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The Acts of the Alexandrines

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THE ACTS OF THE ALEXANDRINES¹

The papyri found in Egypt have made to our stock of Greek literature additions both considerable in quantity and very various in kind. Some of these new texts are by authors already well or comparatively well represented in the surviving remains of Greek literature, like Hesiod, Pindar, the tragedians, and Callimachus. Sometimes authors whose poems had reached us in very fragmentary form, like Sappho and Alcaeus, have had their existing fragments increased by new fragments large enough to extend not inconsiderably our acquaintance with their work. Existing fragments had given us a fairly adequate idea of Menander's style and attitude to life, but it is through the papyri that we are able to appreciate his dramatic art and that of the New Comedy generally at first hand, and no longer merely through the medium of Roman adaptations. Some authors previously represented by fragments too small to reveal their quality have been made effectively known to us by papyrus discoveries; such are Bacchylides and Herodas.

But apart from these extensions of our stock of works in the familiar categories we owe to the papyri our first acquaintance with one or two whole classes of literature. One of these is the series of texts to which scholars have given the name of *Acta Alexandrinorum*, "*Acts of the Alexandrines*", or sometimes, from their striking resemblance to some of the *Acta Sanctorum*, "*Pagan Acts of the Martyrs*". These texts, all of them lamentably fragmentary and incomplete, have little merit as literature, but they

¹ The above is a public lecture given by the author as University Reader in Papyrology at Oxford on 25 Nov. 1948. It makes no claim to contribute anything new to the subject and is no more than a recapitulation of what is already established; but it may still have some utility to students of papyrology, and in the absence of opportunities for access to any collection of papyri I venture to offer it as a small tribute to the memory of a scholar whose friendship was precious to me. I have disregarded three fragments too imperfect to yield anything definite: Wilcken, *Antisemitismus*, p. 825 f.; P. Fay. 217; P. Erlangen 16.

possess considerable interest as historical sources, though their one-sided and propagandist character makes it necessary to treat them with great caution and with a generous discount for exaggeration, distortion, and pure invention. Since the majority of them deal with dissensions between the Alexandrines and the Jewish community of Alexandria they are often described as an Anti-Semitic literature, and they have indeed great value for the historian of that curious recurrent psychological malady known as Anti-Semitism but more justly to be termed Anti-Judaism. Nevertheless their primary character is not so much anti-Jewish as anti-Roman; the Jews were the occasion rather than the cause of the clashes between Alexandrines and the Roman government. These texts represent in fact the nationalistic literature of Alexandria; their purpose is to fan patriotic sentiment in the city, to magnify the heroism and independence of spirit shown by leading Alexandrines, and to intensify hostility towards Roman rule.

Before discussing the nature of this literature I must say something about the reasons which led to its existence. For it might seem at first sight a little strange that the Alexandrines should have cherished so obstinately their resentment, at first not unnatural, at the Roman conquest. They had never been very contented or submissive subjects of their Ptolemaic rulers, with whom they had more than once been in conflict; Euergetes II, according to Polybius, had repeatedly let loose his mercenaries on them and massacred large numbers. Materially the city cannot but have benefited by the Roman annexation. The court, indeed, with all its extravagant pomp, was gone, but Alexandria continued to be the capital of Egypt, and the presence there of the Roman Prefect must have been good for trade; indeed the remarkable centralization which marked Roman rule, with the periodic *Conventus* for legal and other business, the central record offices, and similar institutions, may well have entailed a more constant coming and going and a greater concourse of suitors, litigants, and business people than the city had seen in Ptolemaic times. The Roman army of occupation had its headquarters at Nicopolis, just outside Alexandria, and the troops and their officers had doubtless money to spend in the city. Finally, the Roman connexion, the corn fleets which went periodically to Italy with the grain of Egypt, and the abolition of piracy in the Mediterranean, stimulated commercial activity of every kind. All our evidence suggests

an enhancement of Alexandria's prosperity, at least in the earlier period of Roman rule.

It was not material but more impalpable considerations which prompted the bitter hostility manifested in the *Acta Alexandrinorum*. The Alexandrines could not forget their old status as the capital of a powerful kingdom and an empire, and, though their city was of more recent foundation, they looked upon Rome as an upstart. They had, too, more definite grievances. Augustus had refused them a senate. It has been a matter of controversy whether he abolished an existing senate or merely refused to introduce one. Personally I cannot doubt that the latter is the correct view, and the question therefore arises how a Greek foundation like Alexandria came to lack so distinctive an element in the Greek city-state as a senate. Dr. Tarn has recently put forward the theory that Alexander's foundations were *probably of a new mixed type*; that what he established was not quite what the Greeks would call a *polis*². It would be rash to pronounce this view impossible, since our knowledge is so limited, but it seems to me still rasher to accept it without very positive evidence. It is surely most improbable that Alexander, planting centres of Hellenic civilization in the lands he had conquered, should omit the institution which he must have known to be the salient characteristic of a Greek city-state. We must, I think, assume that one of the Ptolemies, perhaps Euergetes II himself, had abolished the Alexandrian senate.

At all events it is certain that the Alexandrines asked Augustus for a senate, and that he refused the request. The refusal rankled the more because of two measures which he did adopt. On the one hand his establishment of municipal magistrates (though not of a senate or anything that could properly be termed municipal government) in the nome-capitals lessened the difference between them and Alexandria, which itself lacked a senate. It is natural to guess that the innovation emphasized for the Alexandrines their own sense of grievance. On the other hand Augustus confirmed to the Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria all their privileges, including a *gerusia* or council of elders, which probably partook of the nature of a senate. From Philo's words this latter may even have been an innovation of Augustus. The resentment of the

² W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 2nd. ed., p. 161.

Alexandrines was thereby intensified, and was turned in a special degree against the Jews, already disliked because they had taken the side of the Roman invader.

Thus we have an adequate explanation of both the existence and the prevailing anti-Jewish tone of this popular literature. Rome was an oppressive conqueror, who had robbed Alexandria of her independence and her international standing, and the Jews were the favoured satellites of Rome.

The question must, however, be raised whether we can rightly speak of a "literature" at all, rather than of a single literary work. For Premerstein maintained that the existing fragments were all, with one exception, to be regarded as parts of a single work, by a single author, composed early in the third century, perhaps about the time of Caracalla, when hatred of the Imperial government was particularly strong. Before considering this view it is necessary to consider first the character of the narratives. Several of them are in the form of protocols of legal proceedings, and it was at first held by most scholars, notably by Wilcken, that they rested on transcripts of the *commentarii principis*, worked up, however, and embroidered in a propagandist sense. Premerstein established conclusively, I think, the falsity of this view³. That the dates in, for example, the *Acts of Isidorus*, which maintains most consistently the protocol form, are Egyptian, not Roman, is not, indeed, a decisive argument, since the writer who prepared the existing text may have translated Roman into Egyptian dates; but the careful analysis of this text, and *a fortiori* of the others, by Premerstein brings out many small points which are quite inconsistent with the hypothesis that we have even a garbled version of the official *Acta*. The protocol form is a literary device, intended to give verisimilitude and inspire the conviction of authenticity. It does not necessarily follow, however, though Premerstein seems to think so, that we must deny these narratives any connexion with official *Acta*. The very choice of the protocol form may suggest that the *Acta* were among the sources used; it certainly shows that the author or authors had some acquaintance with such records. In fact, if we study these texts and compare them one with another we shall certainly feel

³ In his important work *Zu den sogenannten alexandrinischen Märtyrerakten* (*Philologus*, Supplementband XVI, Heft II).

that they vary considerably in character and were derived from various sources. The *Acts of Paulus and Antoninus* seem clearly to rest on the narrative of an eye-witness, possibly one or more of the Alexandrian ambassadors, rather than on any official protocol. The text as it stands cannot, Premerstein holds, be the ambassadors' report itself, but it may well be derived from it. P. Oxy. 1089 lacks the protocol form altogether; it is a continuous narrative, with reported dialogue. We must obviously conclude that the existing texts were of varying origin and were put together on varying principles.

It is this variation in structure and authority which is for me the chief objection to Premerstein's theory of single authorship. The theory was suggested to him by the fact that most of the papyri seem to date from about the end of the second or beginning of the third century, but he also supports it by arguments of detail, the recurrence of the same ideas and motives and of certain methods of expression, and the stereotyped and conventional picture of the Emperors concerned, which suggests an author writing at some remove from the events narrated.

These arguments do not seem to me at all conclusive. It is true that most of these papyri have been assigned to the period round about A. D. 200; but datings on the score of script alone must always be allowed a fair margin of error, and we must suppose a period not shorter than between 180 and 220 for the papyri in question, that is to say, about forty years. Moreover, as Premerstein himself recognizes, the longer of the two versions in which the *Acts of Paulus and Antoninus* have come down to us was certainly written in the first half of the second century, probably not long after the incidents recorded. Premerstein's view that pamphlets of such ephemeral interest would not be taken up and recirculated or re-shaped about A. D. 200 is contradicted for one of them at least by this text⁴. If in that case a pamphlet of the reign of Hadrian was re-edited at the end of the century there seems no reason why earlier narratives of the same kind might not equally be so treated. Certainly if we are to sup-

⁴ My doubts are reinforced and the above arguments strengthened by a recently published example of the genre: C. H. Roberts, *Titus and Alexandria: A New Document* (*Journ. Rom. Stud.* XXXIX 1949, 79 f.). This scrap, which for the first time shows Titus in the role of a tyrant, *cannot have been written much if at all after the middle of the second century.*

pose that the whole corpus of literature was a single work, composed by an individual writer in the Severan period, though using in some cases earlier authorities, it must be conceded that the author did his work singularly ill. Now he reports legal proceedings with all the matter-of-fact exactitude of an official protocol, now he embroiders the material freely, now, as with the *Paulus and Antoninus Acta*, he reproduces portions of an earlier original, leaving out whatever he thought might be dispensed with, now, as with P. Oxy. 1089, he writes what might well be part of a pure romance; now his narrative has the appearance of substantial authenticity, now it suggests propagandist phantasy. And as for the stylistic and similar evidence adduced by Premerstein, I cannot see that it need be more than a natural feature of a class of works all belonging to a common tradition.

If the more or less contemporaneous date which must be assigned to most of these fragments is not pure coincidence (and it must be remembered that we have far more papyri of the second and third than of the first century, so that first-century examples of the class are less likely to have survived than later ones) I would suggest that there are two possible explanations which suit the facts better than Premerstein's hypothesis of a simple author. The bitter hostility felt towards the Roman government, and particularly towards Caracalla, at Alexandria during the early part of the third century may well have given to pamphlets of the kind we are considering a much increased popularity. It is not unreasonable to suppose that earlier examples were preserved, and were accessible, at Alexandria; what more natural than that the increased demand should have led to their resuscitation?

Alternatively, it seems very possible that some single author conceived the idea of collecting and editing, with some changes, whether of expansion or contraction, as he thought desirable, all the pamphlets dealing with trials of prominent Alexandrines before the Emperor that he could find. If he confined himself in the main to a mere collection of material (a supposition which the case of the *Paulus and Antoninus Acta* makes unlikely) the resulting work would be something like Hakluyt's *Principal Voyages*; if his editorial activity was sufficiently drastic a better analogy would be Malory's *Morte Darthur*. An hypothesis of this kind seems to me to account for the extreme diversity of

style and structure in these narratives better than Premerstein's theory of a single work by an individual writer.

This question may seem a minor one, but it has some importance, since, though we must always make ample allowance for propagandist exaggeration and pure invention, narratives which reproduce, with whatever editorial changes, contemporary pamphlets have a greater right to be regarded as historical authorities than an original work composed, even though on the basis of some earlier evidence, in the early third century.

The view that these fragments, though mostly of later date, contain contemporary material and belong to a continuous tradition finds some support in the first example with which I have to deal. This is perhaps not, strictly speaking, to be classed with the *Acts of the Alexandrines*, but it may well represent an early stage in the growth of a patriotic Alexandrian literature. It is a papyrus at Florence, edited separately by Vitelli and Norsa and later republished as no. 1160 in the series of the Società Italiana⁵, and containing the last column of a longer document. It has at the top the letters μ and $\alpha\beta$, overlined as was done with numerals and hence naturally to be read as 40 and 22. The original editors assigned the papyrus, tentatively, to the earlier part of Augustus' reign, and regarded it as copied from a *τόμος συγκολλησίματος*, that is, a composite roll made up of various documents; and the numbers they explain as referring, respectively, to the roll and the column of the original roll 40, column 22. The Emperor concerned, who is referred to as *Καῖσαρ*, they regarded as Augustus, and the document as the official report of ambassadors sent to him by Alexandria while he was absent from the city but still in Egypt. Even if their view is correct, if this is a verbatim copy of an official document, the very fact that it was copied out, and hardly for official purposes, since the hand is in the main a literary uncial, not that of an official clerk, suggests that the purpose of the copyist was analogous to that which led to the composition of the later *Acta Alexandrinorum*: it was a record of an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the city to secure from a Roman Emperor the satisfaction of its just claims. As a matter of fact, however, arguments, by no means negligible, have been

⁵ There is an excellent fascimile in: M. Norsa, *Papiri greci delle collezioni italiane*, fasc. II 1933, tav. XI.

advanced, notably by Mr. James H. Oliver⁶, against the editor's interpretation. Oliver thinks that the text, though based on an official report, may be a literary rehandling of the material and thus a true fore-runner of the later *Acta*. In that case we cannot necessarily refer the word Καῖσαρ to Octavian; since the hand, though certainly early, might, palaeographically, be as late as Tiberius or even Gaius or Claudius, he might be any one of the first four Emperors.

The papyrus is certainly beset with problems, and no interpretation can be more than tentative, but at least it is certain that someone had a copy made, and apparently not for any official purpose but for private or literary use, of a report on an Alexandrian mission to the Emperor. That fact in itself furnishes a parallel of a sort to the *Acts of the Alexandrines*, and though there is in this affair no element of Anti-Semitism the subject of the embassy was an Alexandrian grievance. The text, as far as preserved, is concerned with the subject of a senate. The editors, followed by some of the scholars who have discussed the text, hold that the envoys were defending an existing senate which Octavian proposed to abolish; my own view⁷, and that of several others, is, very definitely, that they were asking for something which the city did not possess. This seems to me to follow from the wording of the document, from which I will quote the better preserved portion:

For I say [an envoy or a rhetorician engaged by the city is speaking] that this [that is, the senate] will take steps to see that none of those about to be enrolled in the polltax list (?) be entered among the ephebes of the year and so cause a diminution of the revenue, and that the citizen body of the Alexandrines be not sullied by the presence of uneducated, ill-bred persons; and if anyone were over-burdened through irregular exactions either by the Idios Logos or by any collector who extorts men's money by intimidation the senate may meet before your prefect and assist the powerless, so that no lack of aid may lead to plundering by any casual person of moneys which might be preserved for you; and furthermore, if it were necessary to send an embassy to you, it may elect suitable persons and so secure that neither shall any ignoble person go forth nor any suitable one escape the service of his country.

⁶ The ΒΟΥΛΗ-Papyrus, *Aegyptus*, XI (1930-1) 161-8.

⁷ *The Problem of the Alexandrian Senate, Aegyptus*, XII (1932), 173-84.

It is of course conceivable that an advocate, defending a threatened institution, might adopt this hypothetical, contingent tone; but surely it would be far more natural that he would rather describe not what the senate will or may do in the future but the functions which it actually does perform in the present. And when he goes on to say, at the point where the papyrus becomes mutilated, *we ask... that the senate be [or, being] convened yearly*, and adds something about its being subject to an audit of its proceedings, the conviction that he is asking for the establishment of such a body, not arguing against its abolition, becomes almost irresistible. At the end come the words, unfortunately only the beginnings of lines: *Caesar said... On this matter I will decide [probably; when I return] to Alexandria.*

Thus we find, here also, the protocol form, the embassy, and the reply of Caesar, a reply which (since we know that no senate was granted) was merely a polite way of shelving the request of the Alexandrines. It is thus not unreasonable to regard this document as an early example of the class of literature with which I am dealing.

But it is time to turn to indubitable examples of this class, which I will briefly discuss in chronological order — that is to say, in the order not of the papyri but of the events chronicled in them. The earliest text, in this arrangement, is P. Oxy. 1089. This text is written, in literary uncials, which the editors assign to the third century, on the verso of a second-century land-survey. Only of one out of the three visible columns does enough survive to yield any sense, and even this column is mutilated and so much defaced as to be in places unintelligible. Premierstein, indeed, with more courage than prudence, attempted a reconstruction of the greater part, but an examination of the papyrus, which was not accessible to him, does not bear out his suggestions, and such far-reaching conjectural restorations can hardly ever be relied on. Enough survives however to fix roughly the time of the events recorded and to throw interesting light on them. The narrative has not the protocol form seen in several examples of this literature; it is a lively and vivid narrative with dialogue. The surviving portion describes an interview between an "elder" (γεραιός), Isidorus, Dionysius, a woman called Aphrodisia, and Flaccus, in the Serapeum. Flaccus is clearly the well-known Prefekt of Egypt, appointed by Tiberius and sentenced

to death by Gaius. Isidorus and Dionysius are two Alexandrian leaders mentioned by Philo as prominent in the campaign against the Jews. The elder was at first taken as a member of the Jewish *gerusia*. His presence was thus very difficult to explain, since the period concerned must be that of the embittered hostility between Jews and Greeks which led to the great pogrom of A. D. 38. How unexpected is the role here played if the elder is a Jew may be judged from the following passage, where the text is certain: *Isidorus goes up with Aphrodisia and Dionysius, and Isidorus and Dionysius, entering the temple, performed the act of worship. Then the elder flung himself down, and kneeling before Dionysius said, "See, my lord Dionysius, the elder is in the presence of Serapis: do not press hard on Flaccus..."* Here the papyrus becomes defaced. Premerstein restores as follows: *but go with the elders. If you set out on the journey what are we to say to the fathers. Change your mind, my son Dionysius.* This restoration can hardly stand, but at least what is visible makes it clear that Dionysius was contemplating some action not approved by the "elders" and that one of the latter was urging him to desist. From the certain reference to a journey and the sorry remnants of the lower part of the column it may be guessed, even if we do not accept Premerstein's very hazardous restorations, that the action contemplated was a journey, presumably to Rome, for which of course the Prefect's sanction would be required. After this conversation Flaccus enters and engages in a dialogue with Isidorus and Dionysius which the state of the papyrus makes very obscure. It is, however, probable that a substantial bribe (the certain words *five talents* indicate its amount) is offered and accepted, presumably for the desired permit to leave Egypt.

All this is puzzling if the elder is a Jew. But a recently discovered papyrus⁸ has thrown a wholly new light on the situation. This papyrus is terribly mutilated but it does at least reveal that at this period the Alexandrines had a council of 173 γέροντες. It is natural to assume that the γεραιός of P. Oxy. 1089 is a member of this *gerusia*, hence a Greek, not a Jew. The Jewish reference of that text therefore disappears, but not the Jewish

⁸ A. von Premerstein, *Alexandrinische Geronten vor Kaiser Gaius: Ein neues Bruchstück der sogenannten Alexandrinischen Märtyrer-Akten* (P. bibl. univ. Giss. 46), *Mitt. aus d. Papyrussammlung d. Giessener Universitätsbibliothek*, 1936.

background of the events recorded. It is not perhaps certain that Premierstein is right in placing them in the summer of A. D. 37, but he cannot be far wrong, for they clearly form part of what I may call the prologue to the tragedy of Flaccus' fall, and to a stage when there was at least a temporary and pretended reconciliation between him and the Alexandrian nationalists. It was this reconciliation which caused him to take a line hostile to the Jews and so to precipitate the *pogrom* of 38.

The interest of this text is, first, that it illustrates a rapprochement for which we had Philo's word in his *In Flaccum*, and, second, that it reveals a division of opinion among the Alexandrian leaders. It was known already that there were among the Jews two parties, a stricter and more orthodox one and one which held more loosely to the Jewish law; this text shows that among the Alexandrines also there were two parties, no doubt the more extreme hotheads and others who preferred moderate and prudent courses. Perhaps I should have said it seems to show; for of all the surviving specimens of this literature P. Oxy. 1089 inspires least confidence in its historical value. It reads more like a romance than a piece of sober narrative, and the role assigned to Flaccus in accepting a bribe is inconsistent with what even his bitter enemy Philo says of him.

This may be taken as an argument in favour of Premierstein's view that the *Acts of the Alexandrines* were a single work dating from the period of Caracalla. Would not a later author be more likely than a contemporary to write in this way and to present a conventional picture of Flaccus as the corrupt Roman official? The argument certainly deserves consideration, but a generation which has seen to what lengths party propaganda can go in distorting contemporary history will hardly regard it as conclusive, and on the other side must be set the difference of tone between this and other specimens of this *genre*. Moreover, distorted as the picture may be, the main facts would fit well enough into the sequence of established events at the period.

The next work which calls for attention is one closely connected with that just mentioned. This is a papyrus at Giessen published in 1939 by Premierstein or rather, after his death and from his manuscript, by Kalbfleisch⁹. The miserably mutilated

⁹ See reference in note 8 above.

papyrus, which may date from about the end of the second century or early in the third, is one of the longer specimens of its class, remains of at least four columns being traceable, and it would be a very important one were it less tattered. As it is, its evidence is mostly ambiguous and uncertain. There is not a single complete line; the great majority have lost at least half their length, and of many only about a dozen letters or even fewer remain. When I add that out of this pitiful remnant the ingenious imagination of Premierstein has managed to coax nearly a hundred complete or practically complete lines it will be realized that the fairly continuous text which his edition offers must be regarded with extreme scepticism. This is indeed not the occasion on which to discuss the many problems of reading and interpretation. Some of Premierstein's readings are inconsistent with the statements which Kalbfleisch, a more experienced decipherer of papyri, makes as to the traces; some even involve dubious liberties with the Greek language. It is, however, clear that there is talk of a voyage to Ostia, no doubt by Alexandrian envoys, probably that discussed in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, and that the Emperor was Gaius. A mention of Tiberius Caesar may therefore, as Premierstein holds, relate to Gemellus, whom Gaius compelled to commit suicide; but a reference to this event which Premierstein discovers in column II is very dubious. It is also not improbable that the Alexandrines had recently established a *gerusia* of 173 members, sanction for which they were asking from Gaius. This is not certain, as Premierstein held, but the existence of such a body is clearly established. It is certain further that there was a trial of some sort. There are several references to an accuser (*κατήγορος*), whom Gaius ordered to be burned, i. e., possibly, branded (the restoration of the text at this point can hardly be doubted); and after giving this order the Emperor wrote a letter to Alexandria, the text of which is given, but since only a few odd groups of letters remain it is impossible, for any imagination less lively than the editor's, to elicit any connected sense from it. It is at least beyond doubt that here again, despite the well-known partiality of Gaius for Alexandria, Emperor and city are represented as being at loggerheads; and this text fits very well into the context of P. Oxy. 1089 and Philo's *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*.

I come now to the well-known text generally referred to as *Acta Isidori*. Several fragments of this are known. One papyrus is divided between Berlin and Cairo¹⁰, the two together yielding portions of three columns. I myself bought in Egypt and subsequently published a fragment of a different papyrus containing two imperfect columns of the same text, in part covering the same portion of it, though with some verbal differences, as column II of the Berlin fragment¹¹. And finally, about the same time Uxkull-Gyllenband published yet another Berlin papyrus¹², containing portions of two columns, which seems to refer to the same case but to a different point in the trial. All three papyri date from about the same period as the Giessen papyrus. Imperfect as these papyri are, they yield a more continuous context than that at Giessen. Of all surviving specimens of its class this text keeps most strictly to the protocol form; indeed, even when the literary character of most of the other pieces had been recognized most scholars continued to regard this at least as being founded on official *Acta*, which it followed closely. Premerstein's arguments have, I think, disposed of this view. He points out that we have here details not at all to be expected in the official *Acta*, some indeed which cannot have occurred in them. Perhaps he goes too far in denying any connexion with an official source, but we can certainly regard the protocol form as, in its present shape, a literary device, not due to copying from an original document.

The subject of the *Acta Isidori* is a trial at Rome before Claudius in a suit brought against King Agrippa, representing the Jews, by Alexandrian envoys, including the gymnasiarch Isidorus, whom we have already met, and Lampon, another prominent Alexandrine, who figures with Isidorus in the pages of Philo. A long controversy has raged (if that is not too strong a word to apply to what has never been more than an objective discussion among scholars) round the question of date and the identity of Agrippa; but before I deal with this I had better summarize the more certain portions of the text.

¹⁰ Wilcken, *Chrest.* 14.

¹¹ *A New Fragment of the Acta Isidori*, *Archiv f. Pap.* X (1932) 5-16.

¹² *Sitz.-Ber. Preuss. Akad.* 95 (1930) 664-79.

The earliest events recorded occur in col. I of the main Berlin fragment, of which unfortunately only the right side remains, so that no continuous sense can be recovered; but it is at least clear that a preliminary investigation of the case occurred in the Emperor's *consilium* and that the following day, Pachon 6th, that is, the 1st May, was fixed for the hearing of the Alexandrian envoys. The next column, supplemented by the London papyrus, records part of the proceedings on that day. The case was evidently a *cause célèbre*: not only was Claudius accompanied by twenty senators, sixteen of them consulars, but the ladies of the court were also present. The scene was certain gardens, which cannot be definitely identified. The following translation, which combines the Berlin and London texts, embodies in the concluding portion my own restorations of the latter, which are made with every reserve:—*Isidorus began to speak first, saying 'My Lord Caesar, I implore you by your knees to hear me on matters of grave concern to my fatherland'. Claudius Caesar: 'I assign you this day'. And all the senators, his assessors, concurred, knowing the sort of man Isidorus was. Claudius Caesar: 'Say nothing extravagant against my friend; for indeed you have already destroyed two friends of mine: you have destroyed the exegetes Theon and Naevius the prefect of Egypt, who also commanded the camp at Rome, and now you are in litigation against this man'. Isidorus: 'My Lord Caesar, what concern of yours can a twopenny-halfpenny Jew like Agrippa be?...? Claudius Caesar: 'What do you say? You are the most shameless of all men'. Here the papyrus becomes too mutilated for further understanding. In a very imperfect second column of the London papyrus the report of the hearing is continued, apparently with lively details; one fact which emerges is that Isidorus was 56 years old at the time.*

Before we reach the Cairo fragment we have to fit in, somewhere in the intervening space, the other Berlin fragment, which comes from a different roll of papyrus. Here we find Balbillus, a well-known and prominent figure of the time and a personal friend of Claudius, active on the side of the Alexandrines. Isidorus says: *Balbillus speaks well, my Lord Augustus, concerning your interests... As for you, Agrippa, I will reply to your representations about the Jews. My case against them is that they are endeavouring to set the whole world in turmoil. You should disregard individual considerations and look at them as a whole. They*

are not men of like temperament with the Alexandrines, but in their disposition like Egyptians; are they not on a level with those who pay tribute? In these words, which are in part restored by Uxkull-Gyllenband but probably represent broadly the actual sense, we seem almost to hear the tones of Hitler and Goebbels: the Jews are not like ordinary civilized human beings, they are outside the fold, almost sub-human.

The Cairo fragment takes us to a much later stage in the proceedings. Isidorus, who has in the earlier part been respectful enough to the Emperor, has evidently allowed himself in the interim some unpardonable liberty which has brought upon him sentence of death, and his tone, as he is now desperate, is correspondingly more insolent. I quote the greater part of this fragment: *Claudius Caesar*: 'You have killed many friends of mine, Isidorus.' *Isidorus*: 'I listened to the commands of the Emperor. You too, tell me whom you wish me to accuse.' *Claudius Caesar*: 'Really you are the son of a dancing girl, Isidorus!' *Isidorus*: 'I am no slave nor the son of a dancing girl but gymnasiarch of the famous city of Alexandria. As for you, you are the cast-off son of the Jewess Salome...' Then *Lampon* said to *Isidorus*: 'What else is left us but to yield to a crazy monarch?' Again the familiar touch the readiness of the confirmed anti-Semite to assert and even credit the wildest falsehoods about Jews and all suspected of favouring them.

Let us now return to the question of date. The trial was held, we have seen, on the 30th April and 1st May. The two year-dates which can be reconciled with all the factors are A. D. 41 and A. D. 53. If the first, then the Jewish king is Agrippa I, if the second, Agrippa II. Wilcken advanced arguments in favour of the later date, which convinced the majority of scholars; but the most cogent of them have been invalidated by later research and discovery, and Uxkull-Gyllenband's decision in favour of 41 has been followed by many, though Premerstein continued to support 53. I confess I have myself wobbled considerably between the two. The strongest argument in favour of the later date, which still inclines me, though very hesitatingly, to prefer it, is the tone of *Claudius*' letter to Alexandria in P. Lond. 1912¹³. His decisions there cannot have pleased the Alexandrines, but

¹³ H. I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, 1924, 1-37.

his tone throughout is friendly, and there is not the slightest reference anywhere to a previous embassy, or to the case tried on the 30th April and 1st May, or to the fate of Isidorus and Lampon. Now we know that they were both of them executed. The letter of Claudius, in the copy we possess, is undated, but the prefect's edict ordering its exhibition was issued on the 10th November A. D. 41. The letter cannot have been written then after the beginning of October at the very latest. Is it likely, we may well ask, that Claudius, within a few months of ordering the execution of the gymnasiarch and another prominent citizen of Alexandria, should be writing a letter in such terms and without any reference to what had happened? It is no doubt not impossible, but it is at least strange; and there are therefore still good grounds for referring the later date. It is only now and then that we get any glimpse into events at Alexandria, and the hostility between Jews and Greeks and between the citizens and Rome was obstinate enough to yield many occasions for such events as our papyri record. It must, however, be insisted on that Isidorus and Lampon were not put to death for anti-Semitism, though it was their quarrel with the Jews which was the occasion of their fate; they were condemned for turbulence and for *lèse-majesté* against the Emperor.

On the whole the *Acta Isidori* gives a greater impression of historical truth than most of the other texts. It is obviously coloured by patriotic propaganda, as for example where the senators are represented as appreciating the worth of Isidorus; and it is not necessary to believe that the latter was quite as rude to the Emperor as this report shows him, though he must have gone rather far to provoke a sentence of death; but the main facts are credible enough. We know that Isidorus and Lampon did in fact suffer the death penalty. It is thus of interest that the death of Naevius, who must be Naevius Sertorius Macro, the prefect of the Praetorian Cohorts, is alleged by Claudius (if my restorations are right) to have been due to the machinations of Isidorus. The fact that Theon the *exegetes* is mentioned as another victim shows — what indeed can be inferred from other sources — that there were factions and mutual animosities among the Alexandrian leaders themselves.

For various reasons I have discussed the *Acta Isidori* in some detail. I shall have to deal more summarily with the remaining

texts. It might be expected that the serious outbreak of mob violence in the reign of Nero, which according to Josephus led to the slaughter of 50,000 Jews, would find a record in the patriotic literature of Alexandria. Probably it did, but no fragment of the narrative survives. A fragment, dating from the end of the first century, in the Fouad collection of papyri¹⁴, which seems to concern a popular manifestation at Alexandria in favour of Vespasian, may just possibly belong to this class of literature, but too little remains for any certainty, and other explanations are equally if not more likely. For the next certain example of the class¹⁵ we must come down to the reign of Trajan. The position of the Jews had in the interim changed for the worse. The revolt of Judaea in A. D. 66, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, put an end to the political and religious centre of Judaism, and Jews everywhere were now compelled to pay for the cult of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome the two-drachma tax hitherto levied for the maintenance of the temple. Yet, in spite of the deterioration in their standing, they were still subjects of the Roman Empire, and the Imperial government felt itself responsible for their security and well-being. The Alexandrines on their side continued to regard them with the old hostility; and it was a clash between Greeks and Jews which led to the proceedings recorded in the *Acta Hermaisici*, contained in P. Oxy. 1242, a papyrus dating from the early third century. Weber¹⁶ with the help of various small pieces of evidence, fixes the trial about the year 110. Parts of four columns, the last very imperfect, remain. There had evidently been a conflict at Alexandria which it was necessary to excuse, and the Alexandrines sent an embassy to Trajan. The envoys are named; two of them, Theon and an advocate named Paulus, we shall meet again in the next example of this literature. The Jews thereupon appointed their own embassy, and the two parties set off to Rome, each, according to the narrative, *taking their own gods*. The Alexandrian god was, we find later, a bust of Sarapis; that of the Jews may perhaps have been a scroll of the law. The Emperor is represented, in accordance with the usual anti-Semitic practice, as biased

¹⁴ P. Fouad 8. See also P. Jouguet, *Bull. Inst. d'Ég.* XXIV (1942), 21–32.

¹⁵ But see now the Titus affair referred to in note 4 above.

¹⁶ *Hermes*, L (1915) 47–92.

and completely under the influence of his wife Plotina; he is affable to the Jews, cold and hostile to the Alexandrines. Addressing Hermaiscus (evidently one of the envoys, though his name has disappeared from the list), who had apparently made some insolent remark, Trajan says: *Presumably you are studying how to die, being so contemptuous of death as to answer me insolently.* The narrative proceeds: *Hermaiscus said, 'We are distressed that your council chamber has been filled with godless Jews'. The Emperor said, 'See, I tell you a second time, Hermaiscus, you are answering me insolently in reliance on your birth'. Hermaiscus said, 'What insolent answer am I making, mightiest Emperor? Explain to me'. The Emperor said, 'Because you describe my council as dominated by Jews'. Hermaiscus: 'So the name of Jews is irksome to you? You ought then to turn round and help your own people, and not defend the godless Jews'. While Hermaiscus was thus speaking, sweat suddenly broke out on the bust of Sarapis which the envoys carried, and Trajan marvelled; and presently there were tumults in Rome and many shouts were raised, and all fled to the high parts of the hills.*

Here again we have the familiar note of anti-Semitism: the government is being run by the Jews, who are the Hidden Hand, the Power behind the Throne, and everyone who favours them must be actuated by the unworthiest motives. But there is also a peculiar feature in this narrative, which gives it a special interest. This is, the miraculous element, which affords a striking parallel to episodes in the Old Testament. Just as in the latter Jehovah intervenes in conflicts between Jew and Gentile to frustrate by a display of miraculous power the devices of the enemy, so in this case the Alexandrian god Sarapis manifests his divinity to confound the worshippers of Jehovah and the Roman oppressor. The historical value of the record is probably not high. The portrait of Trajan is a caricature, and the concluding incidents can be dismissed as a legend, but at least the papyrus shows the occurrence of anti-Jewish disturbances about 110, and we can presumably rely on the authority of the text for the names of the envoys on both sides. What happened to Hermaiscus does not appear in the extant portion; probably he was put to death.

A few years after the events which led to this affair occurred the greatest disaster in the history of Egyptian Jewry. The Jewish revolt which broke out in 115 in Cyrene spread eventually to Egypt,

and the Jews of Alexandria rose to assist their invading compatriots. The struggle which followed devastated whole quarters of the city, and in the end the Jewish community suffered so terribly that it never fully regained its earlier importance.

It was to a sort of aftermath of this revolt that we must attribute disturbances recorded in the *Acts of Paulus and Antoninus*¹⁷. This text is of special interest because there survive portions of two different recensions. The earlier and longer is contained in fragments divided between Paris and London, though chiefly in Paris; the later and briefer is found in a Berlin papyrus. The Paris-London papyrus is the longest example of the class, extending to eight columns. It is also the earliest in date, with the exception of the first and doubtful example, that relating to the request for a senate. The roll is exceptional in form among literary papyri, in that the text, having run on to the end, is continued on the verso, a very unusual practice. The script appears to belong to the first half of the second century, and the roll must therefore be, if not contemporary with the events described, at least but little later. Unfortunately it is extremely imperfect, and only two columns are approximately complete in breadth. The Berlin papyrus, which Wilcken called recension *b*, is a single fragment of sixteen imperfect lines, dating from the turn of the second-third century; it corresponds with portions of columns II and III of the other recension. This fact, as I have already pointed out, is of some significance: if in this case an Alexandrian "martyrology" dating from the Severan period is found to be a rehandling of an earlier one contemporary with the events narrated there is no reason to suppose that other examples of the class may not be in similar case, even though no trace of their originals has survived.

The imperfection of the papyrus makes most of the details obscure. It is clear that the Emperor, though referred to only as *Kαῖσαρ*, was Hadrian; that a case in which both Greeks and Jews were involved on opposite sides was being tried before him, and that the text is a narrative by one or more of the Alexandrian representatives, as is shown by occurrences of the first person

¹⁷ Wilcken, *Zum alexandrinischen Antisemitismus* (*Abh. d. Phil.-Hist. Kl. d. Kön. Sächs. Ges. d. Wiss.* XXIII, 1909) 807-22; Premerstein, *Hermes*, LVII 266-316.

plural as, for example, where the Emperor is referred to as *speaking to Paulus and our people as follows*. These representatives included Paulus, who, as we know from the previous example, P. Oxy. 1242, was a Tyrian advocate, and two prominent Alexandrines, Antoninus and Theon, the latter of whom formed, along with Paulus, part of the embassy to Trajan in P. Oxy. 1242. The tone throughout is much more sober and less tinged with propagandist exaggeration than usual; the whole text in fact makes upon us in general an impression of historical truth. Even in the tenses moments the Emperor is treated with respect.

The text was re-edited by Wilcken, with the addition of the London fragment, in his monograph *Zum alexandrinischen Antisemitismus* and has been examined in detail by Premerstein, who made gallant but not always convincing efforts to supply its imperfections. From Premerstein's study there emerges something like a connected narrative, which I will briefly summarize, but I must add that several of the details are at the very best probable rather than proved. The Jewish rebels of Cyrene had elected a king, who is variously called in our authorities Lukuas or Andreas. The Alexandrines were notorious for their mordant wit and their love of elaborate "rags"; and it appears from the *Acts of Paulus and Antoninus*, as reconstructed by Premerstein, that some bright spirits of the city staged a sort of farce in which unbounded fun was made of the Jewish *musical comedy king* (τὸν ἀπὸ σκηνηῆς καὶ ἐκ μείμου βασιλέα). The prefect Lupus ordered this to be performed in his presence, whether for his own amusement (which would surely be very reprehensible in the governor at a time of acute tension) or, more probably, in order to acquaint himself with its character. This must have happened in the reign of Trajan, for Lupus was succeeded by Rammius Martialis in Trajan's last year, and it is not clear what connexion the farce had with the events which led to the trial under Hadrian; but doubtless it exasperated the Jews and may have led to renewed disturbances.

Alexandria had suffered terribly in the war, and had to be largely rebuilt. Hadrian, or the Prefect, ordered the resettlement of the Jews, whose quarter had been destroyed. The Alexandrines had probably thought that the disfavour into which the Jews had fallen and the loss of their homes had rid the city for good of this unwelcome element, and their annoyance at Hadrian's

order found expression in ribald songs at his expense and in new disorders. The new Prefect made many arrests of both Alexandrines and Jews, including a number of slaves. There followed an attack on the prison, by which the prisoners were freed. The Jews were probably right in accusing the Greeks of this action; but the Greeks declared that the real culprits were the Jews, who hoped that the blame would be laid on their opponents.

What the issue of the trial was, we cannot say. In the best preserved column Paulus, who was under arrest, declares: *There is a grave reserved for me at Alexandria, of which I think I shall take possession.* Antoninus hereupon intervenes, respectfully enough, to plead for him. It might be inferred therefore that Paulus was under sentence of death, but perhaps he referred merely to his advanced age, for at the end of the column the Emperor orders him to be released but Antoninus to be bound and apparently to be put to the torture. It seems likely that the narrative may have ended with the execution of both him and Theon.

The tone of this piece, as already said, is sober and objective. Hadrian is not represented as an unreasonable tyrant, but seems to be fairly impartial and to hold the scales evenly between Greeks and Jews. The shorter recension omits portions of the earlier version, and there are two very imperfect lines at the beginning and one at the end which cannot be identified with anything in that, possibly because they reproduce lost passages of it; but it does not, so far as it goes, sharpen the tone or add anything of a tendencious nature. In fact the fragment, though too short to afford any argument against Premierstein's view that the propagandist exaggerations of the other texts are an argument in favour of a later date, at least does not support it.

I have said that the revolt under Trajan brought upon the Jewish community of Alexandria a disaster from which it never recovered. It is significant that in the two remaining papyri with which I have to deal the Jews do not appear at all. It is unsafe to build on negative evidence in such a matter, but it certainly does look as if the diminished importance of the Jewish community had eased the tension in that direction but that the old opposition to Roman rule still gave rise to serious conflicts.

The first of these two papyri is P. Oxy. 2177, a recently published papyrus of the third century. The interesting feature of this (apart from the apparent absence of the Jews) is that the two

speakers for the Alexandrines are not themselves citizens of Alexandria but Athenians. They are named Athamas and Athenodorus; and if, as the editor thought, the unnamed Emperor is Hadrian, the latter may well be the Athenodorus of the *Acta Hermaisici*, who is thus shown to be an Athenian. I may recall Paulus, the Tyrian advocate of that and the following text. The most notable passage is the following: *Caesar*: 'You are ambassadors of an alien city'. *Athamas*: 'We are not ambassadors of an alien city, but of our own'. *Caesar*: 'The cities are related?' *Caesar*: 'Summon Athenodorus'. *Athenodorus*: 'I am present, my Lord, listening to my own case'. *Caesar*: 'You mean that the Athenians and the Alexandrines have the same laws?' *Athenodorus*: 'Yes, for they are stronger than all other laws and yet have the mildness of human feeling'. This statement that Alexandria had the same laws as Athens must, so far as it can be trusted, be understood broadly, as meaning that its legal system was based generally on the Athenian, with local modifications. There is a reference to some persons of noble birth (εὐγενεῖς) who were being held by the government, perhaps as hostages, but no light is thrown on the origin of the trouble, nor is there in what remains any attempt to blacken the character of the Emperor.

The last example of this literature is more interesting and more informative. This is the *Acta Appiani*, contained in P. Oxy. 33, and supplemented by a fragment, from the same roll, at Yale University. The Emperor in this case, though unnamed, is clearly Commodus; the principal Alexandrines are Appianus and Heliodorus, perhaps, as Dr. Welles, the editor of the Yale fragment¹⁸, has suggested, a member of the family of Avidius Cassius, and the trial appears to arise out of, or at least to include, a charge of financial sharp practice brought by the Alexandrines against no less a person than the Emperor himself. This is shown by the Yale fragment; an interesting inference by Dr. Welles from the surviving letters is that the abuse complained of concerned the export of papyrus. The text is interesting enough to be quoted in full, so far as it can be recovered: — 'Sending to the other cities, they sell at four times the amount, so that they may recover what they have paid!' The Emperor said: 'And who is it who gets the money?' Appianus said: 'You'. Emperor: 'Do you really believe

¹⁸ *Trans. and Proc. of the Am. Philol. Assoc.*, LXVII (1936) 7—23.

that?' Appianus: 'No, but I have heard it'. Emperor: 'You ought not to have spread this story even before you believed it. Speculator!' Appianus was led away and as he went, seeing a corpse, he said: 'O dead man, when I reach my country I shall tell my father Heraclianus...' [Here the papyrus becomes very fragmentary. After four lines the narrative goes on] While he was thus speaking he turned and seeing Heliodorus said: 'Heliodorus, do you say nothing when I am being led away?' Heliodorus said: 'To whom can we speak when we have none to listen? Hasten, son, to your death. It is glorious for you to die for your own beloved country. Do not be distressed, for I too will follow you...' The Emperor recalled him. The Emperor said: 'Now do you not know to whom you are speaking?' Appianus: 'Yes; Appianus is speaking to a tyrant'. Emperor: 'Not so, but to a king!' Appianus: 'Do not say that. Your father, the deified Antoninus, might meetly play the emperor. Listen to me: in the first place he was a philosopher; secondly he was without avarice; thirdly he was a lover of the good. Your characteristics are the very opposite, tyranny, indifference to the good, want of culture'. The Emperor ordered him to be led away. As he was being led away Appianus said: 'Grant me this favour, Lord Caesar'. The Emperor: 'Which?' Appianus: 'Give orders that I be led away in my ornaments of rank'. The Emperor: 'I grant it'. Appianus took the fillet and put it on his head, and then, putting the white shoes on his feet, he cried out in the midst of Rome: 'Hasten together, Romans, behold an incomparable man, a gymnasiarch and an envoy of the Alexandrines, being led away'. The evocatus ran at once and declared to the Emperor: 'My Lord, do you sit here while the Romans are murmuring?' The Emperor: 'At what?' The consul: 'At the sentencing of the Alexandrine'. The Emperor: 'Let him be brought back'. Appianus, coming in, said: 'Who has called me back now, when for the second time I was making my obeisance to Hades and those who died before me, Theon and Isidorus and Lampon? Was it the Senate or you, the chief brigand?' The Emperor: 'Appianus, we too are wont to bring to their senses men mad and deranged. You speak for as long as I wish you to speak'. Appianus: 'By your Fortune I am neither mad nor deranged, but I make my declaration in defence of my noble birth and my connexions'. Emperor: 'How so?' Appianus: 'As a noble and a gymnasiarch'. Emperor: 'Do you assert then that we are ignoble?' Appianus: 'Of that I know nothing; I am making my declaration on behalf of my

own noble birth and my connexions'. Emperor: 'Do you not know that...' [here there is a lacuna: perhaps *that I am free from avarice*]. Appianus: 'Since you are ignorant of this I will instruct you. First of all, Caesar saved Cleopatra..., who held the kingdom, and as some say borrowed...'. Here the text ends.

The many analogies which this text offers to the *Christian Acts of the Martyrs* will have been seen. The propagandist trend, to enhance the reputation of the Alexandrian martyrs, is obvious, but it must be admitted that the Emperor is represented as showing a patience rather surprising in Commodus.

The *Acts of the Alexandrines* cannot be reckoned among literary masterpieces, but they have a real value. For one thing they add to our none too abundant examples of a class little represented among the extant remains of Greek literature. They are not the work of learned authors or men of genius writing for the cultivated few, nor of orators addressing themselves indeed to the many but using for the purpose all the devices, of the rhetorical art. They represent the popular literature of the time, more or less ephemeral works addressed to the common reader, often lively and vivid enough in style but making little pretension to literary polish. They are in fact in the nature of journalism. Secondly they give us a somewhat novel point of view. We are too much accustomed to looking at the history of the Roman Empire through Roman eyes. Here we are looking, as it were, from the opposite side of the arena: the hostility and smouldering resentment of men to whom Rome was not the great organizing and civilizing power which preserved for later ages the heritage of Greek culture and Greek learning, but an alien and oppressive conqueror. And thirdly, though, as I have insisted, their primary purpose is anti-Roman rather than anti-Jewish, they do furnish useful information on ancient anti-Semitism and provide interesting parallels to its later manifestations. And if they are all of them fragmentary, some lamentably so, at least it may be claimed for them that they offer to the more ingenious and imaginative among the rather desiccated race of scholars opportunities for the exercise of their talents surpassing even those afforded by the most exacting of crossword puzzles.