

ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΟΥ Κ. ΧΡΥΣΟΥ  
Ἐντεταλμένου Ὑφηγητοῦ τῆς Ἱστορίας Μέσων Χρόνων

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<sup>1</sup>, and followed systematically ever since in the sixth and the seventh centuries, that every document should be dated with the «ἐτη τῆς βασιλείας»<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>. 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)<sup>4</sup>.

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]εσπότης [Ἰησ]οῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν βασιλείων καὶ αἰων(ίου) | αὐτοκρ(άτορος), κ(αὶ) τῆς δεσποίνης ἡ[μ]ῶν, τῆς ἁγίας θεοτόκ(ου), κ(αὶ) πάντων τῶν ἁγίων. Παῦνι τε-  
τάρτη ἐνάτης ἰνδ(ικτίονος), ἐν Ἀρσιν(οιτῶν πόλει)+<sup>5</sup>.

1. Nov. 47 «Περὶ τοῦ προτάττεσθαι τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ὄνομα ἐν τοῖς συμβολαίοις καὶ ὑπομνήμασι...», p. 283f. Schoell-Kroll.

2. For the time of Heraclius see H. I. Bell, 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'.

3. H. Zilliacus, Late Byzantine Land-leases from Hermopolis, in: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum XIV 3, Helsingfors 1947, p. 15. Cf. B. R. Rees, Papyri from Hermopolis and other Documents of the Byzantine Period, London 1964, p. 72, n. 1.

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

5. I copy the reading of Fr. Preisigke, Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten, vol. I, Strassburg 1915, 364/5; cf. Wessely, 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'<sup>1</sup>, 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 βασιλεὺς βασιλέων is attributed to Jesus Christ twice in the Book of Revelation<sup>2</sup>. Christian tradition however preferred the title βασιλεὺς βασιλευόντων, as it appears in St. Paul's first letter to Timothy<sup>3</sup>. 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*<sup>4</sup>. In discussing the distinction between βασιλεὺς βασιλέων 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»<sup>5</sup>. 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

1. Cf. the evidence under the section «Kaiser» in Fr. Preisigke, Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden, vol. III, Berlin 1931, pp. 41-72 and Supplement I, Amsterdam 1969, pp. 332-351.

2. XVII 14 and XIX 16. Cf. R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, vol. II, New York 1920, p. 74, according to whom these verses belong to the vision of the destruction of the Parthian kings!

3. Μέχρι τῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἦν καιροῖς ἰδίους δεῖξει ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, VI 14/15. Cf. W. L o c k, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, New York 1924, p. 73.

4. J. D. Breckenridge, The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II, New York 1959, pp. 46-62.

5. Loc. cit., p. 51.

implying that «he rules *directly* over each individual human being». The only possible reason why one would choose the *versio difficilior*, βασιλευόντων 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 βασιλεῖς βασιλέων<sup>1</sup>. 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 participial form — seems to imply a consciousness that the simple expression «King of Kings» was in common currency used of human monarchs»<sup>2</sup>. Hence we should argue that the title βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, used exceptionally in our document<sup>3</sup>, is a direct allusion to the official title of the

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1. Cf. J. G. Griffiths, Βασιλεὺς 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 - negüsä nägäst. 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. Maricq, *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 ὡς κατὰ τὸ προσήκον καὶ οὐκ ἀπεικὸς αὐτῷ ἢ ἐπωνυμία κεκόμψεται τὸ βασιλέα προσαγορεύεσθαι βασιλέων, Menander, *frag. 11, Excerpta de legationibus*, p. 177, 8-10 de Boor.

2. *Loc. cit.*, p. 151. It is interesting to note that the title βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων 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 βασιλεὺς 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 βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, τύραννος τυράνων, 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<sup>1</sup>.

The title *αἰώνιος ἀτοκράτωρ* as attribution to Jesus Christ is, as far as I can see, unique<sup>2</sup>. The adjective *αἰώνιος* demonstrates though that here the author of the contract attributes consciously the imperial titles to Christ. For the dating clause commonly contains the titles *αἰωνίου ἀγούστου καὶ ἀτοκράτορος*. Since any intention to apply imperial titles to Christ could not go so far as to include the title - name *Augustus*, the thoughtful notary did therefore the best he could to imitate the imperial titles. He attributed to the *cosmocrator* the titles *αἰώνιος ἀτοκράτωρ*!

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<sup>3</sup>. The document

1. For the fact that the Persians occupied the whole land to the very confines of Ethiopia, see G. Rawlins on, *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 *imperator*. This was used in the *Italia* and by a number of Latin Fathers. Cf. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. VII, col. 560, s. v., II B, b. For the presentation of *Christus imperator* in Christian art, see A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Strasburg 1936 (reprint: London 1971) p. 193 ff., 209 f., 219, n. 3. For the so-called *Christus victor* mosaic in the archbishop's chapel of Ravenna, see W. Deichmann, *Ravenna. Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes, Kommentar, part 1*, Wiesbaden 1974, p. 57 f., 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 *regnans*, as it was used on the Byzantine coins, and replaced the 'imperial years' with *infinita saecula*: «*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 Staatssymbolik*, in: *Hist. Zeitschr.* 172 (1951) 449-515, at p. 456.

3. Cf. A. Pernice, *L'imperatore Eraclio*, Firenze 1905, p. 172 and G. Rawlins on, 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 *πιστός ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλεύς* in the *intitulatio* of his Nov. 29, dated March 21, 629; cf. J. and P. Zepos, *Jus Graecoromanum*, vol. I, Athens 1931, p. 36. On the importance of this development see mainly L. Bréhier, *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) 295-320. Recently N. Oikonomides read the *intitulatio* of a letter sent by Heraclius to Kavádh-Široe in 628 (which he reconstructed in the last folio of Cod.

has the date: Παῦνι τετάρτη ἐνάτης ἰνδ(ικτίονος). The 4th of Pauni is no doubt the 29th of May<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. Another Faijum papyrus, BGU 725, dated July 21, 618, is also signed: + di emu Petru... Δι' ἐμοῦ Πέτρου<sup>3</sup>. 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 Ἰούστῳ νοταρίῳ καὶ Εὐλογάδι ὁμογενήσιος ἀδελφοῖς τέκνοις καὶ κληρονόμοις τοῦ μακαρίου Νειλάμμου(ωνος) | τοῦ καὶ Βοήθου ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως (sc. Ἀρσινόιτων). Another document, dated February-March, 631, namely Ross. - Georg. III Nr. 51, was written and signed by the notary Ἰούστος<sup>4</sup>. I should thus suggest that it was the same notary, Iustos, who signed this and other documents<sup>5</sup>, and who rented his paternal property in our contract, without signing it

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Vaticanus gr. 1941 containing the Chronicon Paschale) as follows: [Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ Φλάβιος Ἡράκλειος πιστὸς ἐν Χριστῷ βασιλεὺς] Ῥωμαίων, Correspondence between Heraclius and Kanādh-Široe in the Paschal Chronicle (628), in: Byzantion 41 (1971) 269-281, at p. 273, 61. Cf. also the commentary at p. 276 f. Provided thus that Οἰκονομίδης' reading is correct, the first known case for the use of βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων would be dated to 628. The importance of this change for the titles in the papyri is limited, however, since the papyri dated after 629 do not take it into account: cf. H. I. Bell, A Dating Clause under Heraclius, Byz. Zeitschr. 22 (1913) p. 399 f.

1. Cf. P. W. Pestman, Chronologie égyptienne d'après les textes démotiques, Leiden 1967, table opposite p. 9.

2. [Di emu Petru]... δι' ἐμοῦ Πέτρου νο(ταρίου), l. 24: Fr. Preisigke, SB I, p. 365.

3. Ägyptische Urkunden aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin. Griechische Urkunden, vol. III, Berlin 1903, p. 29, 28.

4. Di emu Iustu... Δι' ἐμοῦ Ἰούστου, G. Zereteli-P. Jernstedt, Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen, vol. III, Tiflis 1930, p. 214 ff.

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<sup>1</sup>.

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.\*

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cause he is dealing in this case as a private citizen, but his father's name is mentioned instead: Τῷ λαμπροτάτῳ Ἰούστῳ υἱῷ / τοῦ τῆς μακαρίας μηνῆς Νειλάμμωνος ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀρσιν(οιτῶν) πόλεως. His signature reads: Δι' ἐμοῦ Ἰούστου ἐγρ(άφη). Δι' ἐμοῦ Ἰούστου 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: +Δι' ἐμοῦ Ἰούστου συμβολαιογράφου ταύτης τῆς Ἀρσιν(οιτῶν) πόλεως ἐγράφη ὁ παρὼν πρὸς ἐκφωνῆς 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.