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TWO PAPYRI AND EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF CARACALLA

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Two Papyri and Events in the Life of Caracalla

I. P. Mich. inv. no. 4302 and Caracalla's Promotion to Augustus*

This recently published papyrus (*ZPE* 100 [1994] 264-65) is a grain receipt from 17 June 198 by the sitologoi of Philadelphia. As the editor, P.J. Sijpesteijn, remarks, the titulature of the emperor Septimius Severus includes Παρθικὸς μέγιστος but fails to mention Caracalla's promotion to Augustus, events which are paired in the biography of Severus found in the *Historia Augusta* (16.2-3). The editor says that as this is the first appearance in papyri of Severus as Παρθικὸς μέγιστος, the award of the title and the promotion of Caracalla should be seen as separate events and that the *Historia Augusta* must be incorrect.

While the *Historia Augusta* is notorious for containing inaccuracies and falsehoods, the information from this section of the life of Severus is generally reliable.¹ The proclamation of Severus' victory after the capture of Ctesiphon came 28 January 198, a date preserved in the *Feriale Duranum*.² P. Mich. inv. no. 4302 might be the earliest papyrus on which Severus has the title Παρθικὸς μέγιστος, but then again it might not be. Part of an Oxyrhynchus papyrus dated to the same month and year as P. Mich. inv. no. 4302 (*P. Oxy.* VI 916 = *W. Chr.* I 185, from Pauni in the sixth year of Severus' reign, late May to late June 198) names both Severus and Caracalla as emperors and gives Severus the title Παρθικὸς μέγιστος. Epigraphic evidence shows Caracalla's promotion was known in Numidia by 3 May 198.³ Caracalla's omission from P. Mich. inv. no. 4302 seems likely to be merely a scribal error.⁴ The papyrus, then, hardly provides sufficient evidence to contradict the *Historia Augusta* on the date of Caracalla's promotion to Augustus.⁵

II. P. Strasb. V 377 and Knowledge in Egypt of Geta's Murder

P. Strasb. V 377 is a receipt from Tebtunis. The papyrus contains the date 26 March (30 Phamenôth), and the original editors dated the document to the years 213-17 based on the appearance in the dating formula of the name and titles of the emperor Caracalla. The editors excluded the year 212 based on the opinion that news of the assassination of Geta would not have reached Tebtunis by 26 March. One assumes they accepted a late February date for

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¹ A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African emperor*² (New Haven 1988) 205-6.

² *P. Dura* 54 I.14-15; on the significance of 28 January, see J. Guey, *REA* 50 (1948) 60-70.

³ *CIL* VIII 2465 (*ILS* 2485); see also A. Mastino, *Le titolature di Caracalla e Geta attraverso le iscrizioni* (Bologna 1981) 31.

⁴ Caracalla also seems to have been omitted from the second dating formula in *BGU* I 61 II (23 August 200), though he is implicitly mentioned in the phrase ἔτους η τῶν κυρίων Σεβαστῶν at the beginning of the document.

⁵ Both Birley, *Severus*², 130, and D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle* (Darmstadt 1990) 162, accept the 28 January 198 date, though Kienast ends the entry with a question mark.

Geta's death,⁶ but it has since been proven beyond any reasonable doubt that Geta was killed in late December 211.⁷ A period of three months for the news to reach Tebtunis would not be improbable. The earliest papyrus from after Geta's murder that shows Caracalla as sole emperor is *P. Lond.* III 164 a, from Antinoopolis, with a date of 28 March 212 (2 Pharmouthi in the 20th year of Caracalla's reign).⁸ If Geta's murder was known in Antinoopolis on 28 March, it should not be surprising that the news would have been available at least two days earlier in Tebtunis farther north. Moreover, a transit time of three months for news from Rome to Tebtunis accords well with other evidence.⁹

The date of *P. Strasb.* V 377 can be narrowed based on the emperor's titulature. In the papyrus Caracalla has the titles Παρθικός μέγιστος and Βρεταννικός μέγιστος, but not the title Γερμανικός μέγιστος. Caracalla took the title Germanicus Maximus after his defeat of Germans on the Raetian frontier during the late summer of 213. The earliest notice of the title appears in Rome, on the Arval Brethren inscription for 6 October of that year.¹⁰ It would, of course, take time for news of the title to reach Egypt. Papyri, when mentioning the Parthian and British victories in the emperor's titulature, continued in the 22nd year of Caracalla's reign (213-14) to lack the German victory.¹¹ But this situation did not last too long.¹² The earliest datable papyri with Γερμανικός μέγιστος are *P. Diog.* 11 and 12, from Ptolemais Euergetis (Arsinoe) from the month of Hadrian (Choiak, from late November to late December)

⁶ This February date was calculated from the birthday of 27 May given in Geta's biography in the *Historia Augusta* (3.1) coupled with the notice from Dio (Xiphilinus) 77.2.5 that Geta lived 22 years and nine months. The February date once had wide acceptance, see, e.g., F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964) 150; R. Hanslik, *Der Kleine Pauly*, s.v. Geta 3.

⁷ T.D. Barnes, *JTS* ns. 18 (1968) 521-25, has shown the birthday in the *Historia Augusta* is false. Geta was actually born 7 March 189. Adding 22 years and nine months (from Dio [Xiph.] 77.2.5, see previous note) gives a date for Geta's death between 7 December 211 and 6 January 212. Dio (Xiph.) 77.2.1 indicates Geta was still alive at the start of the Saturnalia on 17 December. A. von Domaszewski, *SHAW* 9 (1918) Abh. 13, pp.62-64, proposed 26 December based both on dates in false documents cited by the *Historia Augusta* and on an emendation to the Chronographer of 354. H. Halfmann, *Chiron* 12 (1982) 229-30, has proposed a different emendation to the Chronographer that gives a 19 December date. Elsewhere I have recently proposed 25 December (M. Meckler, *Caracalla and his late-antique biographer* [diss. Univ. of Michigan 1994] 109-12). Curiously, Kienast, *Kaisertabelle*, 165-67, accepts a December 211 date for Geta's murder (wavering between 19 and 26 December) but still relies on the inaccurate *Historia Augusta* date for Geta's birthday.

⁸ Two earlier examples cited by P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions* (Bruxelles 1964) 103 titles 3, 4, have since been redated. *P. Harr.* I 83, which was originally dated to the 19th year of Caracalla's reign (210-11), has been republished in *P. Diog.* 27, where the document is now dated to 12 November 213. In *BGU* I 223, in which the original editor read the year as the 18th of Caracalla's reign (209-10, no month or day available), W.H.M. Liesker and P.J. Sijpesteijn, *ZPE* 63 (1986) 289, now read the year as the 20th (211-12). Note also the reference to the 18th year of Caracalla's reign in *P. Diog.* 4 is from a document the editor recognizes was written later, during Caracalla's sole rule.

⁹ D.W. Rathbone, *ZPE* 62 (1986) 101-29, esp. the chart on 103; R. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and scale in the Roman economy* (Cambridge 1991) 7-29.

¹⁰ *CIL* VI 2086 (*ILS* 451); Mastino, *Titulature* (see n. 3) 53.

¹¹ *P. Diog.* 27 (*P. Harr.* I 83), from 12 November 213.

¹² P.J. Sijpesteijn, *Symb. Osl.* 18 (1983) 129-32. Travel times, however, could often be far longer than Sijpesteijn assumes (see note 9 above), and he is perhaps too optimistic in expecting to find Γερμανικός μέγιστος in all documents written after Phaophi/Hathyr 213 that give Caracalla's titles of conquest.

in 213.¹³ Shortly thereafter (27 December 213) in nearby Philadelphia, however, Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος was not yet being used, *BGU* I 356 (*W. Chr.* I 88). It must be at this time, then, during the early winter of 213-14, that the new title was becoming generally known throughout Egypt. There are later papyri that list the emperor's titles of conquest but leave out Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος: *SB* VI 9626 (3 May - 24 June 214),¹⁴ *P. Oslo* II 23 (12 August 214)¹⁵ *BGU* XI 2048 (8 January 217).¹⁶ Nonetheless it seems doubtful that Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος would be lacking in documents later than the winter of 213-14 except through scribal error, and so *P. Strasb.* V 377, a document of 26 March, is probably earlier than 214.

From the titulature of the sole emperor Caracalla, the date of *P. Strasb.* V 377 can be narrowed to 26 March in one of two years: 212 or 213. If one accepts the year 212, the papyrus would give the earliest date for the knowledge in Egypt of Geta's murder.

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¹³ P.J. Sijpesteijn, *ZPE* 49 (1982) 105, notes that in *P. Giss. Univ.* VI 47 I r.1, the mention of Caracalla as Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος in a document from the emperor's 21st year (212-13) is due to a scribe who was actually writing the document the following year and supplying the title retroactively.

¹⁴ P.J. Sijpesteijn, *Symb. Osl.* 18 (1983) 130, believes Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος was in now missing edges of the document.

¹⁵ H.C. Youtie, *CP* 27 (1932) 89, proposed that instead of the original editors' reading of κβ'' (22) for the year, the reading should be κς'' (20; 211-12), with ς being a double curve indicating a numeral. P.J. Sijpesteijn, *ZPE* 49 (1982) 105-6, says his inspection supports Youtie's reading. Youtie's reading was misunderstood as κς (26) by Bureth, *Titulatures*, 103 title 3. For the difficulties editors of papyri find in the use of the double curve followed by two oblique strokes see H.C. Youtie, *Chron. d'Eg.* 66 (1958) 268-72, esp. 269 (*Scriptiunculae* II [1973] 670-75).

¹⁶ This is merely a scribal omission, P.J. Sijpesteijn, *Symb. Osl.* 18 (1983) 131. In the same article Sijpesteijn discusses other examples from after the year 213 where the text has broken off before the list of the emperor's titles is complete.