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*An Egyptian Official in Uncertain Times*

In the latest, lively and well-informed, biography of Queen Zenobia,<sup>1</sup> Rex Winsbury has questioned an opinion found in the writings of some professional historians. There must have existed, they think, some sort of understanding with the emperor Aurelian, who allegedly accepted for a while Zenobia's minor son Vaballathus as his junior partner governing the East. This 'convention', as it is sometimes called, would be reflected in the names of the two rulers being used together in dated papyri and on coins. As a result, some high officials in Egypt would remain in charge after the recovery of this province, and perhaps make the transition easier.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars, including the present writer, have always thought that the alleged pact was only one-sided and never recognized by Aurelian,<sup>3</sup> in other words it was a plain usurpation by Zenobia, thinly disguised as an established *modus vivendi* with the emperor. It lasted less than two years and ended in disaster.

A brief reminder of the established facts may be useful. The queen, acting in the name of the boy Wahballat (transcribed as Vaballathus or Athenodorus), controlled parts of the Roman East in place of her husband Odaenathus who had held them by appointment of emperor Gallienus until his assassination in AD 267/268. We know nothing about the first years of this regency, which were later counted as regnal years of Vaballathus. He inherited the paternal royal title naturally enough, especially if it was, as I think, not self-imposed but granted to Odaenathus and his elder son by the emperor in order to challenge the Persian Shapur.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, the office of 'epanorthotes (in Latin *corrector*) of the whole East' was taken over by the young successor in spite of it being a personal and non-hereditary appointment,<sup>5</sup> while the titles of *imperator* and *dux Romanorum*, never used by Odaenathus, appear to have been simply usurped. Whenever dated, all these titles are not earlier than AD 270.<sup>6</sup> Some milestones in the provinces *Arabia* and *Palaestina* add to them an abbreviation for *consul*,<sup>7</sup> which appears also in Greek as ὕπ(ατος) on Alexandrian

<sup>1</sup> R. WINSBURY, *Zenobia of Palmyra. History, Myth and the Neo-Classical Imagination*, London 2010, pp. 167–172.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. L. HOMO, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Aurélien*, Paris 1904, p. 66; J.G. FÉVRIER, *Essai sur l'histoire politique et économique de Palmyre*, Paris 1931, p. 111; recently, D.S. POTTER, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, London-New York 2004, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> H. MATTINGLY, *The Palmyrene Princes and the Mints of Antioch and Alexandria*, *NumChron* 16, 1936, pp. 89–114 (113); D. SCHLUMBERGER, *L'inscription d'Hérodiens. Remarques sur l'histoire des princes de Palmyre*, *BEO* 9, 1942/1943, p. 44; J. STARCKY, *Palmyre*, Paris 1952, p. 58; J. STARCKY, M. GAWLIKOWSKI, *Palmyre*, Paris 1985, p. 63; U. HARTMANN, *Das palmyrenische Teilreich*, [*in:*] K.-P. Johné (Ed.), *Die Zeit der Soldatenkaiser. Krise und Transformation des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert (235–284)*, Berlin 2008 [= *Palmyrenische Teilreich*], p. 366.

<sup>4</sup> M. GAWLIKOWSKI, *Odainat of Palmyra between Rome and Persia*, [*in:*] *Hortus Historiae. Studies in Honour of Professor Józef Wolski on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his Birthday*, Kraków 2010, pp. 467–480.

<sup>5</sup> CIS 3971. Cf. D.S. POTTER, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire. A Historical Commentary on the 13<sup>th</sup> Sibylline Oracle*, Oxford 1990, p. 393.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. KOTULA, *Aurélien et Zénobie. L'unité ou la division de l'Empire?*, Wrocław 1997, pp. 98–103. The papyrological and epigraphical evidence can be found in M. PEACHIN, *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology, A.D. 235–284*, Amsterdam 1990, pp. 404–409.

<sup>7</sup> T. BAUZOU, *Deux milliaires inédits de Vaballath en Jordanie du Nord*, [*in:*] Ph. Freeman, D. Kennedy (Eds), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East I*, *BAR IS* 297, Ankara 1986, pp. 1–8, and B. ISAAC, *The Limits of Empire*, Oxford 1992, p. 223, n. 22.

coins one year later. Normally, this would mean that Vaballathus has been appointed by Aurelian in the course of AD 271 a *consul suffectus* as a mark of acknowledgement of his position, but more likely it was just another usurpation, even if the abbreviations stand for *consularis*/ὕπαρκικός, a title already borne by Odaenathus.

In the course of AD 270 the troops of Zenobia invaded Egypt. There seems to be a common agreement now as to this date, though one two years earlier was favoured before.<sup>8</sup> According to the account of Zosimus (who must have used the same source as HA)<sup>9</sup> this happened still under the reign of Claudius II. Claudius died in summer AD 270, but the news reached Egypt only after 28<sup>th</sup> of September of that year. The mint of Alexandria had still the time to issue some coins of his brother and brief successor Quintillus before a short series dated in year 1 of Aurelian. The prefect of Egypt at the time was called Tenagino Probus; he was sent out by Claudius to chase ‘Scythian’ pirates in the Mediterranean (who were really Goths from the Black Sea northern coast). In governor’s absence a revolt broke out, led by certain Timagenes, probably identical with a ‘high-priest for life of Alexandria and whole Egypt’ mentioned two years earlier.<sup>10</sup> An army commanded by the Palmyrene general Zabdas came to secure the country but soon departed, leaving only a small force soon defeated by the governor Probus back from his naval expedition. The return of Zabdas and an apt maneuver of Timagenes resulted however in Probus’ debacle and suicide. From this moment Zenobia was in control of Egypt.

However, from 12<sup>th</sup> of October to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> of November, presumably of the same year AD 270, six dated papyri avoid the imperial name and use instead the vague formula ‘under the consuls of the current year’;<sup>11</sup> the scribes apparently preferred not to take sides for or against Aurelian. From early December, however, papyri quote two rulers: Emperor Aurelian as Augustus and Vaballathus with his lesser if grandiloquent titulature, both in their first year.<sup>12</sup> It follows that the Palmyrene occupation started in October or November.

The next dated document comes from 14<sup>th</sup> of March of AD 271.<sup>13</sup> It refers to the year 1 of Aurelian being year 4 of Vaballathus (as counted from the assassination of his father). This dating is regularly used in papyri and on coins in that year and the next, the last preserved papyrus including the two names being issued on 17<sup>th</sup> of April, AD 272 (Aurelian 2/ Vaballathus 5).<sup>14</sup> The reconquest of Egypt took place after that date and before 24<sup>th</sup> of June, when Aurelian appears as the sole ruler.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, the Alexandrian mint managed to produce the extremely rare series of Zenobia and Vaballathus as Augusti, without any

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. EQUINI SCHNEIDER, *Septimia Zenobia Sebaste*, Roma 1993 [= *Septimia Zenobia*], pp. 69–75.

<sup>9</sup> Zosimus I 44,1-2; HA, *Vita Claudii XI*, 1-2. Zonaras XII, 27 and Syncellus p. 721 (Bonn), place the event already under Aurelian.

<sup>10</sup> PSI 1039.

<sup>11</sup> EQUINI SCHNEIDER, *Septimia Zenobia*, p. 72. All Julian dates after G. KREUCHER, *Die Regierungszeit Aurelians und die griechische Papyri aus Ägypten*, *APF* 44, 1998, pp. 255–274.

<sup>12</sup> P. Oxy XL 2921. Cf. D.W. RATHBONE, *The Dates of the Recognition in Egypt of the Emperors from Caracalla to Diocletianus*, *ZPE* 62, 1986, pp. 122–125; R. SUSKI, *Konsolidacja Cesarstwa Rzymskiego za panowania Aureliana 270–275*, Kraków 2008 [= *Konsolidacja Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*], p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> BGU 946.

<sup>14</sup> P. Oxy XL 2904.

<sup>15</sup> P. Oxy XL 2902.

mention of Aurelian any more. This issue, paralleled in Antioch, marks the final abandonment of any pretence at common rule. It happened only weeks before the fall.<sup>16</sup> Upon recovering Egypt, the emperor proceeded to introduce the reckoning of his reign from the death of Claudius, as already followed in the rest of his domains, by renaming his Egyptian year 2 to 3.<sup>17</sup>

One single papyrus refers to a certain Julius Marcellinus as deputy prefect, [διέπων] τὴν ἡγεμονίαν.<sup>18</sup> It is dated in an unusual way, ‘after the consulate of Antiochianus and Orfitus’, i.e. after December AD 270.<sup>19</sup> The man would have replaced the unfortunate Tenagino Probus as his second in command and would serve in the very beginning of AD 271 before the names of current consuls in Rome were known. It may be observed, however, that since from the beginning of December AD 270 the Egyptian administration recognized the joint rule of Aurelian and Vaballathus, there was no apparent reason not to use this dating, unless Marcellinus refused to accept the new regime. It is of course possible that this officer maintained himself against the Palmyrenes for a few months somewhere in Egypt as a more or less self-appointed interim prefect. It is also possible that the unique trace of his activities belongs as the latest one to the mentioned above series bearing anonymous consular dates ἐπὶ ὑπάτων τοῦ ἐνεκτῶτος ἔτους in October and November AD 270.<sup>20</sup> Such anti-Palmyrene movement, if it really maintained itself, would have rather surprisingly refrained from naming Aurelian as the rightful emperor. The evidence for its existence is admittedly slight, but nothing seems to contradict it. At any rate, there is no reason to identify Julius Marcellinus with Marcellinus whom Aurelian appointed immediately after his victory over Zenobia as prefect of Mesopotamia and *rector Orientis*.<sup>21</sup>

The case of another official is better documented. Statilius Ammianus was known as prefect of Egypt from several papyri which preserve no date, but two of which mention Aurelian as the sole ruler.<sup>22</sup> Before that, he commanded an *ala* in Arabia under Valerian and served as a deputy prefect of this province under Gallienus in AD 263/264.<sup>23</sup> This has put him in necessary relation to Odaenathus, at that time *corrector totius Orientis* and ‘King of kings’, but we do not know how long he remained in the Levant. His name was further recognized by J.R. Rea in a fragmentary P. Wisc. 2, while N. Lewis restored at the end of this document the names and titles of Aurelian alone.<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, the dating emperor was supposed by the first editor to be Septimius Severus: it all hangs on

<sup>16</sup> H. SEYRIG, Vhaballathus Augustus, [*in:*] Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michałowski, Warszawa 1966, pp. 659–662.

<sup>17</sup> SCHLUMBERGER, *BEO* 9, 1942/1943, pp. 46–48, P. SCHNABEL, *Klio* 20, 1926, p. 363. Cf. J.R. REA, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XL, London 1972, pp. 22–25.

<sup>18</sup> PSI X 1101, cf. J. SCHWARTZ, Préfecture d’Égypte et intérim, *ZPE* 20, 1976, p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> So G. BASTIANINI, Lista dei prefetti d’Egitto, *ZPE* 17, 1975, p. 317.

<sup>20</sup> Listed in KREUCHER, *APF* 44, 1998, p. 267.

<sup>21</sup> Zosimus I 60, 1. Cf. Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire, s.v. Marcellinus 1 and 2.

<sup>22</sup> P. Oxy XXXIV 2711, XL 2923, X 3612, PSI X 1102.

<sup>23</sup> M. SARTRE, Trois études sur l’Arabie romaine et byzantine, Bruxelles 1982, pp. 97–98. The relevant inscriptions: IGLS XIII 9078 and IGR III 1287.

<sup>24</sup> P.J. SIJPESTEIJN, *The Wisconsin Papyri* I, Leiden 1967, pp. 5–6, Pl. I 2; N. LEWIS, NOHMATAΛEΓONTOΣ, *BASP* 4, 1967, p. 34; J.R. REA, Two Notes, *BASP* 5, 1968, p. 40.

one partly preserved letter before a lacuna: Δ (for Domitius Aurelianus) or Σ for Septimius. The choice is by no means obvious from the (rather poor) photograph, but the two restorations support each other.

J.R. Rea has elaborated on this very damaged text next year in a short paper that won a general acceptance.<sup>25</sup> He proposed a convincing restoration of its contents and two corrections, each supplying a date. According to Rea, the document was addressed to a magistrate of Naucratis by a citizen of this city who quoted *in extenso* a petition the author submitted previously to Statilius Ammianus obtaining his approving *hypographè* in the month of Mesore (July/August) of year 3 (line 35); the magistrate was asked to implement the decision of ‘our governor’ and exempt the applicant from liturgical duty. As the mention of year 3 cannot refer to the reign of Claudius II, who died about the end of his year 2 (in summer AD 270) and never lived up to the month of August of the next year, it can only apply to Aurelian after he has recovered Egypt in May or June AD 272. This squares perfectly with other quoted papyri which mention the rule of Aurelian alone. It follows that Statilius Ammianus was serving under Aurelian as governor of the reconquered province.

In the text of the original petition there is also a mention of year 2 (line 22) and of an earlier decision on the same matter, but the context is incomplete and far from clear. This date, if recent at the time of writing, can refer either to the reckoning used during the Palmyrene rule (AD 271/272) or to the computation already corrected to conform to Aurelian’s own usage (AD 270/271). It seems to me that the first possibility is more likely; indeed, quoting a date different from that in the original document would be highly impractical. As the dating Aurelian 2 / Vaballathus 5 remained in use at least up to mid-April AD 272, the two decisions quoted could be very close in time and at any rate within the same Egyptian year. More importantly, accepting this reasoning would mean that Ammianus served as prefect both under the Palmyrenes and after Aurelian’s reconquest. The step was taken by G. Bastianini, who made Ammianus the immediate successor of Marcellinus who according to him served briefly in the early months of AD 271, and by J. Schwartz who has seen Ammianus as an appointee of Zenobia confirmed by Aurelian.<sup>26</sup>

The text of P. Wisc. I 2 as restored by John Rea runs as follows: [...ὕπεγραψάς] μοι οὕτως. Α β[?] ?...κατα τὰ (θείως ?) διη]γορευμένα περι τῶν [... τοῖς δικαί]οις χρήσθαι δύνασ[α], in his translation – *You subscribed for me as follows: 2<sup>nd</sup> year (?)... in accordance with the (imperial?) pronouncements in regard to... you may exercise your legal rights*. Nobody noticed the prudent interrogation mark after β, but even if it was a date, it refers only to some earlier ruling from the second year of an unknown emperor or emperors, and not necessarily to year 2 of Aurelian. The precedent was perhaps pointed out by the applicant himself in line 9: [Αὐ]τοκρατόρων Σε[βα]στῶν]. These joint emperors could not possibly be the Palmyrene usurpers in their final days, so the reference must be to some edict by Valerian and Gallienus if not earlier. If so, no need to make Ammianus a turncoat.

<sup>25</sup> J.R. REA, *The Date of the Prefecture of Statilius Ammianus*, *CdE* 44/87, 1969, pp. 134–138.

<sup>26</sup> BASTIANINI, *ZPE* 17, 1975, p. 317; SCHWARTZ, *ZPE* 20, 1976, p. 104.

A new piece of uncertain evidence came to light in 1995 with the publication of a papyrus fragment from the Michigan collection.<sup>27</sup> It contains a mention of Ammianus and a fragmentary mention of a 5<sup>th</sup> year. S.J. Sijpesteijn concluded that Ammianus *remained in function in year 6 of Aurelian (274/275), unless the reference is to some earlier emperor*. Some further restorations by A. Martin take this text three years earlier.<sup>28</sup>

Martin restored the date as [...ἔτους δευτέρου Αὐρηλιανοῦ Σεβαστοῦ] καὶ ἔτους πέμπτου [τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Σεπτίμιου Οὐαβαλλάτου κτλ.] *vel sim*. As recalled above, the year Aurelian 2 / Vaballathus 5 started on 30<sup>th</sup> August AD 271 and lasted until spring of AD 272. If correct, this restoration would mean that Ammianus was after all appointed by Zenobia and such is the prevailing opinion in recent literature.<sup>29</sup> In fact, everything rests on Martin's restorations which seem plausible but not compelling: the names of both rulers are not preserved.

If Statilius Ammianus, after serving as deputy prefect of Arabia under Gallienus, a position which put him under the orders of Odaenathus, was indeed appointed prefect of Egypt by Zenobia and later confirmed in this post by Aurelian, it would be a remarkable feat of political survival. The troops of Zenobia, on their way to Egypt, confronted and defeated the Roman legion *III Cyrenaica*, destroyed its tutelary temple of Juppiter Hammon in Bostra, no doubt together with the legionary camp, and also killed its commander Trassus if we choose to believe Malalas.<sup>30</sup> What Ammianus would be doing at that time? On the other hand, the smooth passage of power in Egypt in AD 272 was a fact: no fight is reported and the *boule* of Alexandria remained unchanged with the same councilors left in place.<sup>31</sup> The clemency of Aurelian could well have included the prefect Ammianus if he made the right move in the right moment. However, a better proof of this turn in his career should be found than the fragments in Michigan and Wisconsin can provide, as R. Winsbury has rightly felt.<sup>32</sup> For the time being, it seems to me more advisable to suppose that Ammianus spent the intervening years elsewhere and landed in Egypt as a man of Aurelian.

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<sup>27</sup> S.J. SIJPESTEIJN, Known and unknown officials, *ZPE* 106, 1995, pp. 210–211.

<sup>28</sup> A. MARTIN, P. Mich. Inv. 5478a et le préfet d'Égypte Statilius Ammianus, *Latomus* 59, 2000, pp. 399–402.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. D. POTTER, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, London-New York 2004, pp. 267, 270; HARTMANN, *Palmyrenische Teilreich*, p. 361; SUSKI, *Konsolidacja Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*, pp. 118–119, 161; P. SOUTHERN, *Empress Zenobia: Palmyra's Rebel Queen*, London 2009, p. 132; D. POTTER, *The Unity of the Roman Empire*, [in:] S. McGill, C. Sogno, E. Watts (Eds), *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture*, 284–450, *YCS* 34, Cambridge 2010, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Malalas XII 299, 3–10. Cf. IGLS XIII 1, 9107; H. SEYRIG, *Inscriptions de Bostra*, *Syria* 22, 1941, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> P. Oxy 3613.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 1.