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

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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”.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the editor of the text, John Rea, remarked: “Incomprehensible as this fragment still remains, it has strong claim on our attention.”<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> While he was more certain about this date than Rea, he still exercised caution and reservation and admitted that the evidence was indirect.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding this fact, the date promoted by Whitehorne has achieved widespread acceptance,<sup>8</sup> and there are only a handful who question this dating because it relies on circumstantial evidence derived from Christian sources.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 Montevicchi, *Nomen Christianum*, in *Bibbia e papiri: Luce dai papiri sulla Bibbia greca* (Barcelona, 1999), 157.

<sup>3</sup> P.Oxy. XLIII p. 77; cf. Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 187; Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 185.

<sup>4</sup> P.Oxy. XLIII p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 187–96.

<sup>6</sup> Whitehorne, P. Oxy. XLIII 3119, 192–96.

<sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> M. Choat, Christianity, in Christina Riggs (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt* (Oxford, 2012), 482; W. Shandruk, The Interchange of ι and η in Spelling *χριστ-* in Documentary Papyri, 212; Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 186; Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, 2003), 288; Ewa Wipszycka, Les papyrus documentaires concernant l’Église d’avant le tournant constantinien. Un bilan des vingt dernières années, *PapCongr.* XXII (2001): 1323; M. M. Sage, The Persecution of Valerian and the Peace of Gallienus, *Wiener Studien* 17 (1983): 144.

<sup>9</sup> E. A. Judge, The Puzzle of Christian Presence in Egypt Before Constantine, in Alanna Nobbs (ed.), *Jerusalem and Athens: Cultural Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2010), 146.

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: διασημοτάτου δ[ ca.? ].<sup>10</sup> In the third century while διασημότατος could be used to refer to a few different officials it was overwhelmingly used as an honorific epithet for the prefect of Egypt.<sup>11</sup> In such cases when it appears in a formulary for the prefect it is typically followed immediately by ἡγεμών or ἑπαρχος Αἰγύπτου followed by the name of the prefect. The problem here is that after διασημοτάτου in l. 7 there is a very clear δ at the end of the line right before the lacuna. There are essentially only two options for what follows. The first is that it could be διασημοτάτου δ[ιαδεξαμένου τὴν 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.<sup>12</sup> The other possibility is that the δ is the beginning of the word διέπων, which means that the reference is to a “deputy-prefect”.<sup>13</sup> There is only one individual attested in the papyri who is identified as a “deputy-prefect”, whose titlature could fit the extant text on l. 7, and whose tenure spanned a “year 7”; it is Lucius Mussius Aemilianus who was deputy-prefect/prefect from the late 250s to the early 260s.<sup>14</sup> In a number of texts from this period, including some that could date to 259, he is identified by the formula διασημοτάτος διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it seems most likely that the reading for l. 7 should be reconstructed as διασημοτάτου διέποντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ..., and can only refer to L. Mussius Aemilianus.

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 Eusebium*) 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 Aemilianus.<sup>16</sup> In the brief exchange preserved by Eusebius,

<sup>10</sup> In the *ed. pr.* Rea never offered any reconstruction for this line of text nor commented on it in his notes.

<sup>11</sup> O. Hornickel, *Ehren und Rangprädikate in den Papyrusurkunden*, Diss. Gießen 1930, 4–7. A basic search on the DDbDP will confirm that διασημότατος is most often used for the prefect. In Ewa Wipszycka’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.

<sup>12</sup> SB XXVI 16672.5–6 (216–17): κατὰ τὰ κελευσ[θ(έντα)] | [ὕ]πὸ Αὐρηλίου Ἀντινοῦ τοῦ διασημο(τάτου) διαδεξα(μένου) τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ...; cf. P.Rein. I 49.6–7 (215–16). Aurelius Antinous was a “vice-prefect” and did not hold this office before 215 or after 216 thus excluding him from being a prefect during a “year 7”. See G. Bastianini, *Lista dei prefetti d’Egitto dal 30a al 299p*, *ZPE* 17 (1975): 307; O. W. Reinmuth, *A Working List of the Prefects of Egypt: 30 B.C. – 299 A.D.*, *BASP* 4 (1967): 111.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Reinmuth, *A Working List of the Prefects of Egypt*, 119–20. According to Reinmuth (p. 119) the formula ὁ διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν meant that L. Mussius Aemilianus was administering the office of prefect until his appointment as ἡγεμών was formally made. See also Bastianini, *Lista dei prefetti d’Egitto dal 30a al 299p*, 314–15; G. Bastianini, *Lista dei prefetti d’Egitto dal 30a al 299p*. Aggiunte e Correzioni, *ZPE* 38 (1980): 88.

<sup>15</sup> P.Köln X 417.1–2 (ca. 256–58 [Oxyrhynchus]): [Λουκίῳ Μουσσίῳ] Αἰμιλιανῶ τῷ διασημοτάτῳ διέποντι | [τὴν] ἡγεμονίαν; P.Oxy. XII 1468.1–2 (ca. 256–58 [Oxyrhynchus]): Λουκίῳ Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῶ τῷ διασημοτάτῳ | διέποντι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; P.Wisc. I 3.6–8 (256–59 [provenance unknown]): τῷ | διασημοτάτῳ διέποντι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν | Μουσσίῳ Αἰμιλιανῶ. Other references to the deputy-prefecture of L. Mussius Aemilianus include the following: P.Dubl. 18.5–6 (= P.Oxy. I 183R descr. [ca. 257–59 (Hermopolites (?))]): Μουσσίου Αἰμιλιανοῦ διέπον[τος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν]; P.Oxy. XLIII 3112 Fr 1.2 (Jan. 19, 258 [Oxyrhynchus]): Μούσσιος Ἀ[ἰ]μιλιανὸς διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; P.Oxy. IX 1201.13–14 (Sept. 24, 258 [Oxyrhynchus]): Μουσσίοι Αἰμιλιανῶ τῷ λαμπροτάτῳ διέποντι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; P.Strasb. V 393.7, 11, 13 (ca. 256–59 [provenance unknown]): Αἰμιλιανὸς διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; SB XX 14229.8 (either Feb. 28, 258 or 259 [Oxyrhynchite]): τοῦ διασημοτάτου Θεοδώρου ἐπανορ[θωτοῦ Αἰγύπτου καὶ Λουκίου Μουσσίου Αἰμιλιανοῦ διέποντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν. In P.Ryl. II 110.6–7 (Sept. 29 – Oct. 28, 259 [Hermopolite]) L. Mussius Aemilianus seems to no longer be referred to as the “deputy-prefect” but as the prefect: τοῦ διασημοτάτου | [ἡγεμόνο]ς Μουσσίου Αἰμιλιανοῦ. 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.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.11.6: αὐτῶν δὲ ἐπακούσατε τῶν ὑπ’ ἀμφοτέρων λεχθέντων ὡς ὑπεμνηματίσθη (“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 Legentis*, *BASP* 13 (1976): 161 n. 9 has pointed out: “All that the text tells us is that the reigning emperors were Valerianus 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 Cephro 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.

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<sup>17</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.11.6: Αἰμιλιανὸς διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν εἶπεν; 11.9: Αἰμιλιανὸς διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτοῖς εἶπεν; 11.10: Αἰμιλιανὸς διέπων τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτοῖς εἶπεν. The use of such technical titlature lends credibility to Dionysius' statement, preserved by Eusebius, that the exchanges between Dionysius and L. Mussius Aemilianus were taken directly from the official proceedings.