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John Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman East*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. Pp. 244. ISBN 0-300-10898-2. \$60.00.

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For sheer quantity of surviving documentation, there can hardly be a journey in classical antiquity to match that of Theophanes and his entourage, who in the early 320s (perhaps 322 or 323: see p. 35) went from Hermopolis Magna in Egypt to Syrian Antioch, and back again after a two and a half month stay. Not only does John Matthews brilliantly exploit the dry accounts kept on this journey, but his study also serves as an instructive paradigm of striking shifts that have occurred in the study of classical antiquity over the past half century. Embedded within this book lie several more journeys, both literal and metaphorical, beyond the one made by Theophanes himself. In recent years, the scholarly community has complained time and again that colleagues entrusted with unpublished ancient materials are too slow to issue them and thus to share them with others who may be interested. To be sure, the Greek papyri comprising the so-called Archive of Theophanes were themselves slow to reach publication; but ever since they appeared in 1952 the level of interest in them has remained minimal. A total of around 1,500 lines documenting in relentless detail where the travelers stayed each night en route, and above all what they paid for their food and drink daily plus some other expenses, hardly seemed treasure trove fit to attract the ambitious researcher. True, some attention has already been given by a handful of scholars to the terminology used for items of food and drink (with clear signs of Latin infiltrating the Greek East), as well as to the prices recorded in comparison with other sources during a period of monetary inflation. It is Matthews' achievement, however, to recognize that this material offers unique potential to illuminate social and cultural history across a far wider spectrum than has hitherto been recognized. For these purposes, his book offers eight chapters, covering Theophanes' home circumstances in Hermopolis; the party's travels to and from Antioch; their stay there; costs and prices; food and diet. Four appendices include textual notes on the papyri, and an indispensable tabulation of expenditure item by item. The main text of the book is lucid and well pitched to engage a very diverse audience, despite the intricacies of the unfamiliar material. The range of informatively captioned illustrations and maps is a further enhancement.

One major reason why a very diverse audience can engage with the papyrus record here

SEE
p. 7



is that Matthews has had the courage to follow the still relatively novel fashion of presenting it all in English, piece by piece, at the appropriate stages of the book. How different from the original publication in 1952, where Colin Roberts presents nothing but the Greek, together with a concise Introduction and the bare minimum of terse notes on words that might give even a fellow specialist difficulty or were previously unattested.¹ In consequence, even at that time, the potential readership must have been tiny and it has only continued to decline, now almost to vanishing point. Admittedly, in 1952 a full translation would have further increased the expense of producing what was already a costly, delayed publication in financially lean times. Roberts' Preface and his compressed presentation of certain badly damaged documents (for example, *P.Ryl.* 639, 643-51) duly recognize the latter circumstances, ones with which he was to become all the more familiar once he made the unusual career shift from Oxford Classics don to Secretary (equivalent to chief executive) of the University Press in 1954.² Matthews, for his part, is surely right to have concluded that he did not need to re-edit the papyri or to reproduce Roberts' Greek. He might have gone on to point out that today everyone with the capacity to access Google can in any case read the Greek of *P.Ryl.* gratis at any time thanks to the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri, one of the electronic miracles that now acts to advance and reshape our scholarship. Matthews has vigilantly re-read all the Greek, however, and offers specialists twenty pages of shrewd editorial comments in Appendix 2. He also reconsiders positions adopted by Roberts. Notably, he differs from him in dissociating from Theophanes' journey altogether the inventories of clothing and other household articles in *P.Ryl.* 627; indeed, he adds on p. 44, the items listed may not even belong to Theophanes. Matthews' caution here is justified in my view. At the same time he offers good reason for being more convinced than Roberts was that the draft accounts in damaged *P.Ryl.* 639 do relate to Theophanes' stay at Antioch (98-99).

The hazardous journey of the papyri themselves from unknown findspot to publication and eventually translation is itself a long, obscure one that underscores the quirkiness of fate. The bulk of them, it seems, were bought from a dealer in Egypt around 1896 by Arthur Hunt, acting on behalf of Lord Crawford, from whom they were acquired by the John Rylands Library in Manchester in 1901 (the year after it opened), where they still are. At one stage or another, however, certain items somehow became separated from the main group, including in particular a fine Latin letter written by one Vitalis commending Theophanes to the governor of an eastern province; this found its way to Strasburg, where it was published by H. Breslau in 1903. A second such letter in the same hand addressed to a different governor -- but in poorer condition, and missing Theophanes' name -- remained in the main archive, and was the key item that enabled Roberts to link the archive to Theophanes when he began work on its publication in the mid 1930s. Meantime, no later than 1907-08, further letters connected with Theophanes had been brought to Queen's College, Oxford, by Hunt and his associate Bernard Grenfell, both of them Research Fellows of the college. Here these papyri -- placed between fine-quality pages of the weekly *Oxford University Gazette* in order to "relax" them -- evidently lay neglected in a couple of tin boxes for at least half a century until rescued and published by B. Rees in 1964 (*P.Herm. Rees*).

Matthews was himself an undergraduate at Queen's, and later fellow, living and working

-- did he but know it, as he reflects on p. 7 -- in close proximity to where these latter Theophanes papyri had so long been "relaxing." Still less can he have known when he first learned of the Theophanes Archive as a graduate student, from reading an article on imperial bureaucrats in the Roman provinces by the Yale professor Ramsay MacMullen, that he would himself later make the journey there to fill the latter's place on retirement. Such a professional move from one country or continent to another, once a relatively rare event in the classical field, today borders on the commonplace and makes a valued contribution to the internationalization of approaches to antiquity.

Matthews' professional life has journeyed not only literally in space, but also in focus. He is known for his studies of western aristocracies and the imperial court in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, of the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, and of the formidable Theodosian Code. All this work addresses what his Ammianus would approve of as "negotiorum celsitudines" (26.1.1), elevated matters worthy of historical enquiry. The record of Theophanes' journey, by contrast, is one of cabbages, not kings. Until recently few historians would dare to turn their gaze thus, and certainly not in the early 1950s. It was in 1951, after all, that A.H.M. Jones famously identified a papyrus scrap as a more or less contemporary official copy of part of a letter of Constantine quoted in Eusebius' Life of the emperor and long doubted by many to be genuine. With such weighty controversies to pursue, who would choose to concentrate instead on Theophanes' quotidian trivia? It is a mark of how we, and our scholarship, have shifted that today the scholar who does so can be applauded.

We have grown to recognize how much we are what we eat, and how food, drink and everything associated with their consumption can have extensive social and cultural significance. In the context of discussing how best to translate the meal termed *ariston* in Theophanes' accounts, Matthews recalls encountering for the first time as an Oxford freshman -- his "provincial origins" behind him -- "dinner" used for the evening meal and "lunch" for the midday one (92 n. 9). To purists, he might have added, the latter term itself was a deplorable abbreviation of "luncheon." More recently, ours has become a world where the diet-conscious all love their salad, the leafy *sine qua non* of today's American main meal. By contrast, who in Britain in the aftermath of World War II took salad seriously? In condemning the "dull, tasteless and old-fashioned" meals served to himself and other patients at the exclusive London Clinic in the late 1990s, Alan Bennett scathingly characterizes its notion of a salad as "what one would be given in Leeds in 1947, namely a piece of lettuce, a slice of tomato and another of cucumber."³ Now Matthews can offer an entire learned appendix on the identification of *kemia* and *kemoraphanos* in Theophanes' accounts (cf. 216), the former (he suggests) "greens from a variety of radish or similar root crop," the latter "the young shoots of some member of the cabbage family" (234). These identifications are advanced with reference to Greengrocers' English and Hungarian remedies, and a similar one earlier (of *tourtion*, a type of bread, 191) with citation of a recipe found in *Bon Appétit* magazine no less. What would Matthews' own father think, who "would sometimes bring home half a sheep's or pig's head . . . claim[ing] it was the best part of the animal" (91 n. 8; trotters of animals unspecified occur several times in the accounts, a head once, 212)? Yet, ironically, it is in 2006 and from Matthews' hometown of Leicester that *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization* primarily comes. Three of its four principal editors

are professors at the University of Leicester, one of whom Lin Foxhall (American by birth and training) contributes an invaluable entry (with full-page table) on vegetables. This entry in the new Dictionary, and others under such categories as Environment and Food and Foodstuffs (cf. xxv, xxxii-xxxiv), plainly reflect novel perspectives on antiquity that Matthews and many others are now opening up in most rewarding ways.

Matthews' pathbreaking study offers so much of value that I hesitate to question its balance and I mean no disrespect by so doing, especially when little more than subjective taste may be at issue. Chapter 2, for example, on Theophanes and his friends at Hermopolis is entirely appropriate in its placement and execution. Even so, it remains disappointing that the background material about the city and its religious life cannot be closely linked to Theophanes or his journey, and that the surviving assemblage of letters hardly affords more than slight acquaintance with the man or his family. What then follows after this slow start -- treatments of the journeys out and back, and of Antioch itself -- proves far more satisfying by contrast. Here Matthews covers in depth the routes taken by boat and by road, the imperial transport service (*cursus publicus*) which Theophanes evidently used, and the great city of Antioch itself, with a marvelous appreciation of its life as depicted in the topographical border of a mid-fifth century mosaic found in a Roman villa at suburban Daphne. The concluding pair of chapters -- on costs and prices, followed by food and diet -- are no less masterly treatments of their topics, addressing such matters as the level of inflation in the first twenty years of the fourth century, and seeking to distinguish between items purchased for the more privileged members of the party and those for the lower servants' table. The complete menus for meals eaten at a specific time, day and place are even reconstructed from soup to nuts -- or rather "ab ovo usque ad mala" (176) -- with vermouth *absinthion* as aperitif (90). No chef can be identified, however.

There are, to be sure, frustrations which Matthews rightly acknowledges cannot be overcome. How irksome it is, for example, that there is no knowing the size of Theophanes' entourage at any point. Ideally, the accounts might assist a reckoning, but they seldom attach a quantity to the price paid for an item (92, 154). For the outbound journey, Matthews (68, 94-95, 165) must be correct to imagine a group of ten or even more persons conveyed in no less than three heavy vehicles. Perhaps the group accompanying Theophanes on his return in late July was smaller (168); without question, it proceeded surprisingly fast and without rest days (130, 132). Altogether, further comparative data on these aspects would have been welcome. Chapter 16 "Time Under Way" in Michael McCormick's important book *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300-900* (Cambridge, 2001) has much to contribute on speed of travel. Moreover, his observation (449) that travelers might prove fearful of diseases connected with warm weather could conceivably help to explain why Theophanes dashed home at such a breakneck pace. Ten may indeed be too low a total for the outbound group. The upper servants alone who accompanied the emperor Tiberius' *dispensator* Musicus Scurranus from Lugdunum to Rome numbered as many as sixteen (*ILS* 1514), and the *cohors* accompanying the proconsul of Macedonia, P. Antius Orestes, to Samothrace in 165 totals around three times that figure (*AE* 1965.205). In both these instances, the principal traveler was of course an official who desired or felt obliged to display his position. But Theophanes' journey, too, called

for much handling of the heavy baggage -- at every *mansio* from one set of vehicles to another presumably -- and for countless other mundane tasks to be performed (cf. 165).⁴ Did Theophanes himself do the shopping, for example? A gentleman certainly might do so. Among the witty one-liners of Polemo that Philostratus considered memorable was his quip on encountering a fellow sophist buying sausages, sprats and other cheap cuts: "You can't possibly act out the arrogance of a Darius or Xerxes convincingly if this is what you eat" (*Vit. Soph.* 541). There need be little doubt that Theophanes personally purchased the extravagant hat accounted for at Pelusium on the outbound journey (51, 226), for instance, as well as the Silenus-figure wine-jar accounted for there also on the return (125, 136).⁵ Even so, it is hard to envisage a man of his status and loftier preoccupations bothering to go to market daily to make the routine purchases of bread, greens, firewood and the like for the party, as Matthews evidently assumes (9, 90-91, 123, 164).

This said, another most frustrating feature of the entire record is Theophanes' own sheer elusiveness, so that it is virtually impossible to imagine anything about him with confidence. Matthews recognizes this difficulty. We can readily conclude with him that Theophanes and the superior members of the party "enjoyed a typical Mediterranean diet of the time, varied and well furnished in an upper-class fashion" (178), with plenty of meat and good wine but surprisingly little fresh fish (170). We gather that Theophanes had the status of *scholasticus* or practicing lawyer (8, 36). But we simply do not know why he made this five-month trip beyond the fact that its purpose was serious, possibly a financial issue requiring negotiation with the *vicarius* of the diocese of Oriens at his Antioch headquarters on behalf of a city or province (38-39). The contrast with the well-known journeys of Cicero through Cilicia and Pliny through Bithynia, for example, could not be starker; in these instances it is the everyday details that remain a blank, but the purpose is amply documented. There is no reason to imagine that on the road Theophanes displayed the gregarious vulgarity of the emperor Vitellius, who early in the day liked to ask *muliones* and *viatores* with a hearty belch whether they had had their breakfast yet (Suet. *Vitellius* 7). However, to judge by Theophanes' accounts one could be forgiven for suspecting that on the whole he is really rather a dull cove. Even in the throbbing metropolis of Antioch with all the attractions underlined by Matthews (77-79), he appears not to go to the baths specially often (93, 225-26), nor to attend entertainments or festivals. He evidently never hangs out at the barber's, nor buys cosmetics (how gleeful Pliny was to discover that Hostilius Firminus, natty scoundrel and proconsular legate, had credited a bribe to himself as *unguentarius*, *Ep.* 2.11.23). Was Theophanes' mission too time-consuming to permit leisure pursuits? Surely not for all of two and a half months, especially when we recall the limited duration of the typical ancient workday. Was he too stretched financially to enjoy more cakes and ale? Again, I doubt that. Matthews' speculation (39) that Theophanes had meticulous accounts kept in hopes of reclaiming expenses from whoever commissioned his travels seems wide of the mark. More probably, as Matthews also considers (*ibid.*), the trip was euergetism on Theophanes' part, a generous, voluntary public service undertaken by a man who could afford it and conceivably had some personal interest in the outcome.

Last but not least, my sense is that Matthews' inevitably rather unrewarding focus upon

the figure of Theophanes diverts him from giving the real heroes of the surviving record their due. They go unsung, and are taken largely for granted along with the rest of the unidentified minions (94). I mean the actual compilers of the accounts.⁶ As Matthews does recognize (98, 100), their drafts and fair copies display unfailing professional devotion, almost pedantry in places. Hence the entry "gourds for cooking" at Antioch on Pauni 21 is over-written with the correction "green vegetables" (194, 215) -- as if it seriously mattered, especially when the cost of this purchase is piffling. But of course a careful record of how the master's money has been spent had to matter, which is why normally (mentioned above) the quantity of a purchase is disregarded, and only the price is given. How closely the master would ever peruse the accounts might be unpredictable -- Pliny once admitted to inspecting such documents "invitus et cursim" (*Ep.* 5.14.8) -- but still pride and caution required that the work be done scrupulously. To a modern auditor, these accounts (which were, of course, for the master alone) must appear distinctly unsatisfactory insofar as dozens of trifling expenditures minutely recorded are interspersed with substantial sums lacking further detail (cf. 227-31). A few of these latter might even revive hopes that Theophanes did see some fun in Antioch after all. In particular, the coy payment to an unnamed widow made just before he departs there for home invites speculation in this regard (117). The amount must be large, although damage to the papyrus at this interesting point (cf. 4) removes the figure. Matthews conjectures it to be a lump sum for rent. But in that case why not name the owner of the property outright, and would not a substantial downpayment have already been made?

In any event, I suggest it to be only likely that further accounts of a comparable nature were kept on Theophanes' journey in addition to those which happen to survive. More broadly, Matthews' exemplary presentation of the latter acts as a vivid reminder to us of a fundamental part of the everyday routine of all well-to-do households throughout the Roman empire. Alongside MacMullen's "epigraphic habit," it is time for the less visible but even more pervasive "bookkeeping habit" to be given due recognition too. Pliny learned young how revealing accounts could be (*Ep.* 7.31.2), and later he used those of Hostilius Firminus (above) and Caecilius Classicus (*Ep.* 3.9.13, "sua manu scriptum") to devastating effect. Equally, when he undertook the defense of Varenus Rufus, it was the latter's accounts that his Bithynian accusers sought (*Ep.* 7.6.2). For many a bright young slave (like Trimalchio), the job of *dispensator* had unmistakable attraction. Whoever in Theophanes' party fulfilled this function -- and, incidentally, continued likewise back home (cf. most, if not all, of the fragmentary *P.Ryl.* 640-51) -- served him well. Somewhere in this book they merit at least a section devoted specifically to themselves and their procedures. In this key respect Matthews fails to draw inspiration from contemporary trends in historical research. Accustomed to occupying the scholar's traditional place at High Table (166), he is not gripped by the postmodern urge to penetrate below stairs and to reassess the world anew from there. That seems a pity. For it is, after all, largely a cookhouse-eyeview of the unnamed master's journey to Antioch and back that has endured, and that he has brought so splendidly and so unexpectedly back to life. Enjoy.

Notes:

1. This was for long a standard style of presentation, it should be remembered, which was maintained even in the first British sourcebooks for use in ancient history courses. See my tribute, "Meyer Reinhold and Roman civilization: the impact of sourcebooks *sans pareils*," *The Classical Bulletin* 82.1 (2006) 97-101.
2. For Roberts' career and others, attention could usefully have been drawn to R.B. Todd (ed.), *The Dictionary of British Classicists* (Bristol, 2004).
3. *Untold Stories* (London, 2005) 610.
4. For the last day of the outbound journey, when an advance group from the party covered as many as 64 Roman miles, and six "Sarmatians" were specially hired, it seems more probable that these would be outriders to clear the way, or baggage-carriers, rather than an escort of guards as Matthews proposes (9, 50, 56, 61, 67), despite his assurance elsewhere (62) that banditry on this route was not to be expected.
5. This Silenus is recorded as being "from Tyre," which Matthews takes to signify a delayed accounting for a purchase made there. Perhaps, alternatively, "in Tyrian style" may be meant, or an item imported from Tyre? Such a "typically tacky tourist's purchase" (125) merits a reference to Ernst Künzl and Gerhard Koeppel, *Souvenirs und Devotionalien: Zeugnisse des geschäftlichen, religiösen und kulturellen Tourismus im antiken Römerreich*, Mainz am Rhein, 2002. Was there a store perhaps, or even an assistant, in Pelusium that took Theophanes' fancy?
6. Matthews sometimes implies that Theophanes would have compiled the accounts himself, mistakenly in my view: contrast 108 and 150.

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Postscript

Note, however, that both Matthews and this review have overlooked a substantial contribution by E. Kirsten, "Eine Reise von Hermupolis in Oberägypten nach Antiochia in Syrien zur Zeit Kaiser Konstantins," *Erdkunde* 13 (1959) 411-26, reprinted in his *Landschaft und Geschichte in der Antiken Welt: Ausgewählte kleine Schriften* (Bonn, 1984) 263-78.