P.Giss.69: evidence for the supplying of stone transport operations in Roman Egypt and the production of fifty-foot monolithic column shafts

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Students of Roman sculpture and architecture have paid scant attention to the small corpus of papyri concerned with quarrying and stone transport operations in Roman Egypt. This is unfortunate since these documents contain much useful information regarding the availability of several varieties of prestige stone (granite, breccia, alabaster, etc.) employed for sculpture and architectural elements. This note examines one such papyrus (P.Giss.69), discussing its implications for our understanding of the prestige stone supply. The document's principal interest lies in the fact that there is a strong possibility that a column shaft mentioned in the text can be identified as one of those intended for use in the Temple of the Deified Trajan in Rome. If correct, this identification can be used to resolve a long-standing dispute about the date of the temple's construction.

The document in question is a grain requisition from Heptakomia that formed part of the official correspondence of Apollonios, strategos of the Heptakomia Apolloniopolitis nome. It was acquired by the Museum des Oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins in Giessen in 1902, and published in 1912. Below is the text as edited by Kornemann, followed by an English translation:

[......] Ἀ[πλολογίων τῷ] τεμενιστῷ
[......] ἑκάρειν.
Χαιρήμωσα τὸν ἀναδιδόντα σοι τὸ ἔπιστό-
[λι]ὸν τοῦτο ὑπὸ ἀγνοεῖς, ἄδελῃς· καὶ γὰρ πέ-
ρυσι ἐπὶ τὴν παράλημνην τῶν ἴματιον
αὐτὸν παρὰ σοὶ κατέλειψα καὶ νῦν ἄρ δὲ πρὸς
παράλημνην κρειθῆς ἑπεμμένα αὐτόν, ὥς
παρακαλῶ ἐν πάσι συνοδᾶσαι καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν
οὐζήσαν ἐν τῷ ὑπὸ σοι ἱμηρῷ] 

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τάχει αὐτῷ ἐπιστείλαι καὶ βοηθεῖαν δόναι,
[να διὰ] σπ[ό]υδες ἐμβαλόμενοι πᾶσαν τὴν
[κρειθῆς τα]χέως εἰς Καίην[ὴ] παρακομίης,
ἐπεὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ πεντηκοντάποδος στῦλος
καταγωγήν πλείοστα κτήνη ἔχομεν καὶ

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ῃδὴ σχεδὸν κρειθῆ λειψόμεθα· πλείστον
μοι, ἄδελῃς, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ παρέξῃ, ἐδ[ν ἃ]
κρειθῆ ταχέως [......] ἱστέγηται.
("Ετούχ) Ἑ' Ἀδριανοῦ Καίηνο[ρς τοῦ κορίον ] ἔ

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1 This was a short-lived administrative district situated between the Lykopolite and Aphroditopolite nomes in Upper Egypt. See A. Calderini, Dizionario dei nomi geografici e toponomi dell’Egitto greco-romano vol.1, fasc.2 (Madrid 1966) 159-60.