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Adam Łukaszewicz

CLAUDIUS
TO HIS OWN CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

(P. LOND. VI 1912, 103-104)

The famous letter which emperor Claudius sent to the Alexandrians in AD 41, and which a tax collector from Philadelphia for unknown reasons copied on the back of a tax register, has been discussed several times.¹ The main problem that interested most of the learned readers of the papyrus was the Emperor's attitude towards the judaeo-hellenic controversy.²

It may seem that there is no real necessity to reconsider the rather explicit contents of the papyrus. However, the final passage of that important text requires some more attention. Here is the contents of ll. 103-104 according to Bell's original edition:

καὶ ἐγὼ πρόνοιαν τῆς πόλεως ᾗ ποίσομαι τὴν ἀνατάτῳι (l. ἀνωτάτῳι) καθάπερ ἐκ προγόνων οἰκίας ὑμῖν ὑπαρχούσης.

The translation of lines 103-104 in the original edition reads as follows:

"I on my side will continue to display the time-honoured solicitude for the interests of the city, with which my family has a traditional friendship."³

¹ These publications are listed in *CPJ* II 153, pp. 36-37.

² See the discussion in the *editio princeps* P. Lond. VI 1912 = P. *Jews* (H. I. BELL, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, London 1924, pp. 1-37, pl. I) and in *CPJ* II 153 pp. 36-60; cf. B. LEVICK, *Claudius*, New Haven - London 1990, pp. 184-185. For Claudius and the Alexandrians see J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Les Juifs d'Égypte de Ramsès II à Hadrien*, Paris 1997, pp. 239-253; for the letter of Claudius pp. 250-253.

³ H. I. BELL, *P. Jews* = P. Lond. VI 1912, p. 29.

Other examples of English translation show similar freedom in translating these lines. This is how the passage has been translated in the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*:

I for my part will care for the city as much as I can, as one which has long been closely connected with us.⁴

The following translation appeared in the *Select Papyri*, and was also reprinted by Pestman:

I on my side will exercise a solicitude of very long standing for the city, as one which is bound to us by traditional friendship.⁵

The intricated proposals of interpretation given in Bell's edition show that in actual fact the passage has never been understood properly. Bell states:

It is possible that τήν should be corrected to τῆς, taking τῆς ἀνωτάτω with οἰκ(ε)ίας rather than (as in the text) with πρόνοιαν, but this, though it improves the style, is not absolutely necessary; indeed, the omission of τῆς before καθάπερ to connect οἰκ(ε)ίας with πόλεως may be a sign of translation from a Latin original, see introduction. For similar instances see Lafoscade, *De Epistulis*, pp. 92 ff.⁶

Bell's remarks show a strong tendency to "improve" the style of the text. Texts should be understood literally as far as possible. There is no word in the passage that means "traditional friendship". There is no question either of being "bound by friendship". The translation "time-honoured" is doubtful, etc.

Ἰμῖν — as admitted by most scholars — must be considered an error for ἡμῖν. Thus we obtain τῆς πόλεως ... ἡμῖν ὑπαρχούσης.

Προνοίαν τῆς πόλεως ποιήσομαι (for ποιήσομαι) requires no comment.

Bell's idea that in l. 103 τῆς could be read instead of τήν, would imply τῆς πόλεως . . . τῆς ἀνωτάτω which makes no real sense. Much more convincing is the adverbial meaning of ἀνωτάτω which confers the sense of the highest degree upon the emperor's future solicitude for the interests of the city, if the required conditions are fulfilled by the Alexandrians.⁷ Claudius says he would do his best to the city καθάπερ ἐκ προγόνων οἰκίας ὑμῖν (l. ἡμῖν) ὑπαρχούσης.

⁴ CPJ II 153, p. 43.

⁵ *Select Papyri* 2, no. 212; P. W. PESTMAN, *The New Papyrological Primer*, Leiden 1990, no. 16, p. 109.

⁶ P. Jews, p. 37.

⁷ Ἐὰν τοῦτων ἀποστάντες, ἀμφοτέροι μετὰ πραότητος καὶ φιλανθρωπείας (l. φιλανθρωπίας) τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ζῆν ἐθελήσῃται, καὶ ἐγὼ πρόνοιαν τῆς πόλεως ποιήσομαι τὴν ἀνατάτω (l. ἀνωτάτω) καθάπερ ἐκ προγόνων οἰκίας ὑμῖν ὑπαρχούσης (100-104).

Οικίας could certainly be understood as οικείας and so it is interpreted by most editors of the text. In that case the adjective would concern the city (τῆς πόλεως ... καθάπερ ... οικείας), while ἐκ προγόνων would provide a more specific explanation of the genuine character of the “ownership” of the city. Thus we would obtain the following way of reading the passage under discussion: καὶ ἐγὼ πρόνοιαν τῆς πόλεως ἰποιήσομαι τὴν ἀνωτάτῳ | καθάπερ οικείας ἐκ προγόνων ἡμῖν ὑπαρχούσης):

And I on my side will do my best for the city, as one which is my own (as heritage) of (my) ancestors.

However, in actual fact the verb ὑπάρχω (l. 104: ὑπαρχούσης) with dative (ὑμῖν) should be taken in the standard sense of “belonging” and not of “being” (cf. line 23 where we read: φύσει μὲν εὐσεβεῖς περὶ τοὺς Σεβαστοὺς ὑπάρχοντες).

If we understand οἰκίας as a standard genitive form of οἰκία “house, family”, we obtain a more satisfactory interpretation than with the adjective οἰκείας.

An interesting translation has been proposed recently by the specialist in the Alexandrian “Jewish question”, J. Méléze Modrzejewski:

je montrerai, comme par le passé, toute ma bienveillance envers cette cité
comme envers une maison nous appartenant par nos ancêtres.⁸

Modrzejewski understands οἰκία literally, as “a house” (building), which is a remarkable idea. However, it is difficult to see why the emperor should compare Alexandria to a house. The writer, interested in other aspects of the problem, left that passage of his translation without a commentary. Modrzejewski, though to him that particular problem was only marginal, was apparently not satisfied with the previous superficial interpretations and made a courageous attempt to find a new solution.

However, other translations seem also possible with οἰκίας as genitive form of οἰκία “house, family”.⁹ In the present writer’s opinion the text should be read either:

καὶ ἐγὼ πρόνοιαν ἰποιήσομαι τὴν ἀνωτάτῳ τῆς πόλεως | ὑπαρχούσης ἡμῖν κα-
θάπερ ἐκ προγόνων οἰκίας

⁸ MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Les Juifs d’Égypte* (cit. n. 2), p. 251.

⁹ Οἰκία should in the present writer’s opinion be understood as “house or family from which one is descended” (LSJ IV): in that sense Herodotus says οἰκίης ἀγαθῆς (I 107). There are many other examples quoted in dictionaries.

And I on my side will do my utmost for the city, which belongs to me as (a kind of heritage) of the house of (my) ancestors.

or, more plausibly:

καὶ ἐγὼ πρόνοιαν ἰποιήσομαι τὴν ἀνωτάτωι τῆς πόλεως | καθάπερ ὑπαρχούσης
ἡμῖν ἐκ προγόνων οἰκίας.

“And I on my side will do my utmost for the city, as if it belonged to me as (a kind of heritage) of the house of (my) ancestors”.

That seems to be the most convincing interpretation of the passage.

The usage of καθάπερ with a participle, as in the latter proposal, has a close parallel in ll. 99-100: καθάπερ κοινήνι τεινα τῆς οἰκουμένης νόσον ἐξεγείροντας.

Whatever choice we make between the versions proposed above and the version of Modrzejewski, the sense is the same.

Claudius, under cover of a demonstration of some special sentimental attachment for the city of Alexandria as being his “family heritage”, asserts in actual fact his particular right to decide the Alexandrian matters. Claudius’ words are no innocent courtesy formula but rather a clear political declaration.

What was the motive of his statement?

The answer is in the pedigree of Claudius. Claudius was a son of Nero Drusus Germanicus and of Antonia Minor. While on paternal side he was a grandson of Livia, his mother was a daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia. Thus, Claudius was a grandson of Antony and Octavia and through Antony was related also to Cleopatra.¹⁰ Claudius was certainly not unaware of his family connexions. The marriage — formal or informal — of Antony and Cleopatra (37 BC), together with the official proclamation in 34 BC of Antony’s donations of lands to Cleopatra and her children,¹¹ probably were for Claudius a sufficient reason to consider himself a relative of the Egyptian kings. As a descendant of a true master of Alexandria who ruled the city and whole Egypt only little more than 70 years before the date of his letter, the historically-minded Emperor certainly could consider himself a legitimate lord of Alexandria.¹²

An additional motive could be the memory of his brother Germanicus who died (probably poisoned) in AD 19 as a consequence of his visit to Egypt in

¹⁰ See e. g. B. LEVICK, *Claudius* (cit. n. 2), table 1 on p. 3.

¹¹ For a recent discussion of Mark Antony’s donations see Th. SCHRAPEL, *Das Reich der Kleopatra. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zu den Landesschenkungen Mark Antons*, Trier 1996. Cf. G. HÖBL, *Geschichte des Ptolemäerreiches*, Darmstadt 1994; M. CLAUS, *Kleopatra*, München 1995, pp. 68-73.

¹² Mark Antony was — among other titles — also a gymnasiarch of Alexandria in 34 BC, see SCHRAPEL, *Das Reich der Kleopatra* (cit. n. 11), p. 269.

winter 18/19, where he reportedly behaved himself almost as a sovereign in a way which outraged Tiberius, the adoptive father of Germanicus.¹³

The visit of Germanicus to Egypt is attested in papyri which show that he was enthusiastically received by the people of Alexandria (*P. Oxy.* XXV 2435).¹⁴ Germanicus apparently realized the danger and attempted to prevent excessive acclamations and divine honours in an appropriate edict.¹⁵ He also tried to win a reputation of moderation and humane conduct by issuing a prohibition of excessive requisitions made for the purposes of his visit.¹⁶ It seems that these measures were not effectual and that Germanicus' death actually resulted from the emperor's concealed wrath. Germanicus was murdered by agency of Piso, the governor of Syria. Anyhow, Tiberius accused Germanicus in the Senate of improper conduct in Egypt and Suetonius has no doubts as to Tiberius' role in the death of his adoptive son.¹⁷

The connexion of Germanicus' reception and behaviour in Egypt with his descendency from Antony and, consequently, links with the Ptolemies, seems more than probable.

Germanicus is mentioned in the letter of Claudius (l. 27). In the letter there is also a mention of Germanicus' speech delivered in Alexandria. Is that speech identical with the one partly preserved on *P. Oxy.* XXV 2435?¹⁸ The harangue known from the Oxyrhynchus papyrus was apparently improvised (which agrees with the definition of that speech as "sincere" found in *P. Lond.* VI 1912. 27) and pleased the crowd.

Claudius, who at that time was 9 years old, certainly kept a memory of the events and was not unaware of the reasons. The letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians, written 22 years later, brings an echo of the proud awareness of his descendency. Suetonius states, that Claudius took every opportunity to honour the memory of his deceased brother.¹⁹

Claudius also enhances in his letter the "natural" (φύσει, l. 23) reverence of the Alexandrians towards the Emperors and particularly their devotion to his family (l. 25). That passage is followed by the mention of Germanicus' visit to Alexandria.

However, we are not allowed to conclude that Claudius had any genuine predilection for the Alexandrians. Trials and executions prove rather the con-

¹³ D. G. WEINGÄRTNER, *Die Ägyptenreise des Germanicus*, Bonn 1969.

¹⁴ WEINGÄRTNER, *Die Ägyptenreise* (cit. n. 13), p. 73.

¹⁵ SB I 3924; WEINGÄRTNER, *Die Ägyptenreise* (cit. n. 13), p. 108 (Akklamationsedikt des P. Germ.).

¹⁶ SB I 3924; WEINGÄRTNER, *Die Ägyptenreise* (cit. n. 13), p. 124 (Requisitionsedikt des P. Germ.).
Cf. *W. Chr.* 413 = O. Louvre 9004 (WEINGÄRTNER, *ibid.*, p. 123).

¹⁷ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 52.

¹⁸ *P. Oxy.* XXV 2435; cf. CPJII 153. 27, comm., p. 45.

¹⁹ Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.

trary. Though, Alexandria and Egypt certainly interested him to a certain extent. He brought from Egypt a great obelisk and ordered the construction of a Pharos-like lighthouse in the harbour of Ostia.²⁰

Severe to the Greek envoys, he was not always mild to the Jews — according to Suetonius he expelled them from Rome, though it is not certain whether in reality Jews or early Christians are meant.²¹

It seems probable that some allusions to the links of the family of Claudius with Alexandria appeared in the letter of the Alexandrians delivered to Claudius by the second embassy of A. D 41.

(The first embassy under Isidorus perished after having called king Agrippa a “halfpenny-twopenny Jew” and Claudius a bastard of Salome.²² We do not know, who exactly was meant — perhaps it was the sister of Herod the Great, a friend of Livia.²³ At the same occasion Lampon — another protagonist of the Greek Alexandrian patriots — said in the presence of Claudius that the emperor was crazy.²⁴)

The decree voted by the Alexandrians (ψήφισμα, l. 20) most probably came from an informal assembly in the Gymnasium, since there was no city council in Alexandria.

Suetonius confirms Claudius' particular sentiment for Mark Antony, reflected in official enunciations, festivals and edicts.²⁵ Also the marriage of Claudius with Valeria Messalina, a descendant of Mark Antony, could — among other motives — result from her descendency.²⁶

In AD 40 Caligula put to death the last true offspring of the Ptolemies, king Ptolemy of Mauretania, son of Juba and Cleopatra Selene. Suetonius explains that murder with Caligula's greed for money.²⁷ Ptolemy's possessions were confiscated and his kingdom incorporated into the Roman empire. The end of that loyal ally of Rome, decorated with *ornamenta triumphalia* for his victory over Tacfarinas, must have also conditioned Claudius' way of thinking about his own family relationships. Claudius could certainly feel a family solidarity with his Ptolemaic cousin and perhaps reconsider himself as a *sui generis* kinsman of Cleopatra.

Claudius paid official homages to Augustus and Livia.²⁸ He was certainly not interested in any change of the roles which the official propaganda had

²⁰ Suetonius, *Claudius* 20.

²¹ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.

²² *P. Lond.* inv. 2785 = *CPJ* II 156b I 18; *P. Cairo* inv. 10448 = *CPJ* II 156 d III 11-12.

²³ LEVICK, *Claudius* (cit. n. 2), p. 185.

²⁴ *CPJ* II 156 d. III 14-15, cf. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Les Juifs d'Égypte* (cit. n. 2), p. 248.

²⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.

²⁶ LEVICK, *Claudius* (cit. n. 2), table 2, p. 54.

²⁷ Suetonius, *Caligula*, 35.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.

since the time of Augustus attributed to the protagonists of the Alexandrian drama: the "wicked" Cleopatra, the "disorderly" Mark Antony, the "brave" Octavian. Nevertheless, Claudius certainly could have own feelings about the old story of his grandfather and his affair with an Egyptian queen.

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LES LIEUX DE L'ÉGYPTE

Louis Robert dans son ouvrage érudit *À travers l'Asie Mineure* se penche sur la topographie de la Bithynie, et surtout des environs de la ville de Prousiac¹. Dans ses considérations fondées à la fois sur la lecture des textes littéraires et des inscriptions, les relations des voyageurs et les propres observations qu'il a faites en Turquie, l'auteur met en évidence le caractère marécageux de la région de Prousiac. Les textes cités par le savant français mentionnent les roseaux et les marécages de l'Hypios, le fleuve de la ville de Prousiac². L. Robert étudie les passages des auteurs anciens, surtout d'Apollonios de Rhodes, qui dans ses *Argonautiques* mentionne le fleuve, qu'il qualifie de βεβυππειοτάτω βεβυππειοτάτω Ἰσμιό³. Robert traduit βεβυππειοτάτω par «prairies humides». Son interprétation est fondée sur les scholies qui définissent βεβυππειοτάτω comme «lieux humides»: βεβυππειοτάτω ὁ λέγει τοῖς καθύπευρον τόποις⁴.

Robert identifie la signification de βεβυππειοτάτω (ou «lieux humides»), terme relatif à l'Asie Mineure et au fleuve Hypios avec le sens de λυγροί, mot intéressant qui n'apparaît que chez Nicandre, l'auteur de *Theriacè*⁵.

¹ Écrit en juillet 1938 à Louvain pendant un séjour de recherche effectué à l'aimable invitation du Département d'Etudes Classiques de KU Leuven.

² L. Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure. Poésie et prosaïque, monuments grecs, voyageurs et géographie*, Paris 1939 (= *Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome* 239).

³ Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure* (n. 1), surtout p. 11-15.

⁴ *Argonautica* II 795. Citations d'après *The Argonautica of Apollonios Rhodios* ed. G. W. MOONEY, Dublin 1912 (reimpression Amsterdam 1964).

⁵ Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure* (n. 1), p. 12 n. 5; cf. Scholia in Apollonios (inter), recensuit C. Wiesner, Berlin 1935, p. 139.

⁶ Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure* (n. 1), p. 15; cf. Nicandre *Theriacè* 200. Voir n. 26, p. 15 de l'ouvrage de L. Robert, où l'auteur cite Fritzenhagen, cf. infra.