

## Firewood for Rome from Otriculum

In 1994 the scholarly world became aware of a heavy Roman marble weight of an unusual kind from Otricoli, ancient Otriculum in Central Italy (Caldelli 1994). The weight carried an interesting although somewhat enigmatic inscription, the reinterpretation of which is the purpose here. Since its discovery, the weight has received further attention primarily in a contribution on the role of Otriculum in the Tiber Valley economy and the provisioning of Rome (Cenciaioli 2008). The inscription reads (*AE* 1994, 577):

OCRIC P<sup>o</sup> LIGN HAB AVR VRB P<sup>o</sup> CL

*Otric(uli) po(ndus) lign(arium) hab(et) Aur(elius) Urb(---) po(ndo) ((centum et quinquaginta))*

The inscription is dated to the late fourth century. Not least the abbreviation, or perhaps contraction, used for *po(ndus/o)*, a normal P and a superscript smaller O, which finds a perfect analogy in Diocletian's Maximum Prices Edict, points to a late date. Previous scholars have convincingly connected the weight to the commerce in firewood. An inscription from Rome names a *pensor lignarius* (*AE* 1994, 298) and demonstrates that weight was a criterion when wood was sold.

Certain features of the inscription deserve closer scrutiny, which will reveal further aspects of the wood and lumber trade between the Appennine forests and Rome. The most important point to make concerns the weight of the stone. The nominal weight, 150 *librae*, is equal to 49.1 kg, while the stone weighs 56.6 kg. There is a considerable discrepancy, which previous scholars consider an example of willful deceit by the authorities: in order to balance the scales, the wood cutter needs to bring not 49 but 56 kg of firewood.

Dishonest behavior does not have to be the answer. In order to weigh 50 kg of firewood in one go, a special contraption is needed on which to pile up the wood. If that contraption

weighed c. 7 kg, the stone weighing down the other arm of the scales needed to be that much heavier. The case for late-antique corruption disappears.

The second point concerns the word HAB. It is practically unique to find a verb in a technical inscription such as this. The paper investigates the possibility that *hab.* instead might refer to *abies*, “fir”, with a superfluous aspiration added at the beginning of the word.

#### Bibliography:

Caldelli, M. L. 1994. “Nuovo peso iscritto da Otricoli”, *Epigraphica* 56: 200-210.

Cenciaioli, L. 2008. “Otricoli: nuove ricerche e recenti acquisti della Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell’Umbria”, in H. Patterson and F. Coarelli (eds.), ‘*Mercator placidissimus*’. *The Tiber Valley in Antiquity. New Research in the Upper and Middle River Valley*, Rome 2008, 811-835.