THE DATE OF PAPYRUS SB 4483
AND THE PERSIAN OCCUPATION OF EGYPT
There is a group of papyri containing private documents which have as a common characteristic that they omit the dating clause on the 'imperial years', breaking thus the rule established by Justinian\(^1\), and followed systematically ever since in the sixth and the seventh centuries, that every document should be dated with the «ἐτη τῆς βασιλείας»\(^2\). The editors of these documents usually date them «to the period after the Arab conquest of Egypt» and H. Zilliacus is probably right in explaining the omission by the fact that the people of Upper Egypt could not possibly date their contracts in the name of the emperor after the Byzantine rule was abolished in their country\(^3\). Nevertheless, we have reason to suggest that papyrus SB 4483 is an exception which should be dated to the period of the Persian occupation of Egypt (618-630)\(^4\).

This papyrus from Faijum, which belongs to the Louvre collection, contains the lease contract of a garden outside Arsinoe. Its importance consists of the fact that to the *invocatio*, which as usual remains at the beginning, there are added two significant titles applied to Jesus Christ. The *invocatio* and the following date read as follows: \(+ \) ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου καὶ [δ]εσπότου Ἰησοῦ Χρίστου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν βασιλέων καὶ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, τῆς δεσποίνης ἡμῶν, τῆς θεοτόκου, καὶ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων. Παύνι, τετάρτη ἐνάτης ἐνδικτίονος, ἐν Άρσιν (κρίτων πόλει) \(+\).\(^5\)

---

1. Nov. 47 «Περὶ τοῦ προτάττεσθαι τῷ τοῦ βασιλέως ὄνομα ἐν τοῖς συμβολαίοις καὶ ὑπομνήμασι..., p. 283f. Sch o e l l - K r o l l.

2. For the time of Heraclius see H. I. B e l l, A Dating Clause under Heraclius, Byz. Zeitschr. 22 (1913) 395-405. Since the imperial titles are of central importance for the subject of this article I prefer to call the ἐτη τῆς βασιλείας by the non-technical but more correct term 'imperial' instead of the technical term 'regnal years'.


4. For the period 618-630 there are no documents in Egypt dated by 'imperial years'. Cf. H. I. B e l l, loc. cit., p. 399.

5. I copy the reading of Fr. P r e i s i g k e, Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten, vol. I, Strassburg 1915, 364/5; cf. W e s s e l y, Rev. égypt. 3 (1885) 168, number 3.
A comparison of this *invocatio* and dating clause with the documents containing the usual dating clause according to the 'imperial years'\(^1\), shows that the titles τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν βασιλέων καὶ αἰωνίου αὐτοκράτορος are, on the one hand, incorporated into the *invocatio*, but, on the other hand, they are attached to the other titles of Jesus Christ, as they in some cases remain alone, i.e., without the commemoration of the Virgin Mary and the saints. It is, thus, obvious that in applying these titles to Jesus Christ the author of the contract intended to replace the commemoration of the emperor—in the dating clause according to the 'imperial years'—with the attribution of the imperial titles to Christ. What is striking, though, is that he uses two different titles derived from two different traditions.

The title βασιλεύς βασιλέων is attributed to Jesus Christ twice in the Book of Revelation\(^2\). Christian tradition however preferred the title βασιλεύς βασιλευόντων, as it appears in St. Paul’s first letter to Timothy\(^3\). This title was used in the Cherubic Hymn sung in the liturgy during the Great Entrance and found its way into the inscriptions of Byzantine coins in the Latin form *Rex Regnantium*\(^4\). In discussing the distinction between βασιλεύς βασιλευόντων and βασιλευόντων and the Christian preference for the latter, J. D. Breckenridge suggested that «Christ as King of Kings is the supreme power, the divine being having authority over all beings; but as Rex Regnantium He is placed in a particular relationship to the rulers of other men. This implies that He rules through the rulers of the earth, rather than directly over each individual human being»\(^5\). But if this interpretation of the subtle distinction is correct, I cannot understand the Christian preference for βασιλευόντων. For no Christian would hesitate to apply to Christ a title

---

implying that «he rules directly over each individual human being». The only possible reason why one would choose the versio difficultior, βασιλεύοντων instead of βασιλέων, is, in my opinion, that in the Christian era the Parthian monarchs, their Persian successors, the Sassanids, and the Ethiopian monarchs as well as a number of Hellenistic kings were calling themselves officially βασιλεύς βασιλέων. More probable therefore is the explanation offered by J. G. Griffiths in interpreting the phrase «King of Kings of Kings» applied to God in the Jewish Mishnah: «The expanded form — and we should add: the participal form — seems to imply a consciousness that the simple expression «King of Kings» was in common currency used of human monarchs». Hence we should argue that the title βασιλεύς βασιλέων, used exceptionally in our document, is a direct allusion to the official title of the

1. Cf. J. G. Griffiths, Βασιλεύς βασιλέων: Remarks on the History of a Title, Classical Philology 48 (1953) 146-154. For the Parthian usage it is important to note that even Rome time and again did not hesitate to attribute to the Parthian monarchs the title rex regum: K. - H. Ziegler, Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts, Wiesbaden 1964, p. 29, n. 47, p. 37, 50, 59, n. 101, p. 106, n. 71. — For the Ethiopian usage see W. Vycichl, Le titre de roi des rois - negusä nagäst. Etude historique et comparative sur la monarchie en Éthiopie, Annales d'Éthiopie 2 (1957) 193-203. The Sassanid monarchs* were thought the «kings of kings» par excellence. As early as the third century they made conscious use of this title to propagate their imperialistic claims. Thus Shapor I (241-272) after his victorious wars enlarged the title in order to include also the defeated nations and called himself «King of Kings of the Iranians and the Non-Iranians», cf. E. Honigmann - A. Marićq, Recherches sur les Res gestae divi Saporis, Bruxelles 1953, p. 11. That the title was never reduced to an insignificant formula of Oriental despotism, but was constantly used in the frame of the imperialistic policy of Iran, is documented in the minutes of the peace negotiations that led to the Byzantine-Persian treaty of 562. The Persian ambassador was trying to prove the political and military power and ability of his master, Chosroes I, and demonstrate ώς κατά τό προσήκον καί ούκ ἀπεικόνισα επωνυμικά κεκόμψεται τό βασιλεία προσαγορεύεσθαι βασιλέων, Menander, frg. 11, Excerpta de legationibus, p. 177, 8-10 d° B°oor.

2. Loc. cit., p. 151. It is interesting to note that the title βασιλεύς τῶν βασιλευό- των in the Greek versions of I Enoch IX, 4 was transformed in the Ethiopic version into βασιλέων. Cf. R. H. Charles, loc. cit., p. 74. On the other hand, for the βασιλεύς βασιλευόντων in I Tim. VI, 15 the Vulgata has rex regum, probably because in the West the affiliation of the title with the Oriental monarchs was not so obvious.

3. In a Leiden magic papyrus from the second or third century A. D. a demon is called βασιλεύς βασιλέων, τύραννος τυράννων, cf. J. G. Griffiths, loc. cit., p. 152.
Great King of Persia, with whom this title was chiefly identified and whose troops had occupied Egypt. The title \( \varepsilon \iota \omicron \nu o s \ \alpha u t o x o r a t o r \) as attribution to Jesus Christ is, as far as I can see, unique. The adjective \( \varepsilon \iota \omicron \nu o s \) demonstrates though that here the author of the contract attributes consciously the imperial titles to Christ. For the dating clause commonly contains the titles \( \varepsilon \iota \omicron \nu o s \ \alpha \gamma o u s t o u k \) and \( \alpha u t o x o r a t o r o s \). Since any intention to apply imperial titles to Christ could not go so far as to include the title - name \( \textit{Augustus} \), the thoughtful notary did therefore the best he could to imitate the imperial titles. He attributed to the \textit{cosmocrator} the titles \( \varepsilon \iota \omicron \nu o s \ \alpha u t o x o r a t o r \).

If our interpretation of Christ’s titles as the imitation of the current official titles of the emperor and the Great King is correct, then it should be further argued that the document is not later than 629, when Heraclius defeated the Persians and liberated Egypt. The document...

1. For the fact that the Persians occupied the whole land to the very confines of Ethiopia, see G. Rawlinson, The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy, or: The Geography, History and Antiquities of the Sassanian or New Persian Empire, London 1876, p. 505.

2. Not the Latin equivalent \textit{imperator}. This was used in the \textit{Itala} and by a number of Latin Fathers. Cf. Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, vol. VII, col. 560, s. v., \( \Pi \, B \, b \). For the presentation of \textit{Christus imperator} in Christian art, see A. Grabar, \textit{L’ empeure dans l’ art byzantin}, Strasburg 1936 (repr.: London 1974) p. 193 ff., 209 ff., 219, n. 3. For the so-called \textit{Christus victor} mosaic in the archbishop’s chapel of Ravenna, see W. Deichmann, \textit{Ravenna. Hauptstadt des spatantiker Abendlandes}, Kommentar, part 1, Wiesbaden 1974, p. 57 ff., 203. It is interesting that when the Roman pope Hadrian at the end of the 8th century started omitting the imperial dating clause from his documents in order to demonstrate his independence from Byzantium, he attributed to Christ the title \textit{regnans}, as it was used on the Byzantine coins, and replaced the 'imperial years' with \textit{infinita saecula}: \( \textit{Regnante Domino Deo et Salvatore Jesu Christo...per infinita saecula} \): P. E. Schramm, Die Anerkennung Karls d. Gr. als Kaiser. Ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte der Staatsymbolik, in: Hist. Zeitschr. 172 (1951) 449-515, at p. 456.

3. Cf. A. Pernice, \textit{L’ imperatore Eracleo}, Firenze 1905, p. 172 and O. Rawlinson, loc. cit., p. 535, The date 629 is very important also for the development of the imperial titles, since Heraclius assumed officially for the first time the title \( \pi i s t o s \ \varepsilon n \ \chi r i s t o \ \beta a s i l e u s \) in the \textit{intitulatio} of his Nov. 29, dated March 21, 629; cf. J. and P. Zepos, \textit{Jus Graecoromanum}, vol. I, Athens 1931, p. 36. On the importance of this development see mainly L. Bréhier, \textit{Les institutions de l’ empire byzantin}, Paris 1949, p. 50. Cf. now also I. Shahid, The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 26 (1972) 295-329. Recently N. Oikonomides read the \textit{intitulatio} of a letter sent by Heraclius to Kavadh-Siroe in 628 (which he reconstructed in the last folio of Cod. [1]...
The Date of Papyrus SB 4483 and the Persian Occupation

has the date: Παυνι τετάρτη ἐνάτης ἱνδ(ικτίονος). The 4th of Pauni is no doubt the 29th of May\(^1\). On the other hand, the only 9th indiction in the period of the Persian occupation is the year 620/21. I suggest therefore that the contract was signed on May 29, 621.

This dating can be supported by two elements from the contract itself. The name of the notary who wrote and signed the document is Petros\(^2\). Another Fayum papyrus, BGU 725, dated July 21, 618, is also signed: + di emu Petru... Δι’ ἐμοῦ Πέτρου\(^3\). It is, of course, possible that this is not the same Petros who drew up the two documents. It is, however, much more probable to suggest that it was the same person.

Moreover the names of the landlords who rented their property through our document can help us further. Their names are given as follows: τοῖς / θαυμασιωτάτοις Ἰούστω νοταρίῳ καὶ Εὐλογάδι ὁμογνῆς ἀδελφοῖς τέκνοις καὶ κληρονόμοις τοῦ μεγαρίου Νειλάμμων οὗ καὶ Βοήθου ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως (sc. Ἀρσινόης). Another document, dated February-March, 631, namely Ross. - Georg. III Nr. 51, was written and signed by the notary Ἰούστος\(^4\). I should thus suggest that it was the same notary, Iustos, who signed this and other documents\(^5\), and who rented his paternal property in our contract, without signing it

---


\(^2\) [Di emu Petru... Δι’ ἐμοῦ Πέτρου νο(ταρίου), l. 24 : F. Preischke, SB I, p. 365.


\(^5\) As the editors of Ross. - Georg. III 51 testify, this document was written by the same hand which wrote Lond. I 115, 6 (b) in Arsinoe in 633 and which was also signed by the notary Iustos, loc. cit. p. 220. Besides, in SB 4488, dated 635 A. D., the notary Iustos wrote a receipt for paying off vessels which were made for him by the craftsman Paulos. Iustos' name is given without his profession, be-
himself, because, of course, he could not function as notary in his own leasing transaction. If we thus identify the Iustos who functioned as notary in the early thirties with the notary Iustos, son of Neilammon of our contract, then we can safely date it to a period close to this date.

In my opinion, a careful study of the group of documents omitting the 'imperial years' as the dating clause would establish more solid chronology for dating a considerable number of documents into the period of the Persian occupation. And this would be very helpful for the study of that period, of which little is known.*

cause he is dealing in this case as a private citizen, but his father's name is mentioned instead: Τῶν λαμπροτάτω 'Ιούστω υἱῶν / τὸ δ' τῆς μακαρίας μνήμης Νειλάμμωνος ἀπὸ τῆς 'Αρσιν(οίτων) πόλεως. His signature reads: Δι' εμοῦ Ίούστου ἐγρ. (άφη).

1. SB 4672 which belongs to the group with the omitted ἔτη τῆς βασιλείας is an arbitration document dated by the editor to the Arabic era. The notary's signature should lead us, however, to date it also to the twenties or the early thirties of the century: Δ' εμοῦ 'Ιούστου συμβολογράφου τής τῆς 'Αρσινοιτ(ῶν) πόλεως ἐγράφη ὁ παρών πρὸς ἐκφωνή τῶν εἰρημένων δικαστῶν.+

* This study was made possible through the assistance of the papyrologist Professor Z. Borkowski, with whom I shared the privilege of working at Dumbarton Oaks in the autumn of 1975.