff investigated, i. a., the question when indictions were introduced into dating formulas in Greek contracts from Byzantine Egypt.<sup>1)</sup> After pointing out that the earliest instances of such a procedure are found in the famous *P. Edmondstone* (= *M. Chrest.* 361; cf. *P. Oxy.* IV, p. 202) from Elephantine, A. D. 355<sup>2)</sup>, and possibly in *P. Stras.* I 9 (Arsinoe, A. D. 352<sup>3)</sup>) and after a survey of the papyrus documentation available to him, he concluded:

„Nach 476 begegnet überall nur noch Datierung nach Konsulat und Indiktion (nur ein Text, *Strasb.* I 1 v. J. 510 gibt statt des Konsulardatums das Regierungsjahr von Gegenkaisern, s. Preisigke, Einl.; aber auch hier findet sich die Indiktion<sup>4)</sup>). Das Quellenmaterial für die neue Datierweise, aus allen Teilen des Landes, ist so reichhaltig, daß es keiner Zitate bedarf; ich habe nicht eine einzige Ausnahme gesehen. Der Umschlag ist so augenfällig, daß sich der Verdacht aufdrängt, Justinians *Nov.* 47 vom 31. August 537, die eine *dreifache* Jahresbezeichnung (nach Regierungsjahr des Kaisers, Konsulat und Indiktion) anordnete, habe in der Zeit von Theodosius II bis Zenon einen Vorläufer gehabt, der die Datierung nach Konsulat und Indiktion obligatorisch machte. Daß es sich auch hierbei um ein Reichsgesetz und nicht nur um eine Besonderheit Ägyptens handelte, ist zumindestens wahrscheinlich. — Auffallend ist zwar, daß sich keine Spur des angenommenen Gesetzes im *Cod. Just.* findet, doch würde ich dem kein entscheidendes Gewicht

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<sup>1)</sup> H. J. Wolff, *Der Byzantinische Urkundenstil Ägyptens im Lichte der Funde von Nessana und Dura*, *RIDA*, 3e sér., 8 (1961) 115—154, esp. 144—46.

<sup>2)</sup> For the correct date of this papyrus see now *BASP* 15 (1978) 235—36, where also its modern history is discussed.

<sup>3)</sup> In fact, *P. Stras.* I 9.6 refers to the consulate of A. D. 352, see *BL* III 230 (the date to A. D. 307, *BL* I 404, cannot be maintained). In this very fragmentary papyrus one is dealing with the sale of a house and an *exedra* which apparently had been bought before by a certain Ision (one might restore lines 5—6 as: *κατ' ἔργαρον* (l. *ἔργαρον*) *χηματισμῶν* (l. *-μῶν*) *ψ[εχο-]*<sup>6</sup> *[μισμῶν ἐπὶ ὑπηρεσίας τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν Κωνσταντίνου Αὐγουστου τοῦ ἐκ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ ἐπι]ρωστιά- τ[ου] Καίσαρος, τὸ α' μηνὶ Φαγοῦσθι α' τῆς δεκάτης ἰνδικτιωνος, vel sim.* But it should be remarked that in this reference to an earlier date the word *μηνὶ* was probably added by the later scribe [it seems unlikely that it stood in the dating of the original deed of transaction], and it may be that also the reference to the indiction current in A. D. 352 rests upon a later addition. *P. Stras.* I 9 itself must date from a year later than A. D. 352 (cf. also the remarks of Wilcken in *Archiv* 5 [1913] 256).

<sup>4)</sup> *P. Stras.* I 1 actually refers to the consuls from A. D. 434 or to their postconsulate in A. D. 435; cf. *BL* I 403 and *CSBE* (cf. *infra*, n. 5) 53, 117.

beimessen. Die Bestimmung würde etwa in den Rahmen einer Verordnung wie derjenigen Leo's vom 1. Juli 472 passen, von welcher sich im *CJ* 2.4.42 und 8.17.11 Bruchstücke erhalten haben. Da aber bereits von der Mitte des Jahrhunderts an die Indiktionsdatierungen deutlich überwiegen, ist auch mit einem früheren Zeitpunkt zu rechnen.“

Twenty-five years have passed since Wolff wrote these words, and it may be well worth our while to come back to these and test whether Wolff's conclusion still holds good. Recent work done on dating systems and related questions concerning papyri from Byzantine Egypt enables the modern student to use up-to-date collections of documents containing one of the year indicators mentioned, and there is a survey of the papyri from the East for the period 337–540 arranged according to their provenance.<sup>5</sup> This list enables us to investigate the question whether features of regionalism played any role in the use of indictions in dating formulas in such papyri. In order to base this investigation upon a most up-to-date collection of texts arranged according to provenance, the following references published up to May 1985 have been taken into account in addition to those in the list in *Misc. Pap.* 16–21.

*Antaiopolite*: A. D. 524, add *P. Vat. Aphrod.* 14; A. D. 538, move *P. Cair. Masp.* I 67106 to A. D. 539.

*Antinoopolite*: A. D. 390, move *P. Ant.* II 102 to A. D. 445 (cf. *ZPE* 46 [1982] 239); A. D. 442; add *SB* XIV 11434.

*Arinoite*: Add to A. D. 343: *P. Leeds Mus.* 25; to A. D. 407: *P. Rainer Cent.* 89; to A. D. 452: *P. Rainer Cent.* 100; to A. D. 477: *P. Köln* III 152; to A. D. 509: *P. Rainer Cent.* 112; to A. D. 513: *SB* I 5175; to A. D. 526 (?): *P. Rainer Cent.* 114; to A. D. 533: *P. Rainer Cent.* 117.

*Heraikopolite*: Add to A. D. 414/5: *P. Rainer Cent.* 90; to A. D. 441: *P. Rainer Cent.* 94; to A. D. 445: *P. Rainer Cent.* 95, 96; to A. D. 449: *P. Rainer Cent.* 98; to A. D. 457: *P. Rainer Cent.* 101; to A. D. 459: *P. Rainer Cent.* 102; to A. D. 475: *P. Rainer Cent.* 106; to A. D. 484/86: *P. Rainer Cent.* 108; to A. D. 490: *P. Rainer Cent.* 110; to A. D. 492: *P. Rainer Cent.* 124.

*Hermopolite*: Add to A. D. 371: *CPE* VIII 38; to A. D. 380: *P. Stras.* 749; to A. D. 448: *JJP* 19 (1983) 87; to A. D. 451: *P. Rainer Cent.* 99, *CPR* IX 40; to A. D. 463/4: *P. Rainer Cent.* 103; to A. D. 470: *Misc. Pap.* 110; to A. D. 472: *P. Rainer Cent.* 105; to A. D. 487/8: *OPR* IX 36; to A. D. 504: *CdE* 54 (1979) 291; to A. D. 505: *P. Ryf.* IV 609; to A. D. 522: *ZPE* 52 (1983) 261; to A. D. 540: *SB* IV 7340, *Anagennesis* 1 (1981) 226. Move *M. Chrest.* 71 from A. D. 462? to A. D. 466? (cf. *BASP* 17 [1980] 30).

*Oxyrhynchite*: Add to A. D. 338: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3386; to A. D. 341: *P. Oxy.* L 3575, 3576; to A. D. 342: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3387, 3388; L 3577, 3578; to A. D. 343: *P. Oxy.* XLVII 3389; to A. D. 354: *P. Laur.* IV 162; to A. D. 356: *P. Oxy.* LI 3622; to A. D. 358: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3390; to A. D. 359: *P. Oxy.* LI 3623–3625; to A. D. 360: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3391, 3392; to A. D. 361: *P. Oxy.* XLIX 3479; to A. D. 365: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3393; to A. D. 367: *P. Laur.* III 70; to A. D. 371: *P. Oxy.* XLVIII 3395; *ZPE* 37 (1980) 213, (4); to A. D. 387: *P. Köln* III 139; to A. D. 394: *P. Mû.* I 96 (cf. *ZPE* 46 [1982] 241f.); to A. D. 406: *SB* XIV 11574; to A. D. 406: *CPR* VII 39 (cf. *BASP* 18 [1981] 44); to A. D. 412: *P. Oxy.* LI 3639; to A. D. 422: *Aegyptus* 62 (1982) 66; to A. D. 424: *P. Oxy.* XLIII 3148; to A. D. 426: *P. Laur.* IV 159; to A. D. 428/29: *P. Wash. Univ.* I 36; to A. D. 429: *P. Rainer Cent.* 122; to A. D. 430: *P. Mich.* XV 730; to A. D. 432: *PSI XVII Congr.* 29; to A. D. 435: *P. Laur.* IV 177; to A. D. 441/2: *PSI* III 165 (cf. *Scritti Monteverchi*, 214); to A. D. 441 (?): *P. Fouad* 20 (cf. *ZPE* 18 [1975] 218f.); to A. D. 442: *P. Oxy.* XLIX 3481; L 3582; to A. D. 444: *P. Oxy.* L 3583; to A. D. 460: *P. Oxy.* L 3599; to A. D. 467: *P. Mich.* XIV 681; to A. D. 474/5: *J. P. Getty Museum Journal* 11 (1983) 165; to A. D. 484: *P. Laur.* III 95; to A. D. 496: *P. Mich.* XIV 682; to A. D. 499: *P. Mich.* XV 731; to A. D. 502: *P. Oxy.*

<sup>5</sup> Of principal interest are R. S. Bagnall—K. A. Worp, *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* [= *CSBE*], Zutphen 1978, esp. App. D; idem, *Regnal Formulas in Byzantine Egypt* [= *BASP* Suppl. 2], Missoula 1979; idem, *Papyrus documentation in Egypt from Constantine to Justinian*, in *Miscellanea Papyrologica* (ed. R. Pintaudi), Firenze 1980, 13–23. The latter article is of particular relevance for the subject discussed in this article.

L 3600; to A. D. 511: *ZPE* 36 (1979) 84; to A. D. 514: *P. Wash. Univ.* I 17; to A. D. 530: *P. Wash. Univ.* I 25; to A. D. 533: *P. Oxy.* LI 3640; to A. D. 534: *SB XIV 11539* (cf. *BASP* 18 [1981] 461.); to A. D. 535: *P. Oxy.* XLVII 3355.

*Alexandria*: A. D. 374, add *P. Turner* 45.

*Diospolis*: add to A. D. 341: *P. Nag. Hamm.* 63; to A. D. 346: *P. Nag. Hamm.* 64; to A. D. 348: *P. Nag. Hamm.* 66.

*Cynopolite*: A. D. 423, add *P. Köln* III 151.

*Theodosiopolite*: A. D. 447, add *P. Rainer Cent.* 97.

*Thebes*: A. D. 502, add *Archiv* 29 (1983) 29.

*Rhinocorura*: A. D. 511/12, add *P. Ness.* III 15 (cf. *ZPE* 26 [1977] 283).

*Prov. unknown*: add to A. D. 396: *P. Rainer Cent.* 88; to A. D. 401: *P. Rainer Cent.* 165 (cf. *ZPE* 56 [1984] 791.); to A. D. 423: *P. Rainer Cent.* 92; to A. D. 426/27: *P. Rainer Cent.* 93; to A. D. 453/54: *SPP XX* 138; to A. D. 466: *P. Rainer Cent.* 104; to A. D. 485/86: *P. Laur.* IV 141<sup>r</sup>; to A. D. 484: *P. Rainer Cent.* 107; to A. D. 490: *P. Rainer Cent.* 109; to A. D. 505: *P. Rainer Cent.* 111; to A. D. 525/6: *JEA* 68 (1982) 287; to A. D. 529: *P. Rainer Cent.* 115; to A. D. 530 (?): *P. Rainer Cent.* 116.

*Outside of Egypt*: add to A. D. 512: *P. Ness.* III 16; to A. D. 537: *P. Ness.* III 18 (both Nessana, Palestine).

Those localities which have yielded only a very limited number of documents or whose documentation is restricted to only part of the period under survey (cf. the situation in the Antaiopolite) are obviously of less relevance for our investigation about when the indiction began to be included as a regular element in dating formulas. Furthermore, those documents lacking a precise provenance can also be left out of account. One can therefore safely restrict further inquiries to the dating formulas occurring in papyri from the Arsinoite, the Herakleopolite, the Oxyrhynchite and the Hermopolite Nomes.

On the basis of presently available documents one gets the following picture:

**Arsinoite**: In the *fourth* century the majority of the completely preserved dating formulas omit the indiction. Exceptions are (apart from *P. Stras.* I 9, cf. *supra* n. 3) A. D. 382, *P. Gen.* 67; A. D. 391, *SB V 8024 = P. Stras.* 142; A. D. 398, *P. Flor.* I 66.

In the *fifth* century the picture has completely reversed. Indictions are normally found in dating formulas, except in A. D. 407, *SB I 5159*; A. D. 409/10, *SPP XX* 115; A. D. 415, *SPP XX* 90 (cf. *ZPE* 26 [1977] 275); A. D. 417, *P. Got.* 39. Starting with the year A. D. 439 (*SB XIV 11357*) all completely preserved dating formulas show a combination of a consulate + an indiction.

In the *sixth* century all published documents from before A. D. 540 show a combination of a consulate + an indiction.

**Herakleopolite**: In the *fourth* century no papyri with a completely preserved dating formula show a combination of a consulate + an indiction.

In the *fifth* century no texts dating from before A. D. 435 show a combination of an indiction + a consulate in a completely preserved dating formula. Starting with A. D. 435 (*Pap. Lugd. Bat.* XIII 15) papyri with completely preserved dating formulas show such a combination, except A. D. 441, *P. Rainer Cent.* 94 (contract fragment); A. D. 445, *SPP XX* 123 (loan of money); A. D. 446, *P. Rainer Cent.* 96 (fragm.; only dating formula); A. D. 497, *SPP XX* 129 (petition). In the *sixth* century all complete dating formulas show the combination of consulate + indiction.

**Oxyrhynchite**: In the *fourth* century no completely preserved dating formulas show a combination of a consulate (or a regnal or Oxyrhynchite era year) + an indiction,

except perhaps *P. Bon.* 39. 40 (cf. the remarks in *ZPE* 52 [1983] 252, note to lines 2 and 40; the papyrus dates from A. D. 341).

In the fifth century there are up to A. D. 466 only 2 documents which show an indiction in combination with another dating element in a completely preserved dating formula, viz. *BGU* III 936 (A. D. 426; + consulate) and *P. Harr.* 149 (A. D. 444; + Oxy. era year). One other complete dating formula from A. D. 426, *P. Oslo* II 35, lacks the indiction, and so do 2 other papyri from A. D. 444 with complete dating formulas, *P. Oxy.* VII 1037 and L 3583. Starting with the year A. D. 466, one finds *P. Oxy.* XVI 2001 showing a combination of an Oxy. era year + an indiction; in A. D. 467, *P. Mich.* XIV 681 shows a dating only by the Oxy. era year; in A. D. 468, *P. Wisc.* I 10 shows a combination of consulate + indiction; after A. D. 468 the documents normally show a dating with a consulate / Oxy. era year + an indiction, with the exception of *P. Oxy.* XVI 1899 (receipt for part of a waterwheel; A. D. 475 according to *P. Rainer Cent.* 106 introd.; A. D. 476 according to *P. Rainer Cent.* 123. 15–16 n.).

In the sixth century all completely preserved dating formulas show a combination of a consulate / Oxy. era year + an indiction, with the exception of A. D. 504, *P. Oxy.* XVI 1883, 1884 (petitions) and A. D. 509, *P. Oxy.* XVI 1885 (petition).

**Hermopolite:** In the fourth century all completely preserved datings show only a consulate.

In the fifth century a combination of consulate + indiction occurs before A. D. 430 only in *SB* VIII 9931 (A. D. 405, cf. *BL* VI 161) and *PSI* III 245 (A. D. 429). After A. D. 430 the indiction seems lacking in otherwise completely preserved dating formulas only in *P. Rainer Cent.* 99 (A. D. 451; petition), *PSI* VII 768 (A. D. 465, judicial decision), *M. Chrest.* 71 (A. D. 466?; for the date cf. *BASP* 17 [1980] 30; the same *antiscriba* is found both in *PSI* VII 768 and in *M. Chrest.* 71) and *P. Stras.* 148 (A. D. 472; lease contract<sup>6</sup>).

In the sixth century all completely preserved dating formulas show a combination of a consulate + an indiction, except *P. Stras.* 472 (A. D. 533/34, cf. *BASP* 17 [1980] 31; contract of lease<sup>7</sup>).

In short, it may be concluded that in the Arsinoite Nome indictions were introduced into dating formulas already rather early, and that by A. D. 440 this had become normal practice. In Herakleopolis one was almost equally quick; it may be significant (cf. *infra*) that the only late Vth century document lacking an indiction is a petition from A. D. 497 (*SPP* XX 129). In Hermopolis, indictions similarly occur already quite early. Remarkably enough, almost all documents with a completely preserved dating formula lacking an indiction and dating from the later half of the Vth or the start of the VIth century concern petitions and similar documents rather

<sup>6</sup>) It is striking that the month and the day are also lacking in the heading of the document; one might conjecture that these stood, along with the indiction, in the lost part of the papyrus at the left, between lines 2 and 3. Prof. Schwartz informs me (by letter d. d. 7. ii. 1985) that "il y a, entre les lignes 2 et 3, une distance un peu plus grande qu'entre les autres lignes. Cet intervalle tend à diminuer quand on va vers la droite, mais cela n'est pas un argument en faveur d'une ligne '2.' dans la lacune de gauche".

<sup>7</sup>) Prof. Schwartz (cf. *supra*, n. 6) writes that "il est impossible qu'il y ait eu les indications du jour et de l'indiction entre les lignes 3 et 4".

than contracts; the case of *P. Stras.* 472, and possibly that of *P. Stras.* 148 too, remain exceptional. In Oxyrhynchus the situation is a bit confused, in that there are so many documents lacking an indiction in completely preserved dating formulas, after the indiction is found for the first time in a dating formula (*BGU* III 936, A. D. 426) and before it forms a normal part of such a formula (*P. Wisc.* I 10 from A. D. 468 is the earliest of an almost uninterrupted series of documents). There are from the years A. D. 426–468 circa 30 documents which lack the indiction in a completely preserved dating formula, 7 documents have incompletely preserved dating formulas, and only 3 documents include the indiction into the dating formula. It seems an inescapable conclusion that the scribes in the Oxyrhynchite Nome were much slower than elsewhere in adding the indiction to the dating formulas in all kinds of documents.)<sup>8</sup> Moreover, if one excepts the receipt from A. D. 475/76, *P. Oxy.* XVI 1899, the only type of document in which after A. D. 468 the current indiction was not indicated in the dating formulas is the petition, a few of which from A. D. 504 and 509 omit this dating criterion.

One may be tempted, therefore, to ask whether as a rule after ca. A. D. 440–450 especially petitions and similar documents were singled out from a norm (or even a law) to have papyrus documents dated by both consulate (or, for that matter, an Oxy. era year) and the indiction. Furthermore, if one looks the pertinent texts up (Hermopolis: *P. Rainer Cent.* 99; *PSI* VII 768; *M. Chrest.* 71. Herakleopolis: *SPP* XX 129. Oxyrhynchus: *P. Mil.* I 45; *P. Gron. Amst.* 1; *PSI* IX 1075; *P. Oxy.* XVI 1878, 1883–1885) one discovers that in most cases the dating of the document was written at the bottom of it; exceptions are *P. Rainer Cent.* 99, *P. Mil.* I 45, *P. Gron. Amst.* 1, *P. Oxy.* XVI 1878). Apart, however, from the rather numerous exceptions to any rule which would suppose that it was typical for petitions and similar documents to have their dating formulas written at the bottom of the papyrus, it should be remarked that there are petitions which have an indiction in their dating formula: *Pap. Lugd. Bat.* XVII 17 has the indiction in the dating formula and this stands at the start of a petition addressed to a *nyktostrategos* (A. D. 504).

As a conclusion, it would seem that there is not sufficient reason to speculate that the use of indictions was officially prescribed by some law issued in or slightly before A. D. 472 which has been lost to us. One sees that the use of indictions in dating formulas of all kinds of contracts occurred already rather early in the Vth century in papyri from the Hermopolite, the Herakleopolite and the Arsinoite Nomes; only Oxyrhynchus limped a bit behind. If such a law ever had been enacted, one would expect it to have come into visible effect more evenly in our documentation (cf. the introduction of invocation formulas in documents from later Byzantine Egypt, *CdE* 56 [1981] 112ff.). Moreover, if such a use had been prescribed officially, it would be rather difficult to explain why the indiction is so often – though not always – lacking in a rather specific type of documents (petitions and similar documents

<sup>8</sup> For the peculiar conservatism regarding dating practices in Oxyrhynchus cf. also the use of the Oxyrhynchite era years (cf. *CSBE* [supra, n. 5], Chapt. VI) and the use of regnal years in documents from the later part of the IVth century (cf. *Regnal Formulas* [supra, n. 5], Chapt. II). For regionalistic features in dating methods see in general the remarks in *GRBS* 20 (1979) 288ff. It may be noticed here that also in e.g. *SPP* XX 114 (Alexandria, A. D. 421), *PSI* XII 1239 (Antinoopolis, A. D. 430) and *P. Köln* III 161 (Cynopolis, A. D. 423) the indiction is part of the dating formula of these texts.

relating to correspondence between private persons and officials, or *vice versa*).<sup>9)</sup> One is, therefore, obliged to accept the fact that, even though indictions gradually became included in dating formulas during the Vth century, their use was not based upon some official general order or even a law and that only by Justinian's *Nov. 47* (31. viii. 537) was the use of indictions sanctioned and even prescribed, along with the use of consulates and — re-introduced — regnal years, as part of dating formulas in all kinds of papyrus documents<sup>10)</sup>.

<sup>9)</sup> Apart from the petitions referred to several times, cf. also the contracts *P. Stras.* 472 and 148 (cf. *supra*, notes 6, 7); cf. also the receipt *P. Oxy.* XVI 1899 from A. D. 475/76. There is one document written outside of Egypt (*P. Ness.* III 16 from Nessana, Palestine, A. D. 512) which also lacks the indiction in the dating formula.

<sup>10)</sup> It will be remembered that even after the promulgation of *Nov. 47* there are quite a few documents which seem to lack the indication of the regnal year as prescribed in that law. Cf., e. g., from the Fayum: *SB VI* 9283 (A. D. 555) and *BGU I* 305 (A. D. 556); from Hermopolis: *SB VI* 9085, inv. 16048, and *BGU XII* 2202 (both from A. D. 565); from Oxyrhynchus: *P. Got.* 9 and *PSI XIV* 1427 (both from A. D. 564); from Thebes: *P. Lond.* V 1719 (A. D. 556); from Aphrodite: *P. Cair. Masp.* I 87109, 87110 (both from A. D. 565). It would go too far to assume that in all of these texts the lack of a regnal year is due to physical mutilation of the papyrus. Therefore, one has to accept the fact that scribes in Egypt did not always obey to the rules prescribed by *Nov. 47*. But one is not justified, I think, to draw any conclusions from this observation while trying to reconstruct a hypothetical law concerning the use of indictions in papyri before ca. 472.