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Adam Łukaszewicz

SOME REMARKS
ON THE TRIAL OF ISIDORUS AND ON ISIDORUS JUNIOR

À Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski
en hommage amical et reconnaissant

Audiebamus Alexandream, nunc cognoscimus
Cicero, *Pro C. Rabirio Postumo oratio* 35

We know from the *Acta Alexandrinorum* that an Alexandrian gymnasiarch named Isidorus was put to death after a trial which took place in Rome in the reign of the emperor Claudius. The rebellious gymnasiarch is known not only from the *Acta Alexandrinorum*¹ but also from Philo.² Although the text of the *Acta Isidori* seems to be a biased political writing, it is certainly based upon genuine documents. We must rely on that record since we have no better sources mentioning the same events.

Already in the reign of Tiberius, the gymnasiarch Isidorus was a popular leader of anti-Semitic Alexandrians. As we learn from Philo, he was one of those responsible for the massacre of the Alexandrian Jews in A.D. 38. In 39 he was sent to Rome as an envoy. According to the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, during his long sojourn at Rome Isidorus "killed" some important persons. He took part in an action against some friends of the future emperor Claudius.³ However, Isidorus acted only as Caligula's puppet. That is, anyway, how he explains his deeds to Claudius (*Acta Isidori*). During his trial, Isidorus, accused by Claudius of having brought about the catastrophe of Theon and Naevius

¹ H. A. MUSURILLO, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs. Acta Alexandrinorum*, Oxford 1954, "Acta Isidori", 18-26; *CPJ* II 154-159, pp. 55-107.

² Philo *In Flacc.* 20-24, 125-127, 135-150; *Leg.* 355.

³ MUSURILLO, *op. cit.* (n. 1) 19 (col. II 16-19); *CPJ* II 156b I 12-17.

(Macro) and also of other "friends" of Claudius in Caligula's reign (*CPJ* II 156d III 4: [πολ]λοὺς μου φίλους ἀπέκτ[ει]νας, Ἰσίδωρε), says that he only obeyed the precedent ruler (*CPJ* III 156d III 5-6: βασιλέως ἤκουσα τοῦ τότε [ἐπ]ιτάξαντος). And he adds: you can also tell me to accuse anyone. That bitter joke provokes Claudius' sarcastic reaction: ἀσφαλῶς [ἐ]κ μουσικῆς εἶ, Ἰσίδωρε (*CPJ* III 156d III 7-8). This is not an unrelated remark, but an angry reply to Isidorus' ironical proposal. The emperor's remark has the following meaning: you certainly are a son of a musician (i.e. of a whore), since you behave like a prostitute, offering your services to anyone. Isidorus answers: "I am neither a slave (i.e. I am not ready to obey any master) nor a girl-musician's son, but gymnasiarch of the glorious city of Alexandria. But you are the cast-off son of the Jewess Salome!"⁴

The idea that Claudius was a υἱὸς ἀπόβλητος of Salome (the sister of Herod?) must have come from an otherwise unknown Alexandrian gossip, which did not concern the conduct of Claudius' mother Antonia, but suggested that in reality Claudius was a Jewish child brought up in the family of Drusus.

Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, like the editors of *CPJ* II 156, is convinced that the trial of Isidorus took place in spring of A.D. 41 (starting from 30th April) when king Agrippa I (whom Isidorus accused) was in Rome.⁵ This date seems to Tcherikover and Fuks, and also to Modrzejewski, much more probable than the alternative possibility of A.D. 53, when Agrippa II was present in the capital of the empire.

The readers of Philo remember well that the Alexandrian anti-Semites considered as their chief enemy Agrippa I, the king involved in the events of A.D. 38. In 53 the accusation of Isidorus by Claudius of having destroyed some of Claudius' friends in Caligula's reign would be a reference to rather remote events, not very likely to become a reason of Claudius' violent reaction.⁶

In 41, however, the conflict described by Philo (*In Flaccum*), was still current. The atmosphere in Alexandria at that time is well illustrated by the letter of Sarapion to Heracleides, containing a warning: βλέπε σατὸν ἀπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων.⁷

The text of the *Acts of Isidorus* quite explicitly states that Isidorus was the accusing party and that the accused one was Agrippa: Ἰσιδώρου γυμνασιάρχου πόλεως Ἀλεξανδρέων κατὰ Ἀγρίππου βασιλέως κτλ.⁸ That accusation turned into a disaster to Isidorus and to his companion Lampon. We see them later in the role of the accused and condemned ones.

The most important question concerning the trial of Isidorus is the following: why did Isidorus decide to accuse Agrippa? Was Isidorus unable to fore-

⁴ *CPJ* II 156d, III 9-12, translation p. 80.

⁵ J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Les Juifs d'Égypte de Ramsès à Hadrien*, Paris 1991, 141-143.

⁶ Cf. *CPJ* II 156, commentary on p. 68.

⁷ BGU IV 1079 = *CPJ* II 152.24-26 (A. D. 41).

⁸ *CPJ* II 156a II 2-4.

see the result, when he decided to attack a close friend of the ruling emperor, who was to be the judge in that trial? As an experienced politician, could he really expect another result than his own destruction? It is also strange, that during a trial caused by Isidorus' accusation of Agrippa, Claudius asks Isidorus not to say a word against his friend, as if the main subject of the trial were different!

It is difficult to suppose that in reality the formula containing κατὰ Ἀγρίππου quoted above is not taken from the official records, but is an invention of the compiler of the *Acts*. We have to accept the explicit statement of the text that Isidorus indeed accused Agrippa before the emperor.

There is only one possible explanation of that extremely audacious conduct of the Alexandrian gymnasiarch: Isidorus was not alone and expected he would win. The support of Isidorus by some senators could give him the feeling that he would be able to destroy his enemy Agrippa. But in actual fact the attack was directed against the emperor.

The *Acts* clearly state that Isidorus was highly appreciated in Rome: συνεπένευ[σαν καὶ οἱ συνδικαθήμενοι [π]άντες σ[υνκλητικοὶ] εἰδότες ὁποῖός [εἰς] τιν ἄ[ν]ηρ ὁ Ἰσίδωρος (CPJ 156a, II 13-15).

A great specialist in Alexandrian matters, Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski, says: "Les craintes de Claude pour son ami Agrippa ne se nourrissent donc pas de quelque angoisse métaphysique. «Apre sycophante», Isidôros est un homme redoutable: on sait dans l'entourage de l'empereur «quel homme est Isidôros».⁹ It is certainly true that Isidorus was a dangerous enemy even to important people of the imperial court and it may also be true that Claudius' fears for his friend Agrippa were real. However, if the senators wanted to hear Isidorus, it was not for fear. They rather respected him, if we can trust the *Acts*, and anyway there is certainly no hidden irony in the meaning of εἰδότες ὁποῖός [εἰς] τιν ἄ[ν]ηρ ὁ Ἰσίδωρος (CPJ II 156, II 15).

As far as we may understand from the fragmentary *Acts*, at the beginning of the trial Isidorus spoke to the emperor in a rather courteous manner. He attempted to keep the appearances of his good will towards the emperor and avoided direct attacks against him. The exchange of outraging insults between Claudius and Isidorus belongs to the final phase of the trial, when Isidorus became the accused one and even needed, as it seems from CPJ II 156b, II 36, the help of a ῥήτωρ, i.e. a professional advocate.¹⁰

Isidorus' accusation of Agrippa might have been a provocation of an influential group of senators who wanted in that way to intimidate the new emperor. We do not know enough to suppose an actual conspiracy. Other sources

⁹ J. MÉLÈZE-MODRZEJEWSKI, *Juifs* (n. 5) 144.

¹⁰ This is the interpretation of the passage concerning a ῥήτωρ by TCHERIKOVER and FUKS, CPJ II ad loc.

do not give us any information about the matter. We know, however, that Claudius was fond of judging and had a reputation of a fool. That could perhaps encourage Isidorus to carry out his rather hopeless action.

At the beginning of 2000, a block of limestone with a Greek inscription was discovered at the site of Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, where Dr Wojciech Kołataj, Dr Grzegorz Majcherek and a team of researchers of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology carry out archaeological work.¹¹ That item was found in the south-eastern part of the Roman baths of IV century A.D. The surface of the stone is rough and slightly damaged but the inscription is almost complete.

The height of the inscribed surface is 66 cm, its width 56 cm, the thickness of the stone block 50 cm. The height of letters is between 2 and 3 cm. The letters of the last line are smaller.

The inscription was read by the writer in March 2000. Since the publication of that inscription is still in the press,¹² we give below the complete Greek text and a part of the commentary as a complement to the foregoing observations on the gymnasiarch Isidorus.

The new inscription from Kom el-Dikka reads as follows:

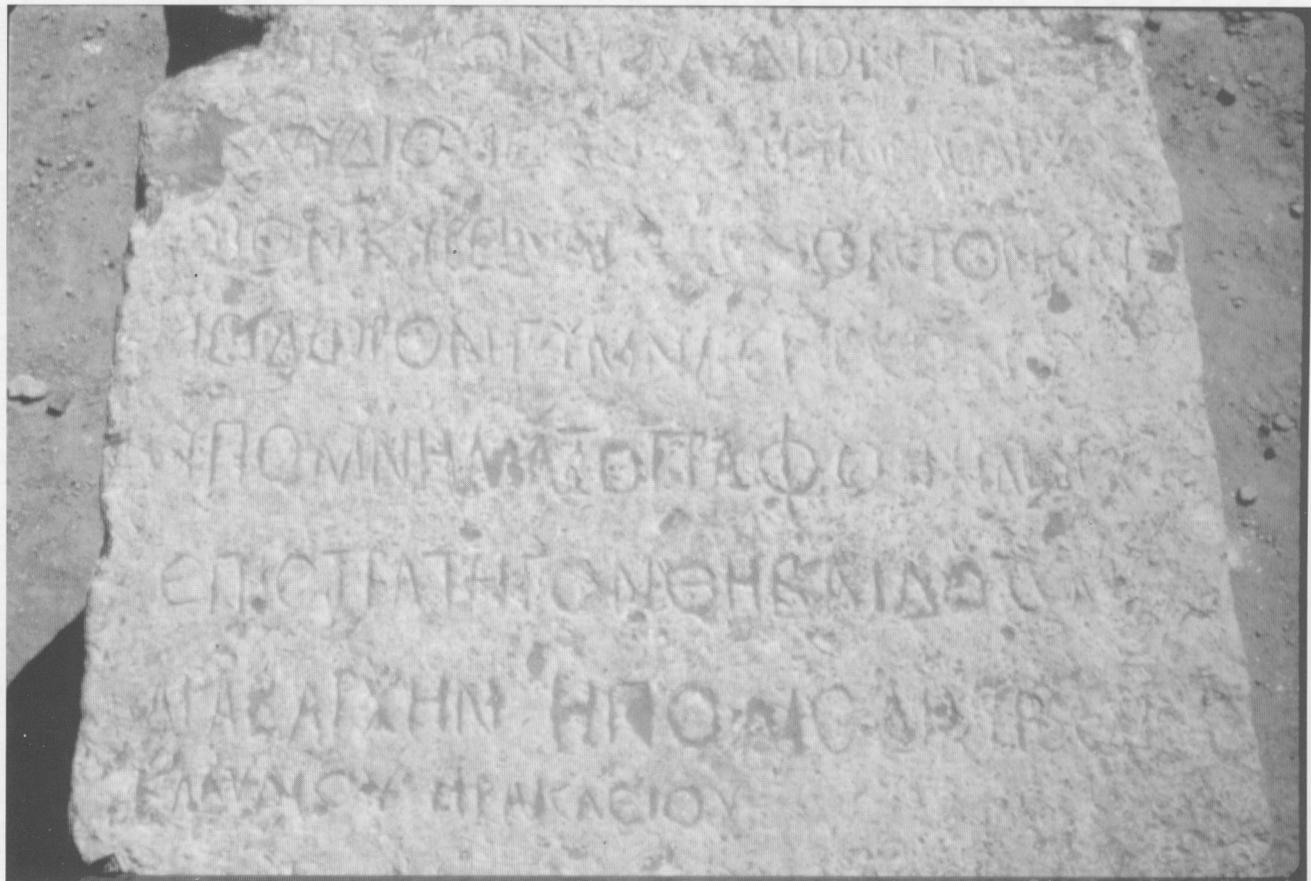
- Τ]ιβέριον Κλαύδιον Τιβε[ρίου
 Κλαυδίου Ἰσιδώρου γυμνασιάρχου
 Κ]ώιον, Κυρειαῖον, Ῥόδιον, τὸν καὶ
 4 Ἰσίδωρον, γυμνασίαρχον,
 ὑπομνηματογράφον, χιλίαρχον
 ἐπιστράτηγον Θεβαίδος καὶ
 ἀραβάρχην ἢ πόλις διὰ Τιβερίου
 8 Κλαυδίου Ἡρακλείου

3 Κυρειαῖον I. Κυρηναῖον

“To Tiberius Claudius, son of Tiberius Claudius Isidorus gymnasiarch, citizen of Kos, Kyrene and Rhodes, also called Isidorus, gymnasiarch, hypomnematosgraphus, *tribunus militum*, epistrategus of Thebaid and arabarch, the city through Tiberius Claudius Heraclius”.

¹¹ I wish to express here my gratitude to the archaeological mission at Kom el-Dikka directed by Dr Wojciech KOŁATAJ (restoration) and Dr Grzegorz MAJCHEREK (excavations) for permission to publish the epigraphic material.

¹² *Essays and Texts in Honor of J. David Thomas*, Ann Arbor, forthcoming.



Isidoros' inscription

These Isidori, father and son, do not seem to appear in other published documentary texts. The inscription under discussion must obviously be compared with the records of the gymnasiarch Isidorus being a part of the *Acta Alexandrinorum*.¹³ Since the writing of our text can be dated to 1st century A. D., and no other Isidorus appears in known texts as a gymnasiarch of Alexandria (see Sijpesteijn's list of the gymnasiarchs¹⁴), we may assume that Isidorus the elder of our text is probably identical with the notorious Alexandrian leader of the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius.

In the *Acta Isidori* and in the text of Philo, the gymnasiarch Isidorus is called only by his Graeco-Egyptian name. The evidence of his Roman citizenship from the new inscription is a significant addition to our knowledge. The *nomina* confirm that the two Isidori must have been granted Roman citizenship by the emperor Claudius.

Isidorus *junior*, the gymnasiarch honoured by the inscription from Kom el-Dikka, cannot be the gymnasiarch Isidorus known from the *Acta Alexandrinorum*. Otherwise we would have to imagine a grant of citizenship by Claudius both to Isidorus junior (age: 56) and to his very old father at the same time. We must also remember that an Oxyrhynchus fragment of the *Acta Isidori* may be read in a way which suggests that the notorious Isidorus was son of a Dionysius.¹⁵

The list of gymnasiarchs by Sijpesteijn contains only two Tiberii Claudii among the Alexandrian gymnasiarchs. Both of them belong to the 1st century A. D.: Tiberius Claudius Theon (A. D. 89) and Tiberius Claudius Eros (1st cent. A. D.).¹⁶

Unfortunately our knowledge about the Alexandrian gymnasiarchs of that period is very limited. One Demetrius is recorded *ca* 50 A. D.¹⁷ and Gaius Iulius

¹³ CPJ II 154-159, pp. 55-107; J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, "Le procès d'Isidôros: droit pénal et affrontements idéologiques entre Rome et Alexandrie sous l'empereur Claude", *Praktika tês Akadêmias Athênôn* 61 (1986) 245-275 (in modern Greek with a French résumé).

¹⁴ P. J. SIJPESTEIJN, *Nouvelle liste des gymnasiarques de l'Égypte romaine*, Zutphen 1986 (*Stud. Amst.* XXVIII), 52.

¹⁵ *P. Oxy.* XLII 3021.6; the editor has some doubts as to the identity of Ἰσίδωρος Διονυσίου(υ) which J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI does not share, see his *Juifs* (n. 5) 141: "le gymnasiarque alexandrin Isidôros, fils de Dionysios". On the other hand it is still a question, whether the text of *P. Oxy.* XLII 3021 could not be read as follows in lines 5-7:

5	Ἰτιβέριος Κλαύδιος
6	Βάρβιλλος καὶ Τιβέριος Κλαύδιος] Ἰσίδωρος, Διονυσίου(ς)
7	καὶ ἄλλοι] πρέσβεις πάντες.

¹⁶ P. J. SIJPESTEIJN, *op. cit.* (n. 14), Suppl. I A, nos. 5 and 6.

¹⁷ Obviously not identical with the arabarch Demetrius known from Josephus *Antiquitates Iud.* XX 147, since that Demetrius was Jewish, like another arabarch Gaius Julius Alexander, the brother of Philo (Josephus, *Antiquitates Iud.* XVIII 259); cf. J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Juifs* (n. 5) 150 (on Demetrius): "un autre notable juif d'Alexandrie".

Iollas in 54. If Isidorus *senior* were a gymnasiarch in 53, as some scholars suggest, he might perhaps have begun his rather short term of office after Demetrius. But a longer term of office and 41 as the date of his trial seem far more probable. Around 41 there is a vacuum in Sijpesteijn's list.

The grant of Roman citizenship by Claudius to Isidorus *senior* can only be dated early in 41, before the trial. There were also other Tiberii Claudii in that embassy, mentioned in the famous letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians published in Alexandria on 10th November of the same year: Barbillus (or Balbillus), Phantias and Archibius.¹⁸ Isidorus, as a member of the embassy of 41, was likely to receive the same honour as some of his colleagues. (His role as a "sycophant" in the reign of Caligula was perhaps temporarily forgotten).

Barbillus, who in 41 received Roman citizenship from Claudius, was also involved in the trial of Isidorus, survived it and has been mentioned in the letter of Claudius. In the emperor's letter there is no mention of the executed ones: Isidorus and Lampon, who were certainly subject to *damnatio memoriae*.

At the time of the drama, Isidorus *senior* was 56 years old.¹⁹ His son was born perhaps about A.D. 15.

At the beginning of the *cursus honorum* of Isidorus *junior* we find the title of the gymnasiarch. Obviously enough, such a choice of a gymnasiarch by the Alexandrians could under these circumstances be considered a defiant anti-Roman act. The date is unknown.

The next office held by Isidorus *junior* was that of *hypomnematographus* (cf. a similar function of Lampon, *CPJ* II 156, p. 70²⁰).

The title of "chiliarch" must be understood as *tribunus militum*. The text does not state where and when Isidorus served as a *tribunus*. His military rank seems to be an important link in his career — he became able to hold *equestrian* offices.

As epistrategus of Thebaid Tiberius Claudius Isidorus is to be added to the list of the epistrategi compiled by J. David Thomas.²¹ The list shows that the title of the epistrategus of Thebaid and the title of arabarch appear jointly in the second half of the 1st century A.D.²² That may reflect a general practice of the time and could confirm the approximative date of our inscription.

¹⁸ *P. Lond.* VI 1912 = *CPJ* II 153 II 16 (Barbillus), II 18 (Phantias) and II 19 (Archibius), cf. 108 and the commentary on p. 44. Cf. A. ŁUKASZEWICZ, "Claudius to his own city of Alexandria (*P. Lond.* VI 1912.103-104)", *JJP* 28 (1998) 71-77.

¹⁹ *CPJ* II 156 b II 34-35 (ἐπάγομαι γυμ[νασίαρχος Ἀλεξανδρείας,] ἐτῶν ν̄ς Ἑλλ[ην]).

²⁰ *CPJ* II p. 69: "Besides the office of gymnasiarchos, which was a civic post, Lampon was also a government official (ὑπομνηματογράφος)".

²¹ J. D. THOMAS, *The epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, Part 2, The Roman epistrategos*, Opladen 1982 (*Pap. Col.* VI).

²² J. D. THOMAS, *The epistrategos*. (n. 21) 185 (no. 8, Claudius Geminus undated, before 91?), cf. I. Memnon 67.

The promotion of Isidorus *junior* to the position of epistrategus of Thebaid and of arabarch may have happened during or after the *Bellum Judaicum*, when he probably was a *persona grata*. Under Nero we find in this function Tiberius Iulius Alexander born in 16 A.D. (?), whose term of office was rather long. Our text may perhaps belong to the Flavian period (Domitian?). This seems to agree with the palaeography of the inscription.

The inscription under discussion has a rather careless form, perhaps due in part to the nature of the material. The text in honour of Isidorus *junior* was set up (probably still during his lifetime) by Tiberius Claudius Heraclius at the expense of the city of Alexandria. Heraclius was presumably a member of the family of the Isidori — perhaps a son of Isidorus *junior* and a grandson of the hero of the *Acta Isidori*.

An interesting point in the career of the younger Isidorus is his citizenship of Kos, Cyrene and Rhodes. That multiple citizenship could be a record of a period of exile (also Isidorus *senior*, according to the statement of Philo, spent a time in exile, as a consequence of his conflict with the prefect Flaccus²³). These titles might however also be a result of his particular popularity or achievement, e.g. in athletic contests, or a simple consequence of his possession of real estate in these places.

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²³ On the self-imposed absence of Isidorus who fled "by his own freewill" see Philo, *In Flacc.* 145; cf. Modrzejewski, *Juifs* (n. 5), p. 135 et 136.