

Οἱ πρὸ ἑμοῦ αὐτοκράτορες

In her most recent discussion of the 6475 κάτοιχοι Ἑλληνες of the Arsinoite nome Orsolina Montevocchi demonstrates once again her genius for revealing possible associations among seemingly disparate elements. That privileged group, she suggests, was constituted in Roman Egypt out of the catoecic families established in the Ptolemaic era, “un *numerus clausus* di possessori di κληροὶ di origine militare” (1).

A key document is *SB* XII 11012, of which Professor Montevocchi herself gave us the penetrating and exhaustive *ed. pr.* (2). The document is of a familiar type, an imperial letter confirming previously granted *beneficia*. The top of the papyrus is missing, but the *ed. pr.* attributes (with cogent arguments) the letter to Nero, and that attribution has been, I believe, generally accepted.

The part of the letter that concerns us here reads: ...μὴ βουλόμενος ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἐπιβαρεῖν ὑμᾶς (3). ὅσα δὲ εἵχε[τε] ... παρὰ τῶν πρὸ ἑμοῦ αὐ[τοκρ]ατόρων λαβ[όντες] ... ὥσπερ κ[α]ὶ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ μου ἐβουλήθη ... ἐπαινῶ καὶ ἀ[να]δέχο[μαι]. “La lettera... parla”, writes Montevocchi, “di imperatori precedenti ... ma non nomina Augusto... L’assenza di un accenno ad Augusto nella lettera di Nerone potrebbe significare che il riconoscimento dei 6475 fu posteriore a lui”, and this, with other bits of evidence, “può far pensare che i 6475 siano una sistemazione dei Μακεδόνες τῶν κατοίκων ἱππέων avvenuta sotto Tiberio” (4).

(1) *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses*, pp. 719-26; the quotation is at 725.

(2) *Aegyptus* 50 (1970) 5-33.

(3) This is a *topos* of Roman imperial propaganda, found also, e.g., in *P. Fay.* 20=*Sel. Pap.* 216, *P. Oxy.* XLII 3022, *P. Wurz.* 9.

(4) *Loc. cit.* (note 1), pp. 724-25.

But does the language of this imperial letter really exclude Augustus? A small but strong body of evidence says no. This letter mentions no emperor by name. As shown by its several occurrences, the expression οἱ πρὸ ἐμοῦ αὐτοκράτορες was a cliché of official language, an all-inclusive brachylogy, comprehending *all* preceding emperors, obviating the need to list them *nominatim*. A corollary is that in this context names or other identifications were stated only when the scope of the reference was *not* all-inclusive. This distinction is clearly made in the above-quoted portion of *SB* 11012, τῶν πρὸ ἐμοῦ αὐ[τοκρ]ατόρων referring to all the writer's imperial predecessors, ὁ θεὸς πατήρ μου to his immediate predecessor alone. This usage is attested all through the Principate.

I. The All-Inclusive Cliché

Our earliest extant example is found in the famous letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians, *P. Lond.* VI 1912=*Sel. Pap.* 212=*CPJ* II 153. At lines 57-59 we have πανθ' ὅσα ὑμῶν ἐχαρίσθη ὑπὸ τε τῶν πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἡγεμόνων καὶ τῶν βασιλέων καὶ τῶν ἐπάρχων, and in lines 67-68 there is a contrast between ἐπὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων βασιλέων and ἐπὶ τῶν πρὸ ἐμοῦ Σεβαστῶν. The designations are distinctive and all-embracing, τῶν (ἀρχαίων) βασιλέων referring to the Ptolemies, τῶν πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἡγεμόνων/Σεβαστῶν to the preceding Roman emperors, i.e. Augustus, Tiberius and Caligula.

In a letter to the Society of Dionysiac Artists, *BGU* IV 1074 (= *SB* I 5225) + *P. Oxy.* XXVII 2476 + *P. Oxy. Hels.* 25, Septimius Severus indulges in a somewhat more expansive form of the cliché: ὅποσα εἶχετε ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑπὸ τῶν πρὸ ἐμοῦ αὐτοκρ[ατό]ρων δεδομένα ὑμῶν δίκαια καὶ φιλότιμα. The insertion of ἐξ ἀρχῆς, not required for the sense, is a rhetorical flourish emphasizing that the Society's rights and privileges have accumulated and existed over a long period (some 200 years), going all the way back to the beginning of the line of αὐτοκράτορες, i.e. to Augustus. Should there be any lingering doubt on this score, it is dispelled by a letter of Claudius, quoted at the opening of the document, which confirmed for the same Society

τὰ ὑπὸ το[ῦ] θε[ε]οῦ Σεβαστοῦ δεδ[ο]μένα ὑμῖν νόμιμα καὶ φιλόανθρωπα (5). In the last imperial letter of the document Severus Alexander refers to ὅσα θεῶ Ἀντωνεῖνω πατρὶ ἐμῶ καὶ θεῶ Σεουήρω πάππῳ μου καὶ τοῖς ἄνωθεν προγόνοις ἐκρίθη.

II. Specific References

When, in contrast, the reference to preceding emperors is less than all-embracing, the text cites the emperor(s) by name or other identifying designation, as in the first part of the quotation from Severus Alexander immediately above. Other examples are:

Vespasian's letter to the Guild of Athletēs, *P. Lond.* III 1178=*W. Chr.* 156, has πάντα ὅσα [θεοῦ] Κλαύδιος αἰτησαμένων ὑμῖν συνεχώρησεν. In *P. Oxy.* XLII 3022 Trajan recalls τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ πα[τρὸς μου] ... ἃς παρέσχεν ὑμῖν. *P. Würz.* 9 contains two examples: at line 38 Antoninus Pius cites ὑμῶν τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ πα[τρὸς μου] δωρεάς, and at lines 49-51 Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, on their accession to τὴν πα[τρῶν] τε καὶ παπῶν ἀρχήν, confirm ὅσα παρὰ ἀμφοτέρων ἐδόθη ὑμῖν.

III. Conclusion

Returning to our point of departure, can we tell when the 6475 κάτοικοι Ἑλληνες classification was created? Not with certainty; but on present evidence there is no bar to envisaging its creation as an element in Augustus's organization of *provincia Aegyptus*.

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(5) It is worth noting *BGU* I 74, where the restoration τὰ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν (M. Aurelius and L. Verus) αὐτοκράτορσιν δόξαντα is eminently justified by the parallels.