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THE DATE OF LUCIAN'S VISIT TO ABONUTEICHOS

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In his defamatory biography of Alexander of Abonuteichos, Lucian tells us how he visited Alexander's home town. The governor of Cappadocia had given him an escort of two soldiers to conduct him to the Black Sea coast. Lucian travelled there with his father and his family whom, however, he sent on to Amastris before entering the lion's den in the company of his bodyguards and of one Xenophon, presumably an attendant (*Alex.* 55f.).

Until recently, the date of Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos seemed reasonably certain. He claims that, after having survived an attempt upon his life contrived by Alexander, he wanted to start a prosecution against Glycon's prophet, but was dissuaded from pressing charges by the governor of Pontus-Bithynia, Avitus.¹ This governor has been identified as L. Hedi Rufus Lollianus Avitus (*PIR*² H 40, *ord.* 144), who happens to be epigraphically attested as holding the position ascribed to him by Lucian. The inscription in question, from Amastris (*IGR* III 84), used to be dated to the year 165. Now Lucian spent some time in Antioch in the entourage of the court of Lucius Verus, who was in supreme command of the Roman forces engaged in the Parthian war during the years 163–166. However, he attended the Olympic Games of 165 (*Peregr.* 35) and visited Ionia and Achaia in 165/6 (*Hist. conscr.* 14). The conclusion that his visit to Abonuteichos should be dated to a point of time in 164/165 was therefore extremely attractive and widely accepted.²

Where biographical data are sparse and disputed, a modest amount of scholarly consensus is comforting. Unfortunately, in 1985 Chr. Marek pointed out that, as the era used in *IGR* III 84 was Lucullan rather than Pompeian, the traditional dating of the inscription to the year 165 was mistaken and should be replaced by a dating to 159. Marek suggested that Lucian had visited Abonuteichos in that very same year.³ In an article published in 1990, C. P. Jones admitted that his previous discussion of Lucian's movements in the 160's needed revision,⁴ and recently S. Swain, in the fine chapter on Lucian in his monograph on Greek elite identity under Roman rule, has followed Marek's tentative dating of Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos to the year 159.⁵

Marek's reasoning is impeccable as far as the date of *IGR* III 84 is concerned, and he has convincingly refuted attempts to disprove his argument or to circumvent its consequences.⁶ His conclusion on the date of Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos, however, seems premature. Avitus was *legatus Augusti pro praetore*; from his governorship on the province of Pontus-Bithynia was permanently governed by imperial legates.⁷ Such officials would normally govern their provinces for two-and-a-half to three years.⁸ As Avitus had been *proconsul Africae* in 157/8,⁹ the inscription from

¹ *Alex.* 57. Burmeister's emendation – Αὔειτος for ἄνεκτος (β) or ἀνός (γ) – has been generally accepted; cf. A. Stein, 'Zu Lukians Alexandros', in: *Strena Buliciana*, Zagreb/Split 1924, 257–265, at 261, and see MacLeod's *OCT* ad loc.

² On Lucian's movements in the 160's see Stein, in: *Strena Buliciana*, passim, esp. 260ff.; J.A. Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, New York 1981, 20–29 and 211; C.P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London 1986, 17f., 60, 124f., 144 and 165f.

³ Chr. Marek, 'Katalog der Inschriften im Museum von Amasra', *EA* 6, 1985, 133–155, at 148f.; *SEG* XXXV 1318.

⁴ C.P. Jones, 'Lucian and the Bacchants of Pontus', *EMC* 34, 1990, 53–63, at 62 n. 43.

⁵ S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250*, Oxford 1996, 324–326 with nn. 92, 96 and 99.

⁶ See Chr. Marek, 'Das Datum einer Statthalterschaft in Pontus-Bithynia: L. Hedi Rufus Lollianus Avitus', *EA* 23, 1994, 83–86; cf. *SEG* XLII 1130.

⁷ *IGR* III 84: Ἀλλολιανοῦ Ἀουείτου πρεσβευτοῦ καὶ ἀντ[ιστρατήγου]. Cf. Marek, *EA* 23, 1994, passim.

⁸ B. Campbell, 'Who were the "viri militares"?', *JRS* 65, 1975, 11–31, at 26.

⁹ See G. Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen. Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Führungsschicht*, Bonn 1977, 208.

Amastris dates from the beginning of his tenure of the governorship of Pontus-Bithynia, which must have continued into the early 160's. In fact, he is attested as governor of the province during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus,¹⁰ and the outbreak of the Parthian war in 161 may very well have upset the regular replacement of the governor of a province as strategically important as Pontus-Bithynia. Therefore, while 164/5 is virtually ruled out by Marek's new dating of *IGR* III 84, a date in 160–162 remains a viable option for Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos.

A stronger case can be made for the period from the summer of 161, the outbreak of the Parthian War, to the end of 162 than for the period from the beginning of Avitus' tenure of the governorship of Pontus-Bithynia to the summer of 161.¹¹

1. The war started in the late summer or early autumn of 161 with a Roman debacle: the imperial legate of Cappadocia, M. Sedatius Severianus (*suff.* 153), invaded Armenia and was ambushed by Parthian troops at Elegeia. Severianus committed suicide, his army was annihilated. Before the next summer, the legate of Syria had been defeated by Parthian forces too.¹² As Lucian travelled to the Black Sea coast through Cappadocia in the company of his father and his family, he probably departed from his native city, Samosata. J.A. Hall, among others, has pointed out that the motive for such a journey may well have been to remove his relatives from the threat of the Parthian war.¹³ A journey so motivated perfectly fits the picture of 161/2, when Parthian troops successively defeated the governors of Cappadocia and Syria and when Samosata must have come under direct threat.

2. Even if one reckons with the possibility that the Parthian war was preceded by its shadow,¹⁴ a dating of Lucian's journey in the period of two-and-a-half years before the outbreak of the Parthian war runs up against another difficulty: it presupposes that the imperial legate of Cappadocia, at that time a friend of his, who provided him with an escort of two soldiers,¹⁵ was Severianus. Severianus governed the province, probably from the late 150's, until his defeat and death at Elegeia in 161 (see n. 12). If we are to believe Lucian (*Alex.* 27), the ill-advised decision to invade Armenia was prompted by an oracle of Glycon, and the unfortunate consular from Gaul is labelled 'that silly Celt' for his gullibility. This is a curious epitaph for a friend. Admittedly, another consular taken in by Alexander's fraud with whom Lucian was acquainted,¹⁶ P. Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus (*PIR*² M 711, *suff.* 146), is not spared censure either,¹⁷ but at least Lucian does not claim him as a friend. It is therefore inadvisable to identify the supportive governor of Cappadocia with the silly Celt.

3. Rutilianus offers another lead. According to Lucian (*Alex.* 34f.), he married the daughter of Alexander as a sexagenarian and died at seventy. As Rutilianus was still alive on 1 June 172 (*CIL* XIV 3601 = *ILS* I 1101), the earliest possible date for his (second) marriage is the summer of 161; a

¹⁰ *Dig.* 50.2.3.2 (Ulpian): . . . *divi fratres Lolliano Avito Bithyniae praesidi rescripserunt.*

¹¹ On the Parthian war see A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius. A Biography*, London 1987, 121–148; K. Strobel, 'Zeitgeschichte unter den Antoninen: Die Historiker des Partherkrieges des Lucius Verus', in: *ANRW* 2.34.2, 1994, 1315–1360, esp. 1317–1324.

¹² On Severianus' governorship of Cappadocia see Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand*, 220: ?157–161/2; on the date of his defeat by Parthian forces and suicide Strobel, in: *ANRW* 2.34.2, 1994, 1319 (citing the evidence in n. 16): ". . . wohl noch im Spätsommer/Frühherbst 161 . . ."; cf. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 121f. On the defeat of L. Attidius Cornelianus, *leg. Augustor. pr. pr. provinc. Syriae*, Strobel, in: *ANRW* 2.34.2, 1994, 1319: ". . . wohl erst im Frühling 162 . . ."; cf. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 123 with 279 n. 24.

¹³ Hall, *Lucian's Satire*, 449 n. 31.

¹⁴ SHA, *Marcus Antoninus* 8.6; cf. Marek, *EA* 23, 1994, 86.

¹⁵ *Alex.* 55: ἐπηγόμην δὲ καὶ στρατιώτας δύο, λογχοφόρον καὶ κοντοφόρον, παρὰ τοῦ ἡγουμένου τῆς Καππαδοκίας, φίλου τότε ὄντος, λαβών, ὡς με παραπέμψειαν μέχρι πρὸς τὴν θάλατταν.

¹⁶ *Alex.* 54; cf. Jones, *Culture and Society*, 145 with n. 48.

¹⁷ See e.g. *Alex.* 30, 33 and 35.

somewhat later date seems more probable.¹⁸ Now Rutilianus lost no time in marrying Alexander's daughter.¹⁹ Nevertheless, before Lucian travelled through Cappadocia to Pontus and confronted Alexander, he had found the opportunity to dissuade the consular from the marriage (*Alex.* 54f.). Again, this points in the direction of a date later than the summer of 161 for Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos.

The arguments, frail though they are, justify provisional acceptance of the late summer of 161 as *terminus post quem* for Lucian's visit to Abonuteichos. How does this fit in with the other evidence that we have on his movements during these years? Probably he attended the Olympic Games of 161.²⁰ At some stage in the last months of 161 or in 162 he travelled to Samosata and evacuated his relatives from the war zone. From Abonuteichos, Lucian travelled westward (*Alex.* 56f.), and he must have returned to western Asia Minor or Greece. Probably it was here that he joined the entourage of Lucius Verus' court on its way to Antioch in 162/3.²¹

If this reconstruction is acceptable, it also accounts for the time and place of Lucian's attempts to dissuade Rutilianus from marrying Alexander's daughter. Although Lucian's narrative implies that Rutilianus became a devotee of Glycon while still in Rome (*Alex.* 30f.), the contacts reported in *Alex.* 53f. may very well have taken place during Rutilianus' tenure of the proconsulate of Asia in 160/1.²²

Finally, who was the governor of Cappadocia who gave Lucian an escort of two soldiers? M. Sedatius Severianus was succeeded as imperial legate by M. Staius Priscus Licinius Italicus (*ord.* 159).²³ The moment of his arrival in Cappadocia is unknown, but as the situation there brooked no delay and as the successes that Staius Priscus achieved in Armenia permitted Lucius Verus to assume the title 'Armeniicus' in the late summer of 163, he must have taken over the province in 162.²⁴ Thus he may have been Lucian's friend and protector. In *How to write history* mention is made of a would-be Thucydides of the Parthian war who credited Staius Priscus with the capacity to kill 27 enemies with his battle cry (*Hist. conscr.* 20). Perhaps Lucian expected the old war-horse to appreciate the joke. His phrasing (above, n. 15) may, however, leave room for the possibility that his friend was an official unknown to us, who held the fort in expectation of Severianus' successor.

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¹⁸ Cf. Stein, in: *Strena Buliciana*, 260.

¹⁹ *Alex.* 35: ὁ συνεταιριστὸς Ῥουτιλιανὸς ἔπεμπεν εὐθὺς ἐπὶ τὴν κόρην . . .

²⁰ *Peregr.* 35; cf. Hall, *Lucian's satire*, 25 with 450f. n. 38.

²¹ This order of events fits in with the observation by Jones, *EMC* 34, 1990, 62 that *Salt.* 79 points in the direction of a recent visit to Pontus. On *De Saltatione*, written in Antioch in 163/4, cf. Jones, *Culture and Society*, 68–75.

²² On Rutilianus' proconsulate see Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand*, 215; R. Syme, 'The Proconsuls of Asia under Antoninus Pius', *ZPE* 51, 1983, 271–290, at 282 (= *Roman Papers* 4, 1988, 325–346, at 337); K. Dietz, 'Die beiden P. Mummii Sisennae und der Wiederaufbau der Basilike Stoa von Thera', *Chiron* 23, 1993, 295–311, esp. 305. On *Alex.* 53f. cf. Jones, *Culture and Society*, 144: "[Lucian] does not indicate where he was, but it may have been the province of Asia".

²³ On Staius Priscus see A. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain*, Oxford 1981, 123–127.

²⁴ See Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand*, 219 and 221; Birley, *Fasti of Roman Britain*, 126; Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 126 and 128f.; Strobel, in: *ANRW* 2.34.2, 1994, 1320f. and 1324f.