

## ALEXANDRIA AD AEGYPTUM: 117-119 A.D.\*

At the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. Egypt became the scene of a violent Jewish revolt that shook both the capital and the surrounding countryside. As far as the events of the revolt in the χώρα from 115 to 117 A.D. are concerned, literary evidence supported by papyrological material allows for a reasonably satisfactory reconstruction of the facts. Notoriously more complex, however, is the situation relative to the events that transpired in the city of Alexandria itself, a theme that has not yet, to my knowledge, been the object of special research among modern historians of the ancient world, though it greatly interested the late Professor Alexander Fuks with whom I have been fortunate to discuss the matter in the course of my doctoral research.

The aim of the present paper is then to review the events of the Jewish revolt in Alexandria with a view to attempting a chronological reconstruction thereof in the light of the available sources.

The principal problem, which specifically concerns the events of the year 115 A.D., resides in the notable discrepancy between the evidence yielded by the literary sources (supported by papyrological material) on the one hand, and the modern interpretation of one specific papyrus, on the other. For the year intervening between February 115 and February 116, referred to by Eusebius as 'the eighteenth year of Trajan's reign,' this Christian historian presents a picture of evermounting unrest and rebellious activity of alarming proportions both in the capital and in the χώρα.

The Greeks, as far as can be determined from Eusebius, failed to put up any effective resistance, while truly organized military repression on

\* I would like to acknowledge my great debt of gratitude to the late Professor Alexander Fuks, my teacher, under whose guidance I acquired whatever insight I have into the historical events here discussed. My warm thanks are also due to Professor D. Asheri who kindly read my ms. and made valuable comments. Needless to say, all errors of facts or judgement are my sole responsibility.

the part of the Romans had not yet got under way (*Eus.*, *H.E.* 4, 2, 1-2). For the autumn of 115, papyrological documents portray an equally chaotic situation in the  $\chi\acute{\omega}\rho\alpha$  where Jewish attacks provoke the sudden departure of the strategos stationed at Apollinopolis Magna. The latter received a letter from his wife, anxious for his safety 'because of what they say about what is happening' (*CPJ*, 2, 436, 3-9). These attestations then yield the general impression that the situation was far from being under Graeco-Roman control.

In contrast with the foregoing, we have evidence supplied by papyrus No. 435 in *CPJ* dating from the nineteenth year of Trajan's reign; this portrays a situation of relative calm in which the Jews, crushed by the Romans, no longer present a threat to peace in Alexandria. It does not mention military activity on the part of the Jews, but rather, an attack launched by the Greeks (on behalf of their slaves) against the Jews. The tone of the document is definitely anti-Greek, the attack being defined as 'a reproach to the entire city' and reveals that a judge had been specially despatched by the Emperor for the purpose of handling all complaints on the spot. The papyrus ends as follows:

Let there be an end of those who say ... that they have been wounded, and demand justice violently and unjustly; for there was no need to be wounded. Some of these errors could perhaps have had an excuse before the battle between the Romans and the Jews, but now they are purposeless judgements, which have never been permitted.

These same events, and more specifically, an attack in Alexandria staged by Greek slaves at the incitement of their masters, also figure in the two fragments of papyrus 158 (*CPJ*), dating from Hadrian's reign. They deal with the matter of two delegations, one Greek, the other Jewish, arriving in Rome to confer in Hadrian's presence about this attack and its consequences, of which the most important had been the sentence passed against the Greeks whereby sixty of them had been exiled and their slaves condemned to death. According to the dating proposed by the editors of the *Corpus*, at least two years elapsed between the attack itself, recorded in papyrus 435 (dated 13 October 115) and the aforementioned delegations.

It is, first of all, highly odd that events occurring in the autumn of 115 are discussed before Hadrian two years later, especially when it is recalled that the intervening period had witnessed the Jewish revolt, the futile attempts at self-defence on the part of the Greeks and, finally, the Roman repression at the hands of Turbo. It is difficult to understand why a relatively minor episode like the Greek attack, in which the culprits responsible had been described as being few (*CPJ*, 2, 435, col. 2, 22-23; col. 3, 1-2) could still be regarded as a live issue in 117 after all that had transpired in the meantime.

Equally problematic, if seen as applying to the year 115, are references to a *δικαστής* sent by the Emperor to weigh what had happened and to attend the trial instituted for the purpose of handling its consequences (*CPJ*, 2, 435, col. 3, 15-20). It appears somewhat strange that the autumn of 115 should have been considered an opportune moment for the legal trial of a mere handful of Alexandrian Greeks who had launched an attack on the Jews, when the latter (according to the unanimous testimony of papyri and literary sources) were engaged in violent onslaughts on Egyptian cities and villages and easily defying the vain attempts of the Greek forces at halting their advance. Furthermore, an entirely legitimate effort at self-defence on the part of the Greeks would not normally have been regarded as an act of aggression, nor could the Jews, in such circumstances, have had serious grounds for complaint. Above all, the clear accusations made by the Jewish delegation to Hadrian (*CPJ*, 2, 158a, col. 2, 8-9; col. 3, 14-15) would have been quite meaningless had they related to the period when the revolt was at its climax. It is therefore wholly surprising that the general tone of papyrus 435 should be one expressing reproach towards the Greeks for fomenting disorders whereas not a single word of blame is addressed to the Jews. Then there is also a passage in the same papyrus treating as 'absurd' the Greek attack on the Jews; moreover, it is further stated that whereas it would have been understandable before the battle between Jews and Romans, it was inexplicable coming as it did in its aftermath (*vide supra*). Now a Greek attack would not have attracted the epithet 'absurd' at such a time as the autumn of 115 (or even 116) when, in actual fact, the Jews still presented a very real threat to Egypt. Finally, the statement *νῦν δὲ μά[τατα] κ[ριτή]ρα* appears logical only if made not during the revolt itself but after the

Romans had quelled the Jewish uprising, that is, after the summer of 117.

The *Corpus* edition of the papyrus displays the dating (ἔτους) ιθ Τραιανῶν Φαῶφι ιβ̄, but the Emperor's name is here entirely reconstructed. In the first edition of this papyrus, Cazzaniga states that the date 'is almost illegible.' The question then arises as to who established the dating 'October 115'. The truth is that none of the editions of this papyrus or the commentaries thereon have ever attempted to establish a precise date with any rigour; there has, on the contrary, always been a degree of uncertainty as to whether the papyrus refers to the reign of Trajan or to that of Hadrian.<sup>1</sup> The dating 115 A.D. proposed in the *Corpus* seems to be based on the supposition that the battle mentioned in the papyrus (*CPJ*, 2, 435, col. 3, 26; col. 4, 1) is to be identified with that recorded by Eusebius as happening in 115 (*H.E.* 4, 2, 1). Also relevant to the official dating of this papyrus is the fact of its being written in the first person and in a reproachful tone; it has, on this account, been identified with an edict issued by Rutilius Lupus 'who was prefect in 115' (*CPJ*, 2, p. 228). Nevertheless, it must be noted that Eusebius does not mention a real battle; he recounts how the Greeks, having found safe haven in Alexandria from the Jewish attacks sustained in the χώρα, killed all the Jews they could find in the capital. One has the distinct impression that it was more a matter of an unpremeditated massacre than of a conventional battle. Above all, it was, according to Eusebius, enacted by Greeks, whereas the μάχη mentioned in the papyrus was fought between Jews and Romans and involved no Greek participation.

As for the supposition that the papyrus was an edict from the Prefect Lupus, it should first of all be noted that he was in office from January

<sup>1</sup> I. Cazzaniga, 'Torbidi giudaici nell'Egitto Romano nel secondo secolo di Cristo', *Ann. de l'Inst. de Philol. et d'Hist. Orient. et Slaves* 5, 1937, note 2, p. 161; M. Rostovtzeff, 'Kaiser Trajan und Dura', *Klio*, 31, 1938, note 1, p. 291; C. Preaux, 'Review of I. Cazzaniga (Torbidi giudaici...)' *Chron. d'Ég.*, 12, 1939, pp. 180-181; T.C. Skeat, 'Review of I. Cazzaniga (Torbidi giudaici...)' *J.E.A.*, 25, 1939, p. 79; A. Vogliano, 'Rapporto preliminare della V<sup>a</sup> Campagna di scavo a Madīnet Mādī', *Ann. de Service des Ant. de l'Ég.* 39, 1939, p. 695; P. Collart, 'Review of I. Cazzaniga (op. cit.)' *Revue de Philol.*, 15, 1941, p. 55; A. Segrè, 'Jews in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt', *Jew. Soc. St.*, 6, 1944, p. 392; J. Schwartz, 'Review of H.A. Musurillo's *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, Oxford 1954,' *Chron. d'Ég.*, 30, 1955, p. 151.

113 to some time between January and August 117 (the precise date is unknown);<sup>2</sup> in other words, on the basis of this data, the papyrus can equally well be dated October 116 rather than a year earlier. In actual fact, the identification of the papyrus with an edict issued by Lupus is far from being an established fact. Its sole basis appears to be the occurrence of this name in the course of the already mentioned debate held in Hadrian's presence by the Jewish and Greek delegations in connexion with the Greek attack. In their commentary on the passage διάταγμα ἀνέγνω [τοῦ?] Λούπου, ὡς προάγειν αὐ[τ]οὺς/[ἐ]κέλευε χλευάζων τὸν ἀπὸ/[σ]κηνῆς καὶ ἐκ μείμου βασιλέα (*CPJ*, 2, 158a, col. 1, 4-7), the editors of the *Corpus* draw attention to the obscure grammatical structure of this sentence as well as to the oddness of the statement according to which a Roman Prefect is said to have participated in a farce put on by the Alexandrians (*CPJ*, 2, p. 95), an event that is completely out of character with the stern posture adopted by the Roman authorities in their dealings with the Greeks—a fact that is amply demonstrated by the contents of papyrus 435 where the behaviour of the Greeks is described as μά[τ]αια κ[ριτή]ρια and as ὄλης πόλεως ... ἔγκλημα (*CPJ*, 2, 435 col. 3, 6; col. 4, 2); and is therefore hardly in keeping with the attitude of Prefect Lupus (χλευάζων) in papyrus 158.

Now if the identification of Lupus in the papyrus with the Prefect of Egypt bearing that name remains purely hypothetical and if, furthermore, the μάχη recorded in the papyrus is totally unrelated to the events of 115 described by Eusebius, then it is clear that we have no basis for dating papyrus 435. The difficulty lies in determining what year corresponded to the nineteenth of Trajan's reign; if it is indeed true that the Egyptian papyri used the Egyptian New Year (starting on 1st Θῶθ, i.e. August 29) as point of reference, it is equally the case that they do not always turn out to be reliable with respect to the *dies imperii* of the various Roman Emperors or to the dates of their decease. Fink states, for instance, that in September 117, the Egyptians were still unaware of Trajan's death.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *B.G.U.*, I, 114, col. 1, 1.9, January 5, 113; regarding the dating of S.B. 10502, see G. Bastanini 'Lista dei prefetti d'Egitto dal 3A, al 299P' *Z.P.E.*, 17-18, 1975, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> See R.O. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*, Princeton 1971, for comments on papyrus 74.

There are also a few other factors suggesting that the papyrus refers to the events occurring *after* Turbo's military intervention, that is, after the summer of 117 when Hadrian was already on the throne. Highly significant here, is the correspondence obtaining between the reproachful tone of papyrus 435 relating to the Greek attack and that evinced in a letter addressed by Hadrian to the Alexandrians, the contents of which will be examined below, ἐπιτιμῶσαν αὐτοῖς (Dio, 69, 8, 1a). Finally, papyrus 158 describes the Greek attack as having taken place 'during the Dacian war' (CPJ, 2, 158a, col. 1, 11-13) which modern research has identified as that fought by Hadrian's armies against the Sarmatic tribe of Roxolani in 117/118 A.D. (CPJ, 2, p. 96). Papyrus 435 therefore seems to treat of events antecedent in time to those referred to in papyrus 158, though in all probability, not much earlier; it would appear reasonable then to posit the date 117 A.D. It is worth recalling, in the connexion, the opinions of Wilcken and Premerstein according to whom this Alexandrian στάσις took place during Martial's term of office.<sup>4</sup> One final reference relevant to dating is possibly that occurring in papyrus 158 which states that 'war' broke out during the absence of a certain κύριος (col. 2, 5-7) identified by Tcherikover with the Prefect of Egypt (CPJ, 2, p. 96). One is therefore led to wonder if these disorders could have occurred in the period intervening between Lupus' departure sometime in the Spring-Summer of 117 and Martial's arrival in the country between 8th and 28th August of the same year,<sup>5</sup> though proofs to this effect are lacking.

The general character pertaining to this turmoil in Alexandria as it is portrayed in these papyri points to a somewhat prolonged period of στάσις between Jews and Greeks. The former accused the latter of having taken certain people out of prison in order to beat them—possibly Jews imprisoned during the military engagement with Turbo (?)—among whom was a certain 'king of the stage and mime' (CPJ, 2, 158a, col. 1, 4-7; col. 4, 1-12), a personality that modern research has vainly tried to identify, though it has been suggested that there was no question here of Lukuas, king of the Cyrenaican rebels himself, but of another individual who represented him symbolically

<sup>4</sup> See bibliography in CPJ, 2, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> This is also Premerstein's opinion; see CPJ, 2, p. 96.

(*CPJ*, 2, p. 95). At a moment when the Jews no longer represented a threat to the city, the Greeks appear to have put on some kind of 'triumphal farce'—accounts of triumphal processions appear in both papyri (*CPJ*, 2, 158a, col. 1, 5-7; 435, col. 1, 16). Direct parallels to these accounts include the New Testament episode relating to the Roman treatment of Jesus just before his death (Matthew 27, 22-23; Mark 15, 16-20; John 19, 1-3) and an event occurring in Alexandria in 38 A.D. in which the Greeks obliged a μεμηνώς to impersonate a 'king of the Jews' decking him out in royal cloak and sceptre and proceeded to put on a theatrical display of mockery that included dancing, miming and the participation of professional flute-players. The show, described in great detail by Philo (*In Flaccum* 36-39; 85), had consisted of a review of tortures inflicted on the Jews. It had, moreover, been performed in a theatre; it is interesting to note that in papyrus 435 too, there is a vague reference of an accusing nature relating to those 'who looked after the theatre' (col. 2, 24). As in 38 A.D. so too, in the time of Hadrian, an armed attack had followed the farce. The Jews, in fact, accused the Greeks of preparing 'fire and sword' against them and of setting fire to their houses (*CPJ*, 2, 435, col. 2, 21 and 28). Contrary to what had happened in 38 A.D. the Greeks responsible for these events were 'few, but... supported by many more and provided for by the powerful who pay not to be abused and maltreated. ... there is a proper time for a trial just as there is a proper place and a proper method of punishment' (*CPJ*, 2, 435, col. 3, 1-20).

The historicity of this Alexandrian στάσις is independently confirmed by literary testimony; a passage from the *Historia Augusta* mentions how, no sooner had Trajan's death become known than on outburst of rebelliousness swept over those peoples subjected only a short time previously; the list of such countries included Egypt *quae seditionibus urgebatur* (*H.A. Hadr.*, 5, 2). The Roman reaction to the situation that had come about in Egypt finds expression in two passages already commented on above; in papyrus 435 the Greeks are urged to cease their laments over their chastisement, deserved or not, since they had brought it upon themselves (col. 3, 20-24); in papyrus 158 there is a reference to activities in the city on the part of the Praetorian guard (col. 4, 8-9). Similar testimony is to be found in another papyrological fragment likewise recording complaints by the Greeks on account of an

allegedly unjust attack that occasioned several casualties among them.<sup>6</sup> Also dating from the early years of Hadrian's reign is yet another fragment of papyrus recording Greek displeasure following upon allegations of 'unjust treatment,'<sup>7</sup> though it is unclear whether the victims intended here are the same as those referred to in the preceding papyrus.

The Roman act of military intervention in Alexandria is portrayed from a completely different angle in another document written by a Roman soldier from the *legio XII Deiotariana* or *III Cyrenaica*, himself a participant in the campaign in which he had also been wounded. In his eyes, the armed intervention was, of course, far from unjust; it was, on the contrary, a justifiable repression of *θόρυβον καὶ ἀκαταστασίαν τῆς πόλεως*. The turmoils here referred to in this text also seem to belong to the early part of Hadrian's reign.<sup>8</sup> Also representing the Roman point of view is a pagan literary source Dio/Xiphilinus in which the use of the verb *στασιάζειν* corroborates the view that this Alexandrian episode had, as far as it can be reconstructed from papyrological evidence, assumed the character of a *στάσις*. D/X also records that in order to dissuade the Alexandrians from adopting warlike attitudes, the Emperor Hadrian had sent them a letter *ἐπιτιμῶσαν αὐτοῖς* (69, 8, 1a). Since no mention is made of the Jews, D/X appears to attribute the initiative in this *στάσις* to the Greek elements in the population, a further confirmation of the general impression imparted by perusal of the papyri. The fact that the Greeks were, on this occasion, the ones responsible for the disorders in the city would seem to suggest a prolonged period of all-out revenge on the part of the Greeks in retaliation for the violent Jewish aggression of the years immediately preceding.

At the outset of Hadrian's reign, the Jewish community in Alexandria must have been both highly depleted in numbers as well as humbled in

<sup>6</sup> *P. Mich. Inv. 4800*=H. Musurillo, 'A New Fragment of the Acta Alexandrinorum,' *J.R.S.*, 47, 1957, p. 186, 11, 25-33. The fragment intended dates from Hadrian's reign.

<sup>7</sup> *P. Athen. 58*=Musurillo, 'P. Athen. 58: A New Alexandrian Fragment,' *Chron. d'Eg.*, 39, 1964, p. 148, 11, 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> H. C. Youtie and J. G. Winter, *Papyri and Ostraca from Karanis*, London 1951, 477 and 478. See also A. Kasher, 'Some Comments to the Jewish Uprising in Egypt in the time of Trajan,' *J.J.S.*, 27, 1976, p. 148.



spirit after the punishment it had taken at Turbo's hands (App. *Bell. Civ.*, 2, 90; Eus., *H.E.* 4, 2, 3-4). Given such a situation, the Greek offensive fits in well with the general pattern of Greek behaviour. Suffice it here to recall Josephus Flavius' account of events occurring fifty years previously in 66 A.D., i.e. the punitive Roman expedition against the Jewish Quarter of Alexandria that had caused a great number of Jewish deaths. At the end of this engagement, the Roman general's call to retreat had been headed by his soldiers but ignored by the Alexandrian Greek populace who, enthralled by their deep hatred for the Jews, could not easily be prevailed upon to withdraw (*Bellum* 2, 497-498).

The Greek attack of 117 had long-drawn-out consequences. The trial was held, sentence was passed, but the complaints and accusations dragged on. Two years later, possibly in 119/120 A.D.,<sup>9</sup> Jewish and Greek delegations appeared before Hadrian to reconsider the trial (*vide supra*) in which sixty Greeks had been exiled and their slaves condemned to death. The Greeks appealed against the sentence and sought to extricate themselves by declaring false the accusations brought against them (*CPJ*, 2, 158a, col. 3, 3-8; 158b, 12-13). They also expressed fears that the Jews might once more renew their attacks on the city in the near future, mentioning with disapproval the step taken by the Prefect Martial who had invited the Jews to προσκατοικεῖν in a place not clearly specified. From there, the Greeks claimed, the Jews could easily prove a threat to the city's safety. This particular passage is not easy to interpret: ὡς διέταξ' ἀνοσίους Ἰουδα[ί]ους προσκατοικεῖν οὐδ' οὐ παραβόλως/ἔσχον ἀναπίπτειν καὶ πο/λεμεῖν τὴν εὐπρ[ο]σώνυμο/ν ἡμῶν πόλιν (*CPJ*, 2, 158a, col. 6, 13-18). The problem here is, of course, to decide on the meaning of the term προσκατοικεῖν which Tcherikover rendered by the expression 'to settle opposite or by the side of,' concluding that the Jews were made to dwell outside the precincts of the city (*CPJ*, 2, p. 98). Musurillo, on the other hand, maintains that '*ad Rammium porro praescripta Hadriani de Iudaeis inter Graecorum Alexandriae insulas collocandis forsitan essent relata.*'<sup>10</sup> Though it is difficult to make precise deductions on the basis of the

<sup>9</sup> *CPJ*, 2, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> H. Musurillo, *Acta Alexandrinorum*, Lipsiae 1961, p. 43.

available textual evidence, it is, at all events, clear that the arrangement was far from satisfactory to the Greek population in the city. Much less obvious here are their intentions vis-à-vis the Jews, i.e. whether they were simply demanding that Hadrian transfer them to another place, or whether they were aiming at having them expelled from the city once and for all. The reason they adduced, i.e. fear of a renewed attack was, after all, understandable after what had taken place in the preceding years. A parallel event occurred after the Roman suppression of the Jewish revolt in Judaea after 70 A.D. when the local population in the city of Antioch (Syria) requested Vespasian to expel the Jews from the city. The Roman Emperor had demurred (*Bellum*, 7, 103–109).

Something of this kind also appears to have occurred in Alexandria, possibly with the result that the Jews were allowed to reside in some part of the city though we do not know exactly where. The Greek delegates to Hadrian also claimed to have forwarded letters to Rome stating their position with regard to the Jewish presence in Alexandria, though these do not appear to have reached their destination, a fact that, according to the Greeks, “accounted for the αἰδέσταιων σου λόγων (this being probably a reference to Hadrian’s own letter to the Alexandrians mentioned by D/X). The Emperor’s words to them must have amounted to an accusation—in fact, both the papyrus recording the proceedings of the delegation, as well as another fragment (this latter rather obscure) portrays the Greeks in a patently defensive posture in the face of serious official accusations emanating from Rome.

Other sources referring to Hadrian’s dealings in Alexandria are not easy to interpret. The Babylonian Talmud records that Hadrian ‘took Alexandria and killed 1,200,000 Jews,’ a statement that also occurs in *Seder Eliahu Rabba*.<sup>11</sup> Eusebius’ *Chronicle*<sup>12</sup> also relates that *Adrianus Judaeos capit secundo contra Romanos reballantes*, but since the text contains no specific mention of the country intended it can equally well be interpreted as referring to Quietus’ campaign in Judaea. If Eusebius’ original statement did not include precise indications of the place where

<sup>11</sup> *Talm. Bab.*, Gittin, 57b and *Seder Eliahu Rabba*, 28 (ed. M. Friedmann, Wien 1902, p. 151).

<sup>12</sup> *Chron. vers. arm.*, p. 164, col. 2 (ed. Schoene). A very similar text occurs in *Chron. Hieron.*, p. 196 (ed. Helm).

Hadrian had conducted his alleged anti-Jewish repression, it is then possible that, on his own initiative, Sincellus linked up Eusebius' passage with other available accounts of turmoil in Alexandria. It is otherwise not easy to explain Sincellus' affirmations to the effect that Hadrian punished the Jews for their aggression against the Alexandrians.<sup>13</sup>

### *Conclusion*

While we cannot deny the Talmudic sources and Sincellus all validity, nor prove that the aforementioned passage in the *Chronicle* refers to events in Judaea, these allegations of Roman anti-Jewish aggression present a notable contrast with the spirit and contents of the two papyrus examined above, which are distinctly anti-Greek in tone. Furthermore, as has also been indicated, neither *Historia Augusta* nor Dio/Xiphilinus gives the slightest hint that Jews were in any way implicated in the seditions that broke out in the early years of Hadrian's reign. If my proposal positing a later date to papyrus 435 (i.e. 117) is correct, the attack of the Greek slaves against the Jews may well turn out not to have been an episode in the Jewish revolt but a later occurrence possibly coinciding with Martial's period of administration, but, at all events, decidedly *after* Turbo's military intervention. Seen within the overall context of Jewish-Greek relations, this attack would seem to represent a Greek attempt at retaliation directed at a Jewish community rendered weak and innocuous by the punitive hand of Rome.

<sup>13</sup> *Chron.*, 348 D.