

On Roman Imperial Promulgations in Greek

N. Lewis

The interplay of cultures was central to the life work of Abraham Wasserstein. The following pages will offer, in his memory, an analysis of a recently discovered major example of Greek in the service of Roman rule.

Imperial Rome communicated with its governors of provinces in Latin. Classic examples are Book Ten of Pliny's *Letters*, i.e. the Pliny-Trajan correspondence, and the rescripts of the Justinian *Code*. In the eastern provinces of the empire, lands previously part of the Hellenistic world, imperial and other official pronouncements were issued to the provincial populations in Greek. At Rome the bureaux (*ab epistulis*, *a libellis*) that handled the emperor's correspondence worked in both languages.¹ An emperor travelling in the East might, on a special occasion, deliver a public address in Greek (his own or prepared for him) — e.g., Nero proclaiming their "liberty" to the Greeks (*IG VII 2713 = ILS 879 = SIG³ 814*). But ordinarily even the philhellene Hadrian conducted his business with the governors of the eastern (as of the western) provinces in Latin.² Similarly, as we see in *P. Oxy.* LI 3614, on his visit to Egypt Septimius Severus, who "was competent or better in Greek" (editor's note), rendered judgement in Latin, which was then translated into Greek: Καίσαρ σκεψάμε[νος] μετὰ τῶν φίλων τῇ πατρίῳ φωνῇ ἀπεφώνησε.³ Another example is Marcus Aurelius' postscript to his famous letters to the Athenians.⁴

Roman promulgations in Greek have undergone repeated textual analysis in the past hundred years, as newly discovered inscriptions and papyri have brought us more and more examples from eastern provinces.⁵ A major element

¹ Under Hadrian, presumably under the press of increasing business, the correspondence office was divided into *ab epistulis latinis* and *ab epistulis graecis*.

² This is specifically stated in the caption of the well-known *BGU I 140 = Sel. Pap. 213 = FIRA² I 78*, ἀν[τί]γρα(φον) ἐπισ[τολ(ῆς)] τοῦ κυρίου με[θ]ηρμ[ην]ευμένης. See, more generally, F. Martín, *La documentación griega ... del emperador Adriano*, 1982, 324-6.

³ On the meaning of τῇ πατρίῳ φωνῇ see editor's note *ad loc.* and my supplementary note in *Pap. Flor.* XIX, 348-49.

⁴ J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions*, no. 184, ll. 94ff.

⁵ Notably P. Viereck, *Sermo graecus quo senatus populusque Romanus ... in scriptis publicis usi sunt*, 1888; L. Lafoscade, *De epistulis aliisque titulis ... graece scriptis*, 1902; D. Magie, *De Romanorum iuris publici sacrique vocabulis sollemnibus in Graecum sermonem conversis*, 1906; A.P.M. Meuwese, *De Rerum Gestarum Divi Augusti versione graeca*, 1920; H.J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions* (=

in this century-long discussion has been the question “of how these Greek documents emanating from Roman official sources were composed”.⁶ Specifically, did the issuing authority compose the original in Greek, or do we have before us a Greek translation of a Latin original? The emperors, as noted above, customarily used Latin. Statutes (*leges*) always have a Latin original. As for the provincial governors, most, being educated Romans, were doubtless “competent or better in Greek”, and that language was the mother tongue of some — e.g., C. Avidius Heliodorus, who was Prefect of Egypt in AD 137-142. But the vast majority of the Roman equestrians and senators who governed eastern provinces were surely content to stick to their own mother tongue and leave the routine work of translation to bilingual staff members or employees.⁷

Such, it is fair to say, is today’s scholarly consensus. But the contrary view has not completely faded. Not so many years ago one writer still insisted that the surviving text of a hearing before Caracalla (*SB XIV 11875 and 11876*) was “no translation but a Greek original”.⁸ I have demonstrated elsewhere that that view is untenable.⁹ Under the Republic — and we shall look in a moment at an outstanding example — promulgations from Roman authorities were often published in Greek versions that were nothing more than plodding, literal renderings of the Latin. Under the Principate, the employment of skilled bilingual clerks resulted in the production of Greek texts that were smooth and idiomatic examples of the inelegant, often cumbersome, business jargon of the day.¹⁰ Even so, traces of the Latin original are usually detectable in even the smoothest of Greek versions.¹¹

American Studies in Papyrology 13, 1974). For a fuller bibliography see R.K. Sherck, *Roman Documents from the Greek East*, 1969, 3.

⁶ S. Mitchell, *JRS* 66, 1976, 100, calling the texts “competent though not impeccable Greek”.

⁷ Thus, in *AE* 1975 no. 805 (cf. my discussion in *Hellenika* 42, 1991-92, 15-20) the Greek text of a governor’s edict is followed by *proponatur*, the governor’s subscription in Latin authorizing promulgation of the Greek version by public display. Similarly, in *P. Oxy.* X 1271 = *Sel. Pap.* 304 = *CPL* 179 a Greek petition has the governor’s subscription in Latin. In contrast, C. Avidius Heliodorus’ edict in *P. Oxy.* XLI 2954 is couched in straightforward Greek showing no signs of translation from a Latin original; this is hardly surprising as he was a noted rhetor whose mother tongue was Greek, but whether he dictated the text verbatim or simply sketched the contents and left the actual composition to his staff remains an open question.

⁸ J.H. Oliver, *ZPE* 42, 1981, 136.

⁹ See *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 33, 1987, 52-53.

¹⁰ See *Studies in Roman Law in Memory of A. Arthur Schiller*, 1986, 128-9, 136-7, for my fuller treatment of this matter.

¹¹ Beginning with the *Res Gestae* of Augustus, the Latin and Greek were sometimes inscribed side by side for public display. To judge from the few extant examples — see the half-dozen listed by S. Mitchell, *JRS* 66, 1976, 110 — this was done but rarely, and the latest example is Trajanic in date.

Published with extensive commentary in *Epigraphica Anatolica* 14, 1989, the text reprinted as *AE* 1989 no. 681 and *SEG* 39 1180, is an inscription of 154 lines from Ephesos. Dated in AD 62, it bears the caption νόμος τέλους Ἀσίας εἰσαγωγῆς καὶ ἐξαγωγῆς κατὰ τε γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν. Predictably, such a major find has elicited ongoing textual and interpretative study.¹² With respect to the language, C. Nicolet remarks (*AE* 1989, 221) on the “vocabulaire très intéressant: aux mots et expressions grecs du texte doivent correspondre les termes latins de la lex originale édictée à Rome”. The first editors make the same observation at greater length (p. 6): “Die Übersetzung der lateinischen Vorlage im Griechisch ist missglückt. Das lateinische Gesetz wurde Wort für Wort übertragen, jede Gattung, jede Anpassung an griechisches Sprachempfinden unterblieb. Gerne wüsste man wo und wie es zu dieser seltsamen Übersetzung kam; gute Übersetzer hätte es ... im Rom wie in Ephesos genug gegeben”.

The Greek does indeed display an extraordinary degree of literalness. This is probably to be explained, in good part if not entirely, by the makeup and dates of the document: this version of AD 62 embodies, with revisions and additions, several earlier versions, some fairly recent, others going back almost a century and a half — that is, to a time when the senate and Roman representatives in the field were more concerned with conveying their ipsissima verba than with stylistic niceties.

In this inscription the most obvious evidences of the Latin original are the following:

1. The date by the consuls of AD 62. Under the Principate the usual practice in the province of Asia was to date by the regnal year of the ruler (continuing the Hellenistic practice), or by the local era or magistrates.
2. The Greek verb in the Latin position, i.e. at the end of its sentence or clause. This occurs repeatedly throughout the inscription.
3. Transliterated Latin words (in addition to Roman names and calendar terms): αἰράριον, ἀσσάριον, δηνάριον, νοουίκιος (novicius), πραῖς (a heteroclyte from *praedium*).
4. Translations of Roman technical terms, especially governmental and legal:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός | vir bonus |
| ἀντιγράφω | rescribo |
| αὐθέντης | auctor (societatis) ¹³ |
| γραμματοφυλάκιον | tabularium |

¹² In addition to H. Pleket accompanying the text in *SEG* 39, 367-87, I have noted the following: R. Merkelbach, *ZPE* 81, 1990, 97-100; C. Nicolet, *CRAI* 1990, 675-98 and *BCH* 65, 1991, 465-80; H. Wankel, *ZPE* 85, 1991, 40; M. Heil, *Epigraphica Anatolica* 17, 1991, 9-18; C. Nicolet, *MEFRA* 105, 1993, 929-59; N. Lewis, *ZPE* 107, 1995, 248. A summary of prior articles is given at *L'Année épigraphique* 1991, no. 1501. Nicolet mentions (*loc. cit.* 941-4) and Pleket (*loc. cit.*) occasionally quotes from an unpublished English translation by M.H. Crawford. A complete revision, with detailed commentary, has been undertaken by C. Nicolet and associates.

¹³ Cf. C. Nicolet, *AE* 1989, 222.

| | |
|--|--|
| δεκάτη | decuma |
| δήμος Ῥωμαίων | populus Romanus |
| δημόσια πράγματα | respublica |
| δημοσιώνης | publicanus, vectigalium conductor |
| δήμου κύρωσις | plebiscitum |
| δόγμα συγκλήτου | senatus consultum |
| δόλος πονηρός | dolus malus |
| ἐλεύθεραι πόλεις | civitates liberae |
| ἐπιμεληταὶ δημοσίων προσόδων | curatores publicorum vectigalium |
| κοινωνός | socius |
| νόμισμα ἠριθμημένον | pecunia numerata |
| ὁ τειμευτητικός νόμος | lex censoria |
| οὔτε ἐν ἱεράῳ οὔτε ἐν τεμένει | ne quid in loco sacro religioso sancto fiat ¹⁴ |
| οὔτε ἐν τόπῳ ἀνετῶ | |
| πίστις ἀγαθή ¹⁵ | bona fides |
| ὑπὸ γνώμῃ ἢ ἐξουσίᾳ τοῦ Ῥωμαίων δήμου | sub dicione aut potestate populi Romani |

The City University of New York

¹⁴ Cf. *Edictum perpetuum* 236 (Lenel).

¹⁵ Restored but likely.