LINCOLN H. BLUMELL

THE DATE OF P.OXY. XLIII 3119, THE DEPUTY-PREFECT LUCIUS MUSSIUS AEMILIANUS, AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BY VALERIAN AND GALLIENUS

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 186 (2013) 111–113

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
THE DATE OF P. OXY. XLIII 3119, THE DEPUTY-PREFECT LUCIUS MUSSIUS AEMILIANUS, AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BY VALERIAN AND GALLIENUS

P. Oxy. XLIII 3119 is a fragmentary papyrus that measures 25.5 × 9.0 cm (H × W) and contains the remains of what appears to be two official letters preserved on a roll. While their respective contents are not entirely clear since at least half of the lines of text are lost this papyrus has nevertheless garnered considerable attention since the second text on two occasions refers to “Christians”. Consequently, the editor of the text, John Rea, remarked: “Incomprehensible as this fragment still remains, it has strong claim on our attention.” Central to the interest in the two references to “Christians” is the date of the document. Rea argued that on paleographic grounds the text dated to the third century and based on the sole chronological reference on the papyrus, a reference to a “year 7” in l. 11 of the first text, he concluded that the correspondence could have been written: 227/28, year 7 of Severus Alexander; 243/44, year 7 of Gordian III; 249 (autumn only), year 7 of Philip; 259/60, year 7 of Valerian and Gallienus; 275 (autumn only), year 7 of Aurelian; 281/82, year 7 of Probus; 290/91, year 7 of Diocletian. While Rea went on to suggest that 259/60, “year 7” of Valerian and Gallienus, appeared like the most likely candidate since they had initiated a persecution of Christians and one might therefore expect to find references to “Christians” in official documents of the time, he remained tentative and simply gave a third-century date for the papyrus. A short time later J. E. G. Whitehorne published what is still considered the definitive treatment of this text. After describing the text and its features in some detail Whitehorne considered all of the dating possibilities outlined by Rea and via a comparison with Christian sources made a circumstantial case that the document should be dated to 259/60, “year 7” of Valerian and Gallienus, and that the text is best seen as emanating from the persecution against Christians initiated by these emperors. While he was more certain about this date than Rea, he still exercised caution and reservation and admitted that the evidence was indirect. Notwithstanding this fact, the date promoted by Whitehorne has achieved widespread acceptance, and there are only a handful who question this dating because it relies on circumstantial evidence derived from Christian sources.

1 The TM no. for this text is 15998. This text has been republished with little variation in AnneMarie Luijendijk, Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (Cambridge, 2008), 184–85. The papyrus contains two documents (Doc. #1, ll. 1–11; Doc. #2, ll. 12–20) that are written by the same hand. It is evident that the fragment comes from a roll since in the left margin at ll. 12 and 15 the last letters of an earlier column are visible. The most detailed description of this papyrus can be found in J. E. G. Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119: A Document of Valerian’s Persecution? ZPE 24 (1977): 187–90.

2 In l. 14 and again in l. 18 the word χρηστιανῶν (l. χριστιανῶν) is clearly attested. On these two references see: W. Shandruk, The Interchange of ι and η in Spelling χριστ- in Documentary Papyri, BASP 47 (2010): 212; cf. Orsolina Montevecchi, Nomen Christianum, in Bibbia e papiri: Luce dai papiri sulla Bibbia greca (Barcelona, 1999), 157.

3 P. Oxy. XLIII p. 77; cf. Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 187; Luijendijk, Greetings in the Lord, 185.

4 P. Oxy. XLIII p. 77.

5 Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 187–96.

6 Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 192–96.

7 Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 196: “In conclusion, if it is accepted that P.Oxy. XLIII 3119,12ff., reflects the existence and enforcement countrywide of legislation dealing specifically with Christian property, then I believe that a date of 259/60 is the only acceptable out of seven possible seventh years in the third century.”


As a result of a new reading proposed here a date of 259/60 may be established that does not require any external argument about the persecution of Christians in the third century to determine which “year 7” is being referenced in l. 11. In the same document in l. 7 it reads: διασημότατος [ἡγεμονίαν] τῆς ἡγεμονίαν .... but the problem with this reading is that it is never attested for any prefecture/vice-prefecture during a “year 7” in the third century. The other possibility is that the δ is the beginning of the word διέπων, which means that the reference is to a “deputy-prefect”. There is only one individual attested in the papyri who is identified as a “deputy-prefect”, whose titulature could fit the extant text on l. 7, and whose tenure spanned a “year 7”; it is Lucius Mussius Aemilius who was deputy-prefect/prefect from the late 250s to the early 260s. In a number of texts from this period, including some that could date to 259, he is identified by the formula διασημότατος διέπων τῆς ἡγεμονίαν. Therefore, it seems most likely that the reading for l. 7 should be reconstructed as διασημότατος διέπων τῆς ἡγεμονίαν .... and can only refer to L. Mussius Aemilius.

In light of this new reading, a connection between P.Oxy. 3119 and the persecution of Christians under Valerian and Gallienus as narrated by Dionysius of Alexandria (apud Eusebius) can now be made. In book seven of Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History he preserves a partial account, which he claims was taken from the very court proceedings themselves, of the actual hearing of Dionysius of Alexandria and four fellow Christians before none other than L. Mussius Aemilius. In the brief exchange preserved by Eusebius,

---

10 In the ed. pr. Rea never offered any reconstruction for this line of text nor commented on it in his notes.
11 O. Hornickel, Ehren und Rangprädikate in den Papyrusurkunden, Diss. Gießen 1930, 4–7. A basic search on the DDDHP will confirm that διασημότατος is most often used for the prefect in Ewa Wipszyc’a’s brief treatment of this text (op. cit. 8) she too noted that the use of the epithet διασημότατος in l. 7 most often referred to the prefect although she never considered who it might be. After the prefect, in third-century texts this epithet is most commonly used for the καθολικός.
13 Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 190 briefly notes that a deputy prefect (διέπων) might be referred to in l. 7 but never pursues this possibility in any detail nor considers how it might impact the dating of the text.
15 P.Köln X 417.1–2 (ca. 256–58 [Oxyrhynchos]: [Λουκίῳ Μουσσίῳ] Αἰμιλιανῷ τῷ διασημότατῳ διέποντι | [ἡ]ν ἡγεμονίαν; P.Oxy. XII 1468.1–2 (ca. 256–58 [Oxyrhynchos]: Λουκίῳ Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῷ τῷ διασημότατῳ διέποντι τῆν ἡγεμονίαν; PWisc. I 3.6–8 (256–59 [provenance unknown]): τῷ διασημότατῳ διέποντι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν | Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῷ). Other references to the deputy-prefecture of L. Mussius Aemilius include the following: P.Dubl. 18.5–6 (= P.Oxy. I 1833 descr. [ca. 257–59 (Hermonitica)?]): Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῷ διέποντος τῆς ἡγεμονίας; P.Oxy. XLIII 3112 Fr 1.2 (Jan. 19, 258 [Oxyrhynchos]: Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῷ τῇ λαμπρότατῃ διέποντι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; PStras. V 393.7, 11, 13 (ca. 256–59 [provenance unknown]): Αἰμιλιανῷ διέποντι τῆν ἡγεμονίαν; SB XX 14229.8 (either Feb. 28, 258 or 259 [Oxyrhynchite]: τοῦ διασημότατου θεοφάραγγος ἐπαρχομένου ἤγεμονος καὶ Λουκίῳ Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανοῦ διέποντος τῆς ἡγεμονίας. In P.RyL I 110.6–7 (Sept. 29 – Oct. 28, 259 [Hermoniteli] L. Mussius Aemilius seems to no longer be referred to as the “deputy-prefect” but as the prefect: τοῦ διασημότατου | [ἡ]γεμονίας Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῷ. However, the situation is complicated by P.Oxy. IX 1201.1, 13–14 (24 Sept. 258) where he is identified both as the “prefect” and as the “deputy prefect” of Egypt.
16 Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 7.11.6: αὐτῶν δὲ ἐπαικονίσατε τῶν ὑπ’ ἀμφοτέρων λειψάνων ὡς ὑπενεχματισθή (“But hear the things themselves that were spoken on both sides, as they were placed on record”). On the date of this hearing N. Lewis, Notationes Legionis, BASP 13 (1976): 161 n. 9 has pointed out: “All that the text tells us is that the reigning emperors were Valerian and Gallienus, which dates the passage prior to A.D. 260, when the former lost his life.”
L. Mussius Aemilianus commands Dionysius and his companions to forsake their beliefs and ultimately exiles them to Cephiro in Libya because of their refusal. It is noteworthy that in this dialogue L. Mussius Aemilianus is repeatedly identified as “the deputy-prefect” (ὁ διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν) using the same unique terminology that may have appeared in P.Oxy. 3119. Furthermore, it is evident from the exchange that L. Mussius Aemilianus was quite proactive about enforcing the anti-Christian edicts of Valerian and Gallienus in Egypt. Thus, it is only fitting that P.Oxy. 3119, the only extant papyrus relating to this persecution, should probably contain a reference to his deputy-prefecture.

Lincoln H. Blumell, Brigham Young University
lincoln_blumell@byu.edu

17 Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 7.11.6: Αἰμιλιανός διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν εἶπεν; 11.9: Αἰμιλιανός διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτοῖς εἶπεν; 11.10: Αἰμιλιανός διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτοῖς εἶπεν. The use of such technical titulature lends credibility to Dionysius’ statement, preserved by Eusebius, that the exchanges between Dionysius and L. Mussius Aemilianus were taken directly from the official proceedings.