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GORDIAN III OR GORDIAN I?

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K. A. Worp, *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 67 (1987) 25-7 (photo p. 28), has published a text relating to market taxes at Oxyrhynchus in the following form:

P.Leid.F 1948/3.4

H. 6 x B. 5 cms

Oxyrhynchus, post 24.iv.239-243

- 1 [ ca. 10 ] βασιλ(ικῶ) γρα(μματεῖ) Ὁξ(υρυγχίτου) διαδεχο(μένῳ) τὴν στρα(τηγίαν)  
 2 [παρὰ Αὐρ(ηλίου) Ἀπο]λλωνίου τοῦ καὶ Καραπίωνος  
 3 [καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐ]τῷ ἐπιτηρ(ητῶν) ὠνῆς παντο(πωλικῆς)  
 4 [ καὶ ταριχ]ηρᾶς πόλεως νομοῦ Ὁξυρυγχ(ίτου)  
 5 [λόγ(ος) τῶν ἐμπωληθ]έντων ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ὠνῆς  
 6 [ ]αϛ α̅ λ̅ μηνὸς Φαρμουῦθι  
 7 [ ca. 14 Μάρκο]υ Ἀντωνίου Γορδιαν[ο]ῦ  
 8 [ ca. 18 ]υ Εὐσεβοῦς Εὐτυχοῦς  
 9 [ ] ἔϛτι δέ·  
 10 [ ] (δραχμὰς) η  
 11 [ ] (δραχμὰς) ιβ̅
- 

«To N.N., royal scribe and deputy-strategus of the Oxyrhynchite Nome. From Aurelius Apollonios, alias Sarapion, and his colleagues-*epiteretai* of the concession of general retail and pickling for the city and province of Oxyrhynchus. Report of revenues from the same concession - - - 1<sup>st</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> of the month of Pharmuthi (of the current x<sup>th</sup> regnal year) of the emperor Marcus Antonius Gordianus - - - Pius Felix. This is: - - 8 drachmas. - - 12 (?) drachmas - - -».

Dr Worp drew attention briefly to the most puzzling feature of the text, namely, that it must have had a hitherto unknown version of the imperial titulature, «There are no papyri with an element between Γορδιανοῦ and Εὐσεβοῦς in Gordian's titulature» (ibid. p. 26, 8 n.), cf. P. Bureth, *Les titulatures* 113. This is in spite of the fact that Gordian III's reign reached a seventh year, so that his titulature is fairly well known. Note that he assigns the papyrus to “post 24.iv. 239-243”, i.e. on or after the last day of Pharmuthi (Pharmuthi 30 = 25 April) in one of the regnal years of Gordian III from the second to the sixth inclusive. Yet this is precisely the period for which his titulature is well known to us. For the moment I can offer no certain solutions, but it does seem clear that this papyrus, had it been better preserved, would have told us something new and interesting about the history of the period. So it may be worth while to reconsider the text of the document and try to clarify what we have for certain and how much, if not exactly what, we need to restore.

The parallels already cited by Worp can help further with the text of line 6. P.Köln V 228.7-9 has μηνι(αῖος) λόγος τῶν ἐμπωληθ(έντων) εἰς τὴν προκ(ειμένην) ὠνῆν ἀπὸ ᾧ ἕως λ̅ καὶ α̅(ὕτης) λ̅ τοῦ διελ(θόντος) μηνὸς Ἐπειφ. SB XVI 12695.4-6 has λόγ(ος) α̅(ὕτενιαυτῶν?)



municipal title, e.g. αρξ/ or βου<sup>λ</sup> for ἄρξ(αντος), βουλ(ευτοῦ), see N. Lewis, *The Compulsory Services* 30 s.v. ἐπιτήρησις, 'Ex-archontes, bouleutai eligible (P.Oxy. 1413, 2116, P.Ryl. 77)', or, less probably, a short patronymic such as Ἐαρῶ or Ὀρου. In 7 the clerk will have written *n* (ἔτους) as e.g. ζ ς, the figure, whatever it was, being followed by the double curve symbol which is commonly used for 'year'. In 8 we have the whole focus of the interest and the doubt.

Perhaps the most likely possibility is that this is a titlature from the very latest phase of the reign of Gordian III, showing that he adopted a victory title in virtue of his initial defeat of the Persians at Resaena (Amm. Marc. 23.5.17). This would imply that the regnal year is the seventh (A.D. 243/4) and the day one after 30 Pharmuthi = 25 April, A.D. 244. At first sight it seems that this is excluded by PSI XII 1238, which contains a copy of a cession of land dated on a doubtful day of the month of Pharmuthi of the first year of Philip I, i.e. in the period 27 March to 25 April A.D. 244. But this copy is embodied in an application for the public registration of the transaction dated 2 September A.D. 244, expressed as Thoth 5 of the second year of Philip, so that it might be argued that there could be a possibility that the form of the date of the contract has been altered to suit the formula for the new reign and that the original document might have been dated to the same day by reference to the reign of Gordian III, i.e. as Pharmuthi *n* of year 7 of Gordian.

In favour of the idea that Gordian III did accept a victory title are a few inscriptions which attribute to Philip I various victory titles referring to a Persian war, see X. Lorient, ANRW II.2 775 n. 861, adding now AE (1975) No. 765 (pp. 200-201) from Thrace with Παρθικοῦ Ἀδιαβηνικοῦ. Probably all of these date from the earlier part of Philip's reign. They are generally dubbed 'unofficial' or 'abusive' or the like. It might be argued that new emperors with doubtful claims to the succession sometimes initially adopted elements of the titles of their predecessors to stress their legitimacy. A striking example is Hadrian's rare early titlature, which reproduces all the titles peculiarly characteristic of Trajan, see P.Oxy.LV 3781.7-10 n.

If the date falls in the last days of the reign of Gordian III, a possible restoration of line 8 would be the pair of victory titles borne by Philip I in AE (1975) No. 765: Παρθικοῦ Ἀδιαβηνικοῦ, giving 18 letters instead of the estimated 19. The regnal year would be his seventh and we should need to restore ζ (ἔτους) in line 7. All this would indicate that in Oxyrhynchus he was still considered to be ruling after Pharmuthi 30 = 25 April A.D.244. The earliest date for Philip I which is contemporary, as opposed to retrospective, would then be either 28 June A.D. 244 (SB VIII 9873.13 Ἐπεῖφι δ̄, but this looks as if it should rather be interpreted as Ἐπεῖφ ιδ̄ = 8 July) or 2 July (P.Warren 21.73: Ἐπεῖφ η̄).

At present the only value of this hypothesis lies in drawing attention to the fact that the papyri are on the verge of telling us something new. To emphasize that it is not a hypothesis to be relied on, it may be worth while to examine another possible, though perhaps not equally likely hypothesis, which could place the papyrus in the crowded year A.D. 238.

Herodian tells us that only Gordian I was proclaimed emperor at Thysdrus in A.D. 238 (III 5.7), and that Gordian II was associated with his father by decree of the Senate in Rome (VII 7.2). We know from a few famous examples that the Roman authorities in Egypt sometimes acknowledged new emperors on receipt of their personal announcements, without waiting for the arrival of news of the constitutionally proper confirmation by the Senate. Vespasian's proclamation at Alexandria itself is perhaps too anomalous to count as a parallel, but besides him we can cite Hadrian, see now P.Oxy. LV 3781, and Avidius Cassius, whose claim was accepted in Egypt until

his bid for power was suppressed again by Marcus Aurelius. It is possible, consequently, that a sole reign of Gordian I was acknowledged in Egypt before a joint rule of Gordians I and II and that the Leiden papyrus dates from it. There are two papyri referring to the joint reign: P.Oxy. XLIII 3107 (13 June) and P.Yale inv. 156 (in AJP 51 [1930] 62-6; 21 June). P.Oxy. LI 3607 (s.d.; before 13 June) is a fragment of a covering letter from an acting-strategus (διαδεχόμενος τὴν στρατηγίαν) for a governor's edict announcing the accession either of Gordians I and II together or of Gordian II alone as junior colleague of his father. It would be possible to restore the fragment to fit either of these eventualities, see P.Oxy. LI p. 18.

If the Leiden papyrus should prove to date from a hypothetical sole reign of Gordian I, we should learn that in Oxyrhynchus, where on Pharmuthi 12 = 7 April A.D. 238 Maximinus and Maximus were still believed to be ruling, see P.Oxy. XLIII 3107.10 and note, Gordian I was considered to be sole emperor at some date not long after the end of Pharmuthi, that is, after 25 April, while by Payni 19 = 13 June (P.Oxy. 3107.16) the joint reign of Gordians I and II had been announced.

For the restoration of the title in this case we might hazard Σεμπρωνιανοῦ Ἀφρικανο]ῦ, giving 20 letters in place of the estimated 19. In the papyri of the joint reign both Gordian I and Gordian II have the titles *Romanus Sempronianus Africanus*, see P.Oxy. XLIII 3107.12-15 n., but the Alexandrian coins have only *Sempronianus Africanus* for each (J. Vogt, *Die alexandrinischen Münzen* i 190, ii 136; R. S. Poole, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum: Alexandria etc. 235-7*; J. G. Milne, *Catalogue of the Alexandrian Coins in the Ashmolean Museum* 80; A. Geißen, *Katalog der alexandrinischen Kaisermünzen ... Köln* iii 218-220). *Romanus* looks like an allusion to the approval of the Roman Senate. If there were, as outlined above, a sole reign of Gordian I, it would necessarily antedate the arrival in Oxyrhynchus of news of the Senate's approval along with the installation of Gordian II, which may be reflected in P.Oxy. LI 3607.

One tiny shred of evidence to comfort this second hypothesis is the coincidence that the new Leiden papyrus mentions an acting-strategus of the Oxyrhynchite nome and that P.Oxy. 3607 mentions an acting-strategus who is very likely to have been serving in the Oxyrhynchite nome. The prospect is open that both documents may refer to the same man's term of office in the early summer of A.D. 238. The weakness of this argument is that the list of strategi and their deputies would not forbid a new acting-strategus to be inserted in both years, see G. Bastianini, J.E.G. Whitehorne, *Strategi and Royal Scribes (Pap. Flor. XV) 98-9*, 144.

This is a tantalizing state of uncertainty to have reached after the expenditure of so much time and ink. It will be interesting to see what new evidence arises to demolish one or both of the possibilities envisaged for restoring this papyrus. Even if both turn out to have been misguided, it may have been worth while to draw some attention to the dim glimpse of something new in Roman history which it offers. Finally it needs to be stressed how unlikely it is that the papyrus is rightly ascribed to the years A.D. 239-43 and represents an aberration in the titles of Gordian III, which we know well. It is far more likely that it represents a different stage of events either before or after that period, in A.D. 238 or A.D. 244.