

A LETTER OF AVIDIUS CASSIUS ?

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(Plate IV)

Occasionally there comes to light a papyrus text which illuminates events central to the history of the Roman Empire, known hitherto only from literary or epigraphical sources. Such texts—of which *P. Giss.* 40, containing the famous edict of Caracalla, is perhaps the best-known example—are of more than ordinary interest to the non-papyrologist, because they provide independent testimony for events which are sometimes misreported or only partially reported in other sources. In the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 52 (1966), 141–6 (with Plate xxxv), J. W. B. Barns published a text from the Oxyrhynchus collection containing, so it was claimed, a communication from the newly elected emperor Severus Alexander, promising to an unspecified body a visit and conferment of favours. The editor opined that this document was ‘not merely a personal message of the young emperor but his actual autograph’.¹

Two fresh interpretations of this problematic text have recently been advanced.² Dr. Rea has produced a convincing realignment of the two fragments of the letter which removes the ground for attribution to Severus Alexander.³ He suggests that the document is a copy of a letter sent to Rome after the proclamation of Maximinus the Thracian, referring to an impending visit, perhaps to Rome, and the conferment of privileges upon the Alexandrians; that this copy of the letter was addressed to Apolinarios, president of the *boule* of Oxyrhynchus, who can perhaps be identified with L. Septimius Aurelius Sarapion *alias* Apolinarios who is known to have been *prytanis* of the *boule* of Oxyrhynchus at some time between 229 and 237.⁴ Mr. Parsons accepted the new placing of the small fragment, and suggested that the document contains a proclamation of Vaballathus, issued as the Palmyrene army advanced northward to the capture of Alexandria in about A.D. 270. Both these hypotheses, as their authors readily admitted, left difficulties of interpretation for which no plausible solution offered. A fresh examination of this document offers positive advances on two fronts. First, some new textual considerations of which the major innovation is the suggestion that the letter will have contained at least two lines of writing above the present remains. Second, a new and better identification of the addressee Apolinarios. In the light of these advances I offer a reconsideration of the historical circumstances surrounding this text, and suggest that the document is to be dated to the last quarter of the second century A.D. and is to be connected with the revolt of Avidius Cassius. Not only does this hypothesis explain the obscure references in the letter, but it also precludes objections raised against its predecessors.

I. THE TEXT

I here present a new version of the text based upon that of Dr. Rea (with tacit correction of a few misprints):

Ἄλεξαν[δρε]ῖς εν . . [. .]
καὶ πα[ρ] . [.] . φεπικ . [.] . [. .]
τὴν πρὸ[ς] ἐμὲ εὔνοιαν . . . ἐν
τοῖς στέρνο[ι]ς περιφέρου[σ]ις τὴν[]

* For comment and advice I am indebted to T. D. Barnes, R. A. Coles, F. G. B. Millar and J. R. Rea, which does not imply that they necessarily agree with the views expressed.

¹ The text is reprinted as *SB* 10295, and this convenient notation is hereinafter employed for reference to the text. References to Barns' commentary are by author and page number only.

² J. R. Rea, 'A Letter of Severus Alexander?', *Chronique d'Égypte* 42 (1967), 391–6; P. J. Parsons, 'A Proclamation of Vaballathus?', *Chronique d'Égypte* 42 (1967), 397–401. Both articles are hereinafter cited by author and page number only.

³ Dr. R. A. Coles confirms Rea's alignment of the

small fragment on the basis of an enlarged photograph of the verso of the papyrus. Although the vertical fibres have been stripped from both the large and the small piece, the photograph shows that the impression of the top layer of fibres has remained. In Rea's placing of the small piece these fibre impressions are precisely aligned.

⁴ *P. Oxy.* 890, dated by reference to the strategos Aurelius Leonides, known to have been in office between 229 and 237, cf. G. Mussies, 'Supplément à la liste des stratèges des nomes égyptiens de H. Henne', *Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava* 14 (1965), 26; and add *P. Oxy.* 2473.

- 5 γνώμην π[αρ]εμείνατε· ἀφικνοῦμ[αι οὖν]
 πρὸς ὑμᾶς τῷ[χ]η ἀγαθῇ, κεχε[ι]ροτονη[μένους]
 μὲν αὐτοκράτωρ ὑπὸ τῶν γενναιοτάτ[ων]
 στρατιωτῶν, ἐπὶ δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν παρ' ὑμῖν
 αἰσίως παρελευσόμενο[ς], καὶ ἀφ' ὑμῶ[ν]
 10 μάλιστα ἀρξάμενος τῆς τοῦ εὖ ποιεῖν [ἐξου-]
 σίας ὅσον δίκαιόν ἐστιν παρέχειν [τῇ πα-]
 τρώα πόλει π[αρεῖχον]
 [ἔτ]ους ᾧ Φαρμ[οῦθι]

Verso Ἄπολιναρίω Χ βουλευτ' (ῆ) πρε[σβευτῆ]

1. ενα. [, Barns, p. 144: he considers the possibility of an address τοῖς ἐν ἀρχῇ. This is made unlikely by the new placing of the small fragment and the traces after *nu* are so exiguous as to permit no hypothesis. The remains of a stroke from bottom left to top right make this combination of *αφ* rather unlikely (compare ἀρχὴν in line 8). Barns considered that the message as we now have it seemed complete, and being forced to the conclusion that the address must therefore be in the first line was unfavourably inclined to the suggestion of 'Ἀλεξαν[δ]ρεῖς or sim.' With the new placing of the small fragment it must be said that line 1 as we have it would constitute an extraordinarily abrupt beginning for so important an official document. Hence Rea (p. 392) argued for more than one column (perhaps of differing shape or height), but Barns' observation (p. 144, n. 1) that the left-hand margin seems to have had a straight edge is well-founded. An examination of the upper part of the papyrus under strong magnification has convinced me of the probability that there were at least two lines of writing above the present remains. In the upper left-hand corner, the top layer of fibres has been stripped off at every point where traces might be sought. There are several traces of ink here which could be attributed to the writing of the address on the verso, but at least two traces which cannot be explained thus. The stripping of the fibres begins approximately 0.4 cm. above αλε of the first line. Given the average line-spacing in this text one would expect a trace of the bottoms of letters of the previous line at this point and the microscope does indeed reveal very faint traces here. There are further traces higher up this little peninsula of papyrus which does not contain any part of the address on the verso. It may be presumed that since the extant portion of the letter contains what must have been the most important part of the message (the announcement of accession to power) there were probably not more than two or three lines above this.

8. παρ' ὑμῖν], Rea: παρ' ὑμῖν] is perhaps better. On the very edge of the papyrus is a trace of ink which seems more likely to belong to the vertical of *rho* than to the oblique stroke of *alpha*. This trace has now become detached from the papyrus, but it can be seen in *JEA* 52, Pl. xxxv.

9. παρ[ε]λευσόμενο[ς], Rea, Barns: a part of the broken edge of the papyrus has been folded over. Unfolded it reveals traces of the *rho*. Read παρελευσόμενο[ς]. ἀφ' ὑμ[ῶν], Rea: only the bottom of the final letter survives in the shape of a more or less horizontal stroke. The microscope reveals in the middle of this a tendency upwards for the second vertical of *mu* and I therefore prefer to read ἀφ' ὑμῶ[ν].

12. -τρώα πόλει π[αρεῖχον], Rea: the final letter might equally well be *tau*. If π[ι] is correct the restoration π[αρέξω] (so Barns, p. 145) is also possible. For -τρώα the only possible restorations are πατρώα and μητρώα. The point is crucial. Barns' suggestion that it is a periphrasis for Alexandria as the metropolis of Egypt is difficult.⁵ Rea suggests that it might refer to Rome, Parsons that it is explicable in terms of Zenobia's supposed descent from the Alexandrian dynasty.⁶

The interpretation of the historical significance of this document is extremely precarious. The strongest objections to the theory that it is to be connected with Vaballathus and the Palmyrene occupation of Egypt were stated by Parsons himself (p. 401): that the hand in which the document is written seems to be of a date considerably earlier than A.D. c. 270, and that Vaballathus could not, without stretching the truth, describe himself as κεχειροτονημένος ὑπὸ τῶν γενναιοτάτων στρατιωτῶν.⁷ Rea's attempt to connect the document with the accession of Maximinus the Thracian rests on the reading of πρὸ[τ]άνει

⁵ Alexandria is termed Αἰγύπτου πάσης μητρόπολις by Ptolemy, 4, 5, 4, but it is not so described in the papyri: see A. Calderini, *Dizionario dei Nomi Geografici e Topografici dell'Egitto Greco-Romano* I (1935), 56-7, 61; cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (1937), 472, n. 11.

⁶ Rea, pp. 393-4; Parsons, p. 398.

⁷ In the case of Vaballathus this could hardly be read as anything but a reference to Palmyrene troops, whereas οἱ γενναίωτατοι στρατιῶται is the regular description of the Roman army; see, e.g., *P. Oxy.* 1412, 6-7. According to Zosimus, 1, 44, the invading army was composed of Palmyrenes, Syrians and *barbari*.

in the address, and on the supposition that the recipient of the letter, Apolinarios, was a *prytanis* of the *boule* at Oxyrhynchus and can be identified with L. Septimius Aurelius Sarapion *alias* Apolinarios, known to have been *prytanis* there at some time between 229 and 237 (see n. 4).

II. THE RECIPIENT

A fatal objection may be presented to the identification made by Rea. The presidency of the *boule* in the *metropoleis* of Roman Egypt was an office held by one individual (as opposed to a board of officials) for a period of one year (with possible re-election) beginning on the first day of the Alexandrian year, Thoth 1 (August 29).⁸ If *SB* 10295 is a proclamation of Maximinus the Thracian, dated in his first regnal year, Apolinarios will have held the presidency in 234–5, and the document will date to Pharmouthi (March–April) of 235. In Mecheir (Jan.–Feb.) of that same Alexandrian year, there is attested a different president, namely Aurelius Pekyllos *alias* Theon.⁹ Only in the last resort should a death in office and a replacement be considered and, in fact, a more probable identification may be adduced. Without a cogent external reason for reading the last title of the address as πρυ[τόναι, which is lacking if Apolinarios cannot have been the *prytanis* of 234–5, the traces of the last letter on the papyrus are inconclusive. External support for the reading πρε[is provided by *P. Oxy.* 933, which contains a private letter dated by Grenfell and Hunt to the late second century. The address on the verso reads Ἀπολιναρίω β. . αντ() πρεσβευτῆ π(αρά) Διογένους Ὁθονιακοῦ. The most obviously attractive restoration, which the editors tentatively suggested, is βου[λ(ευτῆ)] Ἀντ(ινοέων πόλεως).¹⁰ If this is correct, the probability of an identification is obviously strong and fresh interpretations of *SB* 10295 become available. Of primary importance is the fact that both *SB* 10295 and *P. Oxy.* 933 may belong to the second century.¹¹ Hence the validity of an attempt to connect *SB* 10295 with attested events of second-century history.

First, however, attention may be focused briefly upon the information about Apolinarios which may be gleaned from *P. Oxy.* 933. It is apparent that, wherever the writer Diogenes was when he wrote the letter, Apolinarios was somewhere else—τυχῶν [τ]οῦ πρὸς σ[ἐ] χεινομένο[υ] ἡδιστά σε ἀσπάζομαι (lines 4–5). The third person referred to was evidently responsible for delivery of the letter. In lines 14–16 we read περὶ τῆς μικρᾶς ἐγενάμην ἄχρις ἂν καταπλεύσῃ. The usual sense of καταπλεῖν in the papyri is to sail down the Nile. This statement is followed by the words καὶ πάντα αὐτῆ ὑπῆρκεται ὥστε ἐπανελθόντα σε μαρτυρηθῆ (read μαρτυρήσειν). The circumstances to which reference is made in private letters are often susceptible of a variety of interpretations and the elliptical statements in *P. Oxy.* 933 are no exceptions. But some conjectures may be made with a certain amount of probability. First, that since Apolinarios bears the title πρεσβευτῆς the business which caused his absence from home—that he was away from his home is suggested by the

⁸ This is argued in Ch. III of my monograph *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt* (forthcoming in the series *American Studies in Papyrology*), and is confirmed by a recently published text, Z. Borkowski, 'Le Papyrus de Berlin inv. 11314 et les prytanes d'Oxyrhynchus de 277 à 282', *Chronique d'Égypte* 43 (1968), 325–31. The main item of evidence for the date of the commencement of the presidency is *SB* 7696, 45 ff.

⁹ *P. Osl.* 111, 119–20. A possible alternative reading is πρυ[τάνευσαντι] but this would violate the normal order of titles and lose the advantage of having the letter addressed to a prominent official of Oxyrhynchus.

¹⁰ From a photograph, kindly supplied by the Toledo Museum of Art, I have been able to check the reading of *P. Oxy.* 933 verso. Although a photograph can be deceptive, it seems to me that there is clearly an *eta* at some distance to the right of the *beta*, and traces of other letters in between are compatible with a reading of βουλεντῆ (taking the stroke which Grenfell-Hunt understood as a mark of

abbreviation to be the left hand stroke of *upsilon*); this reading also makes the spacing more consistent. I suggest therefore Ἀπολιναρίω βουλεντῆ Ἀντ(ινοέων πόλεως) πρεσβευτῆ.

¹¹ On palaeographical grounds no precise dating can be sought or hypothesized. Either document could belong to the late second or early third century. The absence of the *nomen* Aurelius in *P. Oxy.* 933 is suggestive but far from conclusive. It could have stood in the lost portion of *SB* 10295 but if the suggestion that not more than two or three lines are lost from the top of the document (p. 21) has any weight there will only have been room for an abbreviated form of the *nomen*. It should be noted that if the documents do belong to the second century the only places at which Apolinarios could have been a *bouleutes* are Ptolemais (see *SB* 9016), Antinoopolis (see E. Kühn, *Antinoopolis: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Hellenismus im römischen Ägypten* [1913], 90–137) and possibly Naukratis (see U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde* I [1912], 12–13).

fact that ἡ μικρά, probably his daughter, remained for a time at least at the place of origin of the letter—was the πρεσβεία. The title is one which is usually applied to people involved in a specific embassy.¹² It is not unlikely that if Apolinarios was called away on an embassy his destination will have been Alexandria.

The ultimate origin of *P. Oxy.* 933 will bear further examination. Diogenes might have been an Oxyrhynchite writing to Apolinarios at Alexandria, but it also seems possible to postulate a connection between this letter and the 'Greek city' of Antinoopolis, situated up-river from Oxyrhynchus. This connection, suggested by the reading of Ἄντ(ινοέων πόλεως) in the address, receives circumstantial support from the occurrence of the name Antinoos in line 29.¹³ We may thus proceed to a consideration of the situation described in lines 21 ff., where Diogenes writes διεπεμψάμην τῇ μικρᾷ τὸ ἐπιστό[λ]ιον, ἐποίησα δὲ καὶ τὸν νυκτοστράτηγον φ[ύ]λακα κοιμᾶσθαι πρὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ. An hypothesis may be offered, *exempli gratia*, not in order to preclude others, but merely to demonstrate that sense can be made of the text in the light of the suggestions already advanced. Apolinarios, an owner of property at Oxyrhynchus and Antinoopolis, is away on business at Alexandria. His correspondent Diogenes writes to him from Antinoopolis (*a*) that ἡ μικρά has sailed down-river from Antinoopolis to Oxyrhynchus, (*b*) that he (Diogenes) has sent a letter (perhaps from Apolinarios) to ἡ μικρά and (*c*) that he (Diogenes) has made the night-strategos sleep on guard at Apolinarios' house in Antinoopolis which is now empty.¹⁴ The assumption that Apolinarios will have kept two households, one in Oxyrhynchus and one in Antinoopolis, is easily justified.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that different and equally plausible interpretations can be constructed, the evidence admits of one further hypothesis provided that the connection of Apolinarios with Antinoopolis be accepted. A papyrus of the second century records proceedings of the *boule* at Antinoopolis which took place at some unspecified date after the death of Antoninus Pius.¹⁶ The president of the *boule*—who was therefore also a *bouleutes*—at the time of this debate was one Lucius Apolinarios.¹⁷

We may now turn to the Apolinarios of *SB* 10295. It is clear that there is no serious objection to identifying him with the recipient of *P. Oxy.* 933, and the collocation of name and titles is a very strong basis for such an identification. The two documents could easily be contemporary, and there is nothing in either document which is rendered inexplicable by the identification. The provenance of the documents—both were found at Oxyrhynchus—is easily explained by the supposition that Apolinarios possessed property there and will have left or disposed of the letters during a period of residence at Oxyrhynchus. As far as *SB* 10295 is concerned, the natural assumption is that he will have come into possession of this important official document in his capacity of πρεσβευτής and there is no difficulty in supposing that he will have received a letter emanating perhaps from the prefect's office while he was in Alexandria. Hence we may confidently restore πρε[σ]βευτῆ in the address of *SB* 10295 and presume that both occurrences of the title refer to his service on the same πρεσβεία.

III. AVIDIUS CASSIUS

It remains to consider under what circumstances an Antinoite named Apolinarios might have gone on an embassy and come into possession of an official letter regarding the

¹² See, for example, *SB* 4101; *P. Lips.* 34-5; *P. Lond* 1178 (iii, p. 213); *C.P.Herm.* 119 verso, 4, 4; *P. Oxy.* 1662; H. A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (1954), index s.v. For an exception, see *P. Oxy.* 1560 and *PSI* 1225, referring to an Alexandrian with the titles πρεσβευτής καὶ ἀρχιδικαστής.

¹³ Dr. David Thomas, in an article forthcoming in *Chronique d'Égypte*, notes this, correctly remarking that the name was popular at Antinoopolis though not confined to that city. I am indebted to Dr. Thomas for permission to refer to this.

¹⁴ This explanation fits the theory of Dr. Thomas (o.c. in n. 13) that the night-strategos does not appear in the *metropoleis* until after 200, but he himself prefers to emphasize the connection with Oxyrhynchus and accept a dating in the third century.

¹⁵ A *bouleutes* of Antinoopolis with connections and probably property (cf. *P. Oxy.* 2106) at Oxy-

rhynchus is attested in *P. Oxy.* 2130; for ἰδιώται with similar connections, see *P. Oxy.* 1119. For a prominent Antinoite family with property elsewhere, see *P. Mich.* 422, introd.

¹⁶ Wilcken, *Chrestomathie* 27, esp. lines 11-12, θεοῦ Αἰλίου Ἄντ[ω]νείνου.

¹⁷ Titled ὁ πρυτανικός, a term regularly used to designate the president of the *boule* at Antinoopolis, see *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt* (above, n. 8), index s.v. The identification can only be tentative, but there is no difficulty in assuming that the *praenomen* was omitted in *P. Oxy.* 933 and *SB* 10295 (see n. 11). The only other Antinoite of this period who seems to offer any possibility is C. Julius Apolinarios Niger, but he is not attested as a *bouleutes* (*P. Mich.* 422, introd.). For Antinoite prosopography, see P. V. Pistorius, *Indices Antinoopolitani* (1939), 1-38.

proclamation of a new emperor in March or April of an unspecified year. The emperor (or usurper) must be one who was proclaimed by the soldiers (κεχειροτονημένος ὑπὸ τῶν γενναιοτάτων στρατιωτῶν, lines 6–8), who had some connection with Egypt (εὔνοια[ν], line 3) and who came to power in the spring Φαρυ[οῦθι, line 13]. Of the emperors and usurpers between Marcus Aurelius and Severus Alexander only two seem worthy of consideration, Pescennius Niger and Avidius Cassius. The former was an Italian of equestrian stock, who was put in command of Syria by Commodus and proclaimed by the Syrian army after the death of Pertinax.¹⁸ The unreliable evidence that he held an earlier post in Egypt is now discredited.¹⁹ The earliest papyrus documents attesting him as emperor date to Payni 23 (June 17), a minimum of seven weeks after the date of *SB* 10295.²⁰ These facts offer little firm basis for hypothesis. The arguments in favour of connecting *SB* 10295 with the revolt of Avidius Cassius in 175 may be put in the form of a commentary on the crucial points of the text.

Lines 1–5: Ἄλεξαν[δρε]ῖς . . . εὔνοια[ν . . .]. . . περιφέροντ[ε]ς . . . π[α]ρμεῖναι. Avidius Cassius was well-known in Egypt and popular even before his proclamation as emperor. He successfully quelled the revolt of the Boukoloï in 172–3 and is said to have been popular throughout the east.²¹ In the somewhat sketchy evidence for the revolt of Avidius Cassius a noticeable fact is the adherence of Alexandria to his cause.²² The word παρεμείναι is therefore particularly appropriate; Avidius will have earned the gratitude of the Alexandrians whose city was almost captured by the Boukoloï.²³ Further, the prefect of Egypt, Calvisius Statianus was an active supporter of Avidius Cassius in the revolt of 175.²⁴

Line 5: ἀφικνοῦμαι. ἀφικνούμενος is less satisfactory since the connecting particle (οὐν) would be lost and we would have to suppose that the main verb followed πόλει. There is no evidence for a visit to Alexandria by Avidius Cassius during the period of the revolt but it is not improbable that he made an appearance at a main centre of support. The present tense may easily bear a future meaning, however, and it is highly probable that if Avidius did not visit Alexandria during the revolt he will have promised a visit and appropriate benefactions. Obviously the case for a πρεσβεία connected with his proclamation is stronger if Avidius was in Alexandria in April 175, but it can be maintained without difficulty if he was not (see below).

Lines 6–9: κεχειροτονη[μένος] παρελευσόμενος[ς]. The contrast made by use of the particles μέν and δέ is important here. If the restoration of παρ' ὑμῖν is correct, the train of thought must be 'although elected *imperator* by the most noble soldiers (elsewhere), it is among you that I am about to enter auspiciously the supreme command and (therefore) starting from you in particular my power to confer benefits . . .'. Avidius was proclaimed

¹⁸ Dio 74, 6, cf. *HA, Pesc.* 2, 1; *PIR*¹ P 185; *RE* 19 (1938), 1086 ff.

¹⁹ Victor, *de Caes.* 20, 8–9; *HA, Pesc.* 7, 7, cf. R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (1968), 47, 64. The evidence that he was called the 'New Alexander' (Dio 74, 6, 2a) is comparable to that about the Alexander-fetish of Caracalla. In neither case is it necessarily to be discredited, but it is not sufficient to justify the references to Alexandria in *SB* 10295 (cf. the remarks of Barns, p. 145).

²⁰ U. Wilcken, *Griechische Ostraka aus Aegypten und Nubien* (1899), no. 972; *BGU* 454.

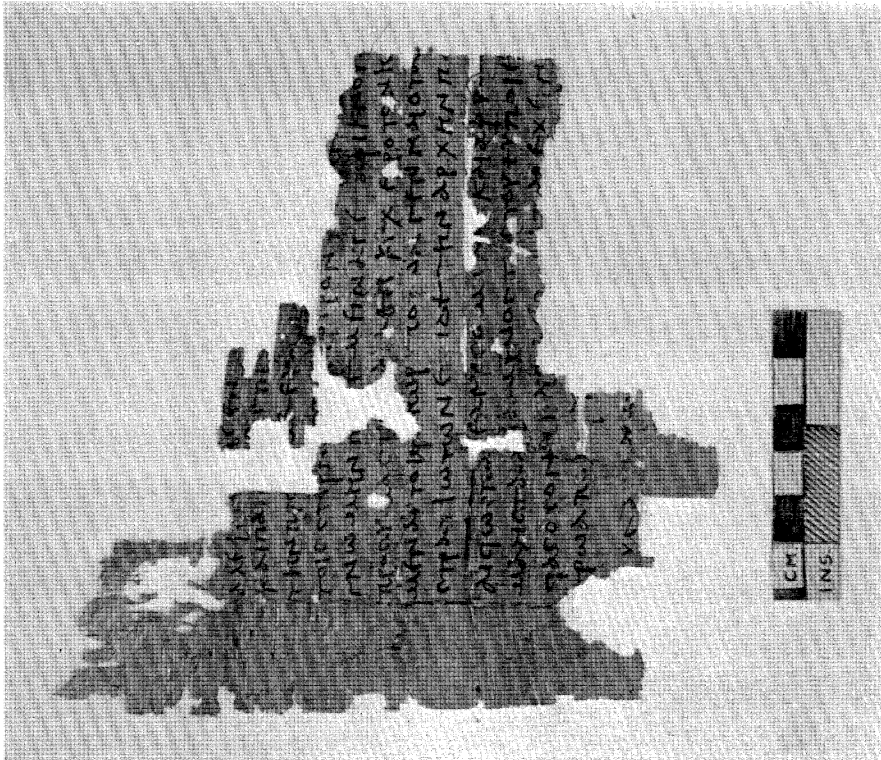
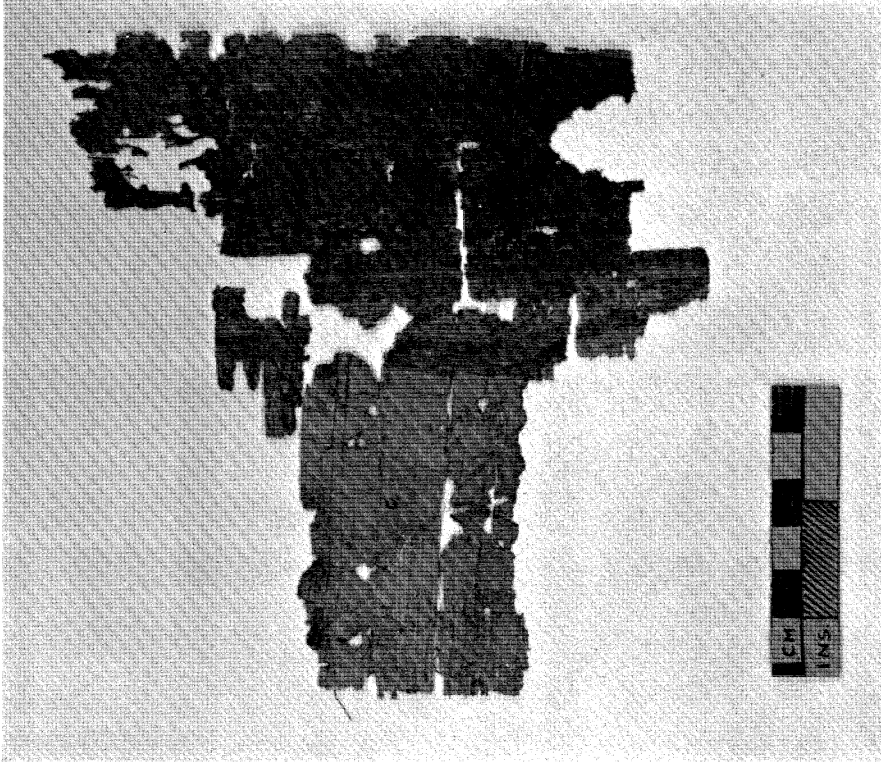
²¹ Dio 71, 4; *HA, Avid. Cass.* 6, 5–7.

²² *HA, Marcus* 26, 3 ('et cum multa Alexandrinii in Cassium dixissent fausta'); 25, 12; cf. Joann. Ant., *fr.* 118 (Müller, *FHG* 4, p. 582).

²³ Dio 71, 4, 2.

²⁴ Dio 71, 28, 3, where he is called Flavius Calvisius. After his deposition we find a vice-prefect in office, namely Caecilius Salvanus (*BGU* 327, April 176); so too after the removal of Epagathus, *P. Oxy.*, xxxi, p. 102. As for the position of the city of Alexandria during the revolt, a problem is presented by *HA, Marcus* 25, 4; *Avid. Cass.* 7, 4, where it is stated that Alexandria was put in the hands of Maecianus who 'consenserat spe participatus Cassio'.

The theory that this was the well-known jurist L. Volusius Maecianus (on whom see H-G. Pflaum, *Les Carrières procuratoriennes équestres . . .* [1960], no. 141) necessitated an emendation of 'filium' in the Codex Palatinus of the *HA* to 'fautorem', 'conscium' or 'socium'. It is now discredited by the evidence that Volusius was prefect of Egypt in 160–1 (A. Stein, *Die Praefekten von Aegypten* [1950], 88–90), and hence can hardly have been *iuridicus Alexandriae* in 175; the error has persisted, however, see R. Rémondon, 'Les Dates de la révolte de C. Avidius Cassius', *Chronique d'Égypte* 26 (1951), 369. Stein (*PIR*² A 1406) suggested that the *HA* refers to Maecianus, the son of Avidius (cf. H. Dessau, 'Die Familie der Kaiserin Sulpicia Dryantilla', *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 22 [1900], 199–205) and that the Alexandria of which he was given charge was not the city but the daughter of Avidius (see below, n. 27). In spite of justified criticism (E. Hohl, *BPhW* 58 [1938], 1364–5), the view has been revived (S. J. de Laet, 'Note sur deux passages de l'Histoire Auguste', *L'Antiquité Classique* 13 [1944], 127–34). If the evidence is to be accorded the status of fact at all, it is probably safest to regard Alexandria as the city and Maecianus as the son of Avidius Cassius. But the *HA* is clearly confused.



PAPYRUS FROM OXYRHYNCHUS (SB 10295): (1) RECTO, (2) VERSO (see p. 20 f.)

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in Syria after claiming to have been elected by the troops in Pannonia.²⁵ The precise distinction between proclamation by the troops and taking ἀρχή may be explicable by the supposition that this was written after Avidius became aware that the rumours of the death of Marcus were false. He was, therefore, either at Alexandria when this announcement was made, or was expecting to be there in the very near future. Rea (p. 394) remarks that the possibility that these lines refer to a usurper is not excluded. I would go further and suggest that the phrasing here actually favours a usurper over a canonical emperor.

Lines 11-12: τῆ . .]τρῶα πόλει. This allusion is perhaps the strongest reason for connecting the document with Avidius Cassius, for his father, Avidius Heliodorus, is known to have been prefect of Egypt in 137-42.²⁶ The correct restoration is, therefore, τῆ πα]τρῶα πόλει. If this seems a somewhat extravagant allusion to his father's tenure of the prefecture at Alexandria, it should be remembered that its appropriateness might be dependent upon Avidius Cassius' attitude towards the city (which is probably reflected in the fact that his daughter was called Alexandria²⁷) and on the demands of political expediency. The possibility that he had good reason to claim Alexandria as his fatherland because he was born there during his father's prefecture is probably to be rejected,²⁸ but it is quite natural that he should want to stress his connections with the city in a message addressed to its citizens. It is perhaps worth noting that, if the reading of παῖδ[is to be accepted in line 2 (see Rea, p. 395), it could be construed either as referring to the fact that Avidius Cassius was the son of a prefect or to his own son Maecianus (see n. 24).

Line 13: ἔτ]ους ἄ Φαρμ[οῦθι. The date fits the revolt of Avidius Cassius particularly well. The earliest document hitherto known which is dated by his short reign is an ostrakon of Pachon 8 (May 3).²⁹ This document may therefore be as little as a week or as much as five weeks after the date of *SB* 10295. According to Dio the reign of Avidius Cassius lasted three months and six days,³⁰ presumably reckoned from the date of his proclamation by the soldiers. Since a scribe in Thebes was again dating by Marcus alone on Mesore 4 (July 28), the absolute *terminus post* for the beginning of Avidius' reign is Pharmouthi 28 (April 23).³¹ On the other hand, since account must be taken of the length of time required for the dissemination of the news of Avidius' death, the proclamation should certainly be placed somewhat earlier than this. In fact we cannot at present better the conclusion of Rémondon that it took place some time in the last two weeks of April.³² But we must avoid the error of assuming that the earliest date *now extant* reflects the actual earliest date at which Avidius was recognized in Egypt. It is probably also safer to assume that his acceptance in Egypt will have postdated by a short time his proclamation by the soldiers.

Verso: πρ[ε]βευτῆ. The supposition has been that Apolinarios will have gone on an embassy to Alexandria connected with the proclamation of Avidius Cassius, and will there have come into possession of this letter which is presumably a copy of an official document, probably emanating from the office of the prefect. Such embassies were of course quite common, and might begin to assemble a very short time after the proclamation of a new

²⁵ Dio 71, 23, 1. According to Philostratus, *VS* 2, 1, 13, he was virtual ruler of the east (cf. Dio 71, 3). For a recent account of the revolt, see A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (1966), 252-60.

²⁶ A. Stein, *Die Praefekten von Aegypten* (1950), 72-4; R. A. Coles, 'The Date of the Prefecture of Avidius Heliodorus', in *Acts of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology*, Ann Arbor 1968 (1970).

²⁷ *HA*, Marcus 26, 12; *Avid. Cass.* 9, 3; cf. Dessau, o.c. (n. 24); and for his granddaughter, (Claudia) Maeciana Alexandria, *PIR*² C 1100.

²⁸ The expression will bear this sense and is consistent with the fact that Cyrrhus in Syria was his πατρίς, cf. R. Syme, 'Hadrian and Italica', *JRS* 54 (1964), 142-9. The evidence for the career of Avidius Cassius does not fit very well with the supposition that he was born at the earliest in 137. He is attested as suffect consul on May 6 of an uncertain year between 161 and 168 (*CIL* ix, 2995), usually assumed to be between 161 and 163. Even if we assume the consulship to have been a reward for his part in the Parthian war held between 166 and 168

(167 probably being excluded by the fact that another pair of suffect consuls are attested on May 5, *CIL* xvi, 123), he would only have been about thirty years of age at the most. A consulship at this age for the son of an equestrian prefect would be highly unusual: see J. Morris, 'Leges Annales under the Principate', *Listy Filologické* 87 (1964), 316-37, esp. 332 f. Apart from the fact that he held the post of *ab epistulis* under Hadrian, nothing is known of the career of Avidius Heliodorus other than his prefecture (Pflaum, *Les Carrières procuratoriennes équestres* . . . [1960], no. 106, cf. Townend, *Historia* 10 [1961], 376-7). We must therefore be satisfied with the probability that Avidius Cassius will have spent some part of his childhood or early youth at Alexandria during his father's prefecture.

²⁹ *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien* ser. 3, 7 (1896), 123; omitted by R. Rémondon, 'Les Dates de la révolte de C. Avidius Cassius', *Chronique d'Égypte* 26 (1951), 364-77.

³⁰ Dio 71, 27, 3².

³¹ *O. Bod.* 1487.

³² o.c. (n. 29).

emperor.³³ Josephus' description of Vespasian's arrival in Alexandria in the autumn of 69 gives a good idea of what might have been anticipated or prepared for Avidius Cassius in 175.³⁴ As has been said, there is no evidence for the presence of Avidius in Alexandria at this time. The alternative supposition will therefore be that such embassies will have convened in expectation of a visit, perhaps at the instigation of the prefect Calvisius Statianus. It is not impossible that the letter of which Apolinarios received a copy was disseminated as propaganda by the prefect in order to establish the claims of Avidius Cassius upon a firm footing. Whatever the case, *SB* 10295 deserves the particular attention of historians of the Roman Empire; it is a welcome accession to the small number of extant papyri which bear upon events affecting the central seat of power.³⁵

IV. SUMMARY

Two major suggestions have been advanced about the text of *SB* 10295. First, that the letter is not complete; the text now extant constitutes the end of a letter written in a single column containing not more than two or three lines above the present remains. Second, that the addressee, Apolinarios, is identical with the addressee of *P. Oxy.* 933, who was a *bouleutes* of Antinoopolis and a πρεσβευτής, and that the title πρε[σβευτῆ] should be restored in *SB* 10295. Possibly he is also identical with a known president of the *boule* of Antinoopolis in the later second century. It has been suggested that Apolinarios went on an embassy to Alexandria in the spring of an unspecified year in connection with the accession of a new emperor. As a corollary to these hypotheses, it has been argued that the emperor concerned is in fact Avidius Cassius. Nothing in the text precludes this, and three references support it very strongly: namely, the distinction between 'election' and 'accession to ἀρχή', the close ties with Alexandria and the fact that Avidius Cassius' father was a prefect of Egypt, and finally the date. Objections which have been raised against previous theories do not hold for this one, and there is no reason (palaeographical or other) why *SB* 10295 should not date to A.D. 175.

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³³ Herodian, 2, 8, 7 (Pescennius).

³⁴ *B´* 4, 656—εις δὲ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἀφιγμένῳ τῷ Οὐεσπασιανῷ τάπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης εὐαγγέλια ἦκε, καὶ πρέσβεις ἐκ πάσης τῆς ἰδίας οἰκουμένης συνηδόμενοι· μεγίστη τ' οὕσα μετὰ τὴν Ῥώμην ἢ πόλις στενοτέρα τοῦ πλήθους τότε ἤλεγχετο. On the visit of Vespasian to Alexandria, see now Heinrichs, *ZPE* 3 (1968), 51–80. Josephus' description (*B´* 4, 616 ff.) of the intrigues of Tiberius Julius Alexander over the proclamation of Vespasian is worth quoting at some length, for it might equally have served as an account, *mutatis mutandis*, of the situation in Alexandria in the spring of 175: ἐπιστέλλει δ' εὐθύς τῷ διέποντι τὴν Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν Τιβερίῳ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ, δηλῶν τὸ τῆς στρατιᾶς πρόθυμον, καὶ ὡς αὐτὸς ὑποδύς ἀναγκάτως τὸ βάρος τῆς

ἡγεμονίας συνεργῶν αὐτὸν καὶ βοηθῶν προσλαμβάνει. παραγνοῦς δὲ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν Ἀλέξανδρος προθύμως τὰ τε τάγματα καὶ τὸ πλῆθος εἰς αὐτὸν ὠρκωσεν. ἑκάτεροι δ' ἀσμένως ὑπήκουσαν, τὴν ἀρετὴν τάνδρος ἐκ τῆς ἐγγύς στρατηγίας εἰδότες. καὶ ὁ μὲν πεπιστευομένος ἦδη τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν, προπαρεσκεύαζεν αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν ἀφίξιν τάχιον δ' ἐπινοίας διήγγελλον αἱ φῆμαι τὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνατολῆς αὐτοκράτορα, καὶ πᾶσα μὲν πόλις ἐώρταζεν, εὐαγγέλια δὲ καὶ θυσίας ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ἐπετέλει.

³⁵ See *CP´* 418a (Vespasian), cf. Koenen, *Gnomon* 40 (1968), 256; *SB* 421 (proclamation of Maximus as Caesar); *Klio* 7 (1907), 278 (Hadrian); *P. Oxy.* 1021 (? sacrifices for the accession of Nero); *BGU* 646 (Pertinax); all pertaining to the accession of a new emperor or Caesar.