

Augustus and Traditional Structures in Egypt

Grand Policies or Ad Hoc Measures?

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1 Augustus and Egypt

Cassius Dio's account of the Roman conquest of Egypt is undoubtedly unsympathetic: he opens the passage by clarifying that "Egypt was enslaved" and then depicts a clash of gods, a weeping Apis deprecating the entrance of Octavian in Egypt. Octavian himself is shown while refusing to pay homage to the Apis bull, and claiming that he was accustomed to worshipping gods, not cattle; the *princeps* is portrayed in the act of deliberately bypassing the mausoleum of the Ptolemies, whom he despised as "dead men", while obviously paying homage to the mummified body of Alexander the Great, whose nose he accidentally broke.¹ Two hieroglyphic inscriptions inform us that Augustus replaced the high priest of Ptah Padibastet IV-Imhotep, who died two days before Augustus captured Alexandria, with the young Psenamun, who in 28/7 BCE received the new title 'prophet of Caesar'. The dynasty of the high priests died out in 23 BCE, when Padibastet-Imhotep was finally buried.²

The Augustan attitude towards Egyptian temples seems less consistent: on the one hand, the *princeps* built traditional temples (Dendur, Kalabsha) in the early part of his reign; on the other, there are numerous hints to confiscations of temple land and priests complaining about new taxes after 4 BCE.³ This twofold attitude has been recently studied by A. Connor's book, significantly

1 Refusal to see Apis: Suet., *Div. Aug.* 93 and Cass. Dio, 51.16.5 in contrast to Alexander, who had sacrificed to the Apis bull of Memphis (Arr., *Anab.* 3.1–2) and thereby claimed acceptance among the Egyptians. Among the portents that accompanied the conquest of Egypt Dio lists the weeping Apis (51.17.4), which suggests a conflict with the high priests of Memphis.

2 *BM 184* and *BM 188*; on these inscriptions, see F. Herklotz, *Prinzeps und Pharao: der Kult des Augustus in Ägypten. Oikoumene* (Frankfurt am Main 2007), 294–298; N. Marković, 'Death in the Temple of Ptah: The Roman Conquest of Egypt and Conflict at Memphis', *Journal of Egyptian History* 8 (2015), 37–48 purports that the failed burial of the high priest was due to internal dynastic struggles among the priests of Memphis, not to Roman intervention.

3 For Augustus' confiscation of some temple resources, not as an act of opposition to Egyptian religion, on his building of traditional Egyptian temples as an act of conciliation with the native population, and on his pragmatic reception of some Pharaonic conceptions of

subtitled ‘Confiscation or Coexistence’, which, in W. Clarysse’s words on the website of the book launch, “will definitely put an end to the idea that the Romans took away the land of the Temples”. Certainly, as A.L. Boozer put it, “the ‘confiscation narrative’ does not accurately represent the Roman imperial relationship with Egyptian temples”.⁴

As for Augustus’ treatment of the Jews of Egypt, an ancient and populous community, little is known before 4 BCE. In *Res Gestae* 27 Augustus mentions the conquest of Egypt (*Aegyptum imperio populi romani adiecti*), but never hints to Judaea, a sign perhaps that he regarded that region as a kingdom under the Herodians rather than a part of the Empire.⁵ What we know about Augustus’ policy towards the Jews of Egypt comes from Greek sources, mainly of Jewish origin; both Josephus and Philo talk of Augustus in positive terms. There were certainly Alexandrian Jews in Augustus’ circle: *BGU* 4.1129 (13 BCE) talks of an otherwise unknown Simon, slave or freedman “of Caesar”, and of his slave the Alexandrian Jew Tryphon, and several papyri document Jews in Augustan Alexandria.⁶ In the *Legatio ad Gaium*, Philo gives voice to the most striking encomium preserved down to us, calling the emperor *alexikakos*, “averted of evil”, and *irenophylax*, “guardian of peace”.⁷ Philo delivered his speech before Caligula in 39. Certainly, this must be read as the apologetic plead of the Alexandrian Jewish community in a dangerous situation.⁸ Philo’s ties with Augustus were personal; his brother C. Julius Alexander, the ‘Alabarch’, had an important role in the financial life of the new province. Philo’s father Alexander may have supported Julius Caesar during the Alexandrian War.⁹ Josephus talks

kingship, without embracing the role of king or god, G.S. Dundas, ‘Augustus and the Kingship of Egypt’, *Historia* 51 (2002), 433–448 esp. 440–2; 446–7.

4 See https://www.press.umich.edu/12220891/confiscation_or_coexistence. A. Connor, *Confiscation or Coexistence. Egyptian Temples in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 2022), 36, reports: “the priests negotiated and participated in a system introduced by the administration at some point after 30 BCE. While this tighter control over circumcision and priestly enrolment has been interpreted as part of a program of Roman hostility toward the temples, the temples’ complicity in the process has received less attention”. I thank Andrew Connor for sending me a copy of his book.

5 A survey of the sources on Augustus and the Jews may be found in E. Tagliaferro, ‘Augusto e gli Ebrei’, *Quaderni di Vicino Oriente* 10 (2015), 125–138.

6 See e.g. *BGU* 4.1134 (10 BCE), and *BGU* 4.1136 (11/10 BCE).

7 Philo, *Leg.* 144–147.

8 L. Troiani, ‘Augusto e l’elogio di Filone Alessandrino’, in: G. Negri, A. Valvo, eds., *Studi su Augusto. In occasione del XX centenario della morte* (Torino 2016), 129–137.

9 On the family of Philo, J. Schwarz, ‘Note sur la famille de Philo d’Alexandrie’, *Mélanges Isidore Lévy* (Paris 1953), 591–602; K.G. Evans, ‘Alexander the Alabarch: Roman and Jew’, in: E.H. Lovering Jr., ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1995 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta 1995), 576–594; D.R. Schwartz, ‘Philo, his family, and his times’, in: A. Kamesar, ed., *The Cambridge Companion*

about the edicts issued by Julius Caesar and then by Augustus, which permitted the Jews throughout the Empire to respect their cult and send money to the Temple of Jerusalem. These edicts are cited word for word in Book 14 of the *Jewish Antiquities* and have been deemed authentic.¹⁰

In this paper, I will try to look at the Augustan attitude towards Egyptian temples and the Jews of Egypt, and will investigate whether we can detect grand policies which may have affected the traditional structures of these two communities. Did Augustus create or maintain a loyal relationship between the Roman state and Egyptian temples such as the temple of Ptah in Memphis, by allowing temple and priests substantial autonomy, as did the Ptolemaic kings? Did he treat the Jewish community in Egypt as a privileged group, which enjoyed full trust on the part of the state and served faithfully in the army, as was the case under the Ptolemies? And finally, did he align his Jewish policy in Egypt with his larger Jewish policies elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and in Judaea?

2 Augustus' Edict to the Jews and the Death of Herod

The main piece of evidence on Augustus' favourable policy towards the Jews is a famous edict to the Jews of Asia, which confirmed their right to follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers. The decree allowed the observation of the Sabbath and of the day of preparation for it, and issued specific penalties for those who stole Jewish sacred books or money – this last point seems the issue at stake on most occasions. The text is reported word-by-word by Josephus in:¹¹

Caesar Augustus, *Pontifex Maximus* with tribunician power, proclaims. Since the Jewish people has been found well-disposed to the Roman people not only at the present time but also in the time past, and especially in the time of my father *imperator* Caesar, as has their high priest Hyrcanus, it has been decided by me and my council under oath, with the consent of the Roman people, that the Jews may follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers, just as they followed

to *Philo* (Cambridge 2009), 9–31; M.R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria. An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven-London 2018), 29–30. On Julius Caesar's Jewish policy, E. Polyviou, 'Caesar's Jewish Policy according to Flavius Josephus', *Anistoriton Journal* 14 (2014–2015), 1–11.

10 M. Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World. The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius* (Tübingen 1998).

11 Ed. Niese (Berlin 1892).

them in the time of Hyrcanus, high priest of the Most High God, and that their sacred monies shall be inviolable and may be sent up to Jerusalem and delivered to the treasures in Jerusalem, and that they need not give bond on the Sabbath or on the day of preparation for it (Sabbath Eve) after the ninth hour. And if anyone is caught stealing their sacred books or their sacred monies from a synagogue or a meeting room, he shall be regarded as sacrilegious, and his property shall be confiscated to the public treasury of the Romans. As for the resolution which was offered by them in my honour concerning the piety which I show to all men, and on behalf of Gaius Marcius Censorinus, I order that it and the present edict be set up in the most conspicuous (part of the temple) assigned to me by the *Koinon* of Asia with plainly visible lettering. If anyone transgresses any of the above ordinances, he shall suffer severe punishment.¹²

This edict was dated to 12 BCE on the basis of a numeral *XI* present in the margin of the Latin version, erroneously intended to be the number of the *tribunicia potestas* of Augustus. Following an earlier hypothesis by R. Syme, C. Eilers suggested that the mention of C. Marcius Censorinus' proconsulship brings the date of the edict down to 3 BCE or shortly before; the new dating is more convincing, as it links the edict to Augustus' settlement of Jewish affairs after Herod's death.¹³ This new context deserves further investigation. According to Josephus, on the death of Herod in 4 BCE his sons Antipas and Archelaus sent letters to Augustus, who then "called together his friends to give their opinions. Among them he gave first place at his side to Gaius, the son of Agrippa and of his daughter Julia, whom he had adopted".¹⁴ Salome's son Antipater spoke against Archelaus, and Nicolaus spoke in favour; Augustus broke up the council and postponed the decision. Then a revolt broke out in Judaea after Archelaus set off to Rome. The cities in Judaea rose after procurator Sabinus garrisoned the province to guard the million sesterces promised to Augustus; Sabinus engaged in a battle at Pentecost, around the end of May 4 BCE, and the porticoes of the temple were set on fire. After a series of battles, and the appearance of various pretenders, Varus managed to quell the sedition with two additional

12 *AJ* 16.162–165. Translation adapted from Pucci Ben Zeev 1998, op. cit. (n. 10), 235–257.

13 C. Eilers, 'The Date of the Augustus' Edict on the Jews (*Jos. AJ* 16.162–165) and the Career of C. Marcius Censorinus', *Phoenix* 58 (2004), 86–95. He expands on an earlier hypothesis by R. Syme, published posthumously in *Anatolica. Studies in Strabo*, ed. by A.R. Birley (Oxford 1995), 304–306. Cfr. R. Syme, 'The Titulus Tiburtinus', *Akten des VI. Internationalen Kongresses für Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik, Münche n 1972, Vestigia* 17 (1973), 585–601 = *Roman Papers III* (Oxford 1979–91), 872–873.

14 *Jos., AJ* 17.228–230.

legions and numerous auxiliaries. A delegation of fifty Jews reached Augustus in Rome to ask to be put under the province of Syria; Josephus narrates that the Jewish delegates were supported by 8,000 Jewish residents in Rome, a figure which may be regarded as too high, but certainly shows the substantial agreement between Jerusalem and the diaspora communities.¹⁵

Augustus summoned again his *consilium* in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, and gave audience to the opposing delegations.¹⁶ Josephus reports the speeches of the Jews and of Nicolaus of Damascus respectively against and in favour of Archelaus. After these audiences, Augustus dismissed the council and appointed Archelaus as ethnarch of half of the territory that had been subject to Herod. Nicolaus, a protagonist of the events and the source of Josephus, specifies that Archelaus' territory yielded an annual tribute of 600 talents per year.¹⁷ Josephus then lists the other decisions of Augustus. First, Herod Antipas received Peraea and Galilee, with an annual tribute of 200 talents. Second, Philip got Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, and a territory called "the domain of Zenodorus", bringing an income of 100 talents. Finally, Judaea and Samaria got a discount of one third of the tribute by Augustus. As F. Millar pointed out, the revenues from the ethnarchy of Archelaus and the tetrarchies of Herod Antipas and Philip in the settlement of 4 BCE were equivalent to 3.6 million, 1.2 million, and 600,000 *denarii*, in total 900 talents or 5.4 million *denarii* at the exchange rate of 6,000 *drachmai* (equivalent to *denarii*) per talent, a very high revenue. It is noticeable that the overall annual revenues from Judaea and adjacent territories were more or less the equivalent of the fines imposed on Antiochus III of Syria after the battle of Magnesia in 189 BCE (15,000 talents over a period of twelve years); a very high income which Nicolaus of Damascus duly reported in his account.¹⁸

Augustus then detached the Greek cities in Archelaus' territory, such as Gaza, Gadara, and Hippos, from the ethnarchy and added them to the province of Syria, thus joining the provincial enclave of the Decapolis.¹⁹ This move created an important commercial area that conveyed to Rome the taxation raised from the import of luxury merchandise from Arabia Felix.²⁰ It is likely that the office of *alabarches* or *arabarches*, in charge of customs-dues on

15 Jos., *AJ* 17.300.

16 Jos., *AJ* 17.301.

17 Jos., *AJ* 17.317. Cfr. *BJ* 2.96. F. Millar, *The Roman Near East. 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge 1994, 2nd ed.), 51.

18 Millar 1994 op. cit. (n. 17), 51 n. 30. On the war indemnity imposed to Antiochus, Polyb., 21.40, Liv., 38.37; cf. P. Kay, *Rome's Economic Revolution* (Oxford 2014), esp. Ch. 2.

19 Jos., *AJ* 17.318–320.

20 Millar 1994 op. cit. (n. 17), 43.

long-distance trade imports from the East into Egypt and thence to Italy, gained further importance.

Josephus says that in 4/3 BCE Augustus made these decisions along with a council of friends and of the most prominent Romans, one of the first appearances of the *consilium principis*. The text of the edict (*AJ* 16.163), too, uses the Greek term συμβουλίω, a 'technical' translation of *consilium*, while the account of the hearings on the death of Herod in 4 BCE in *AJ* 17.301 and 17.317, taken from Nicolaus, describes the council as a συνέδριον, in Jewish terms. The prominent role of Gaius Caesar in this *consilium* shows that the settlement of the Herodian kingdom, along with the money and royal favours gained by Rome in this transaction, was vital for the preparation of the expedition to the East. Significantly, magnificent *ludi* were held in Rome in 2 BCE, when 260 lions were slaughtered in the Circus Maximus, 36 crocodiles in the Circus Flaminius, and a gigantic *naumachia* represented the battle of the Athenians versus the Persians.²¹ In the same year, the temple of Mars Ultor was dedicated, symbolising the programmatic Roman revenge against Parthia. Consistent with this picture, the members of the *consilium* deciding on the fate of Judaea overlapped with the men who accompanied Gaius in the East: among them, Marcus Lollius, Sulpicius Quirinius, Marcus Censorinus, Velleius Paternulus, Juba II of Mauretania, and a young Sejanus.²²

3 The Aim of the *epikrisis* in Egypt: Granting Privileges or Extending Taxation?

A recently published census declaration from the Fayum proves the existence of a provincial census in Egypt in the year 27 (3 BCE) of Augustus, ordered by the prefect Gaius Turranius.²³ This confirms that a seven-year cycle of censuses was taken in 10 BCE (year 20), 3 BCE (year 27), 4/5 CE (year 34), 12 CE (year 41), and every 14 years from 19 CE on.²⁴ Documents show that the census of 3 BCE

21 Cass. Dio, 55.10.7–8.

22 The great journey of Gaius in the East is described as instructional by Cass. Dio, 55.10.17 and Vell. Pat., 2.101.1. The staff included M. Lollius as *comes et rector* (Suet., *Tib.* 12.2); L. Licinius (*CIL* 6.1442), otherwise unknown; L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cf. Suet., *Nero* 5.1); P. Sulpicius Quirinius (Tac., *Ann.* 3.48); and probably Juba II of Mauretania as historian (cf. Pliny, *NH* 6.141). Aelius Sejanus (Tac., *Ann.* 4.1) was too young to have been a regular *comes* of Gaius although he could have served under him.

23 W.G. Claytor, R.S. Bagnall, 'The Beginnings of the Roman Provincial Census: A New Declaration from 3 BCE', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 55 (2015), 637–653.

24 *SB* 20.14440; R.S. Bagnall, B.W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge 1994), 2–4. For D.W. Rathbone, 'Egypt, Augustus and Roman taxation', *Cahiers du Centre Gustave*

was preceded by operations of *epikrisis*, that is, preliminary exams of the privileged status of specific classes, such as Alexandrians, Jews, and Egyptian priests, aiming to extend the levy of the so-called *laographia* (the yearly poll tax in cash) to a larger public.

Obviously, in 4/3 BCE the revenues from Egypt were especially vital for supplying the Roman army on its way to Parthia. It is even possible, although it remains speculative, that the *epikrisis* that preceded the census of 3 BCE implied the recruitment of some auxiliary forces for the expedition.²⁵ We know that under Augustus the population of the province of Egypt was divided up into a minority of Roman citizens, exempt from *laographia*, Alexandrian citizens, exempt as well, and the mass of Graeco-Egyptians, who paid the full rate. Some Greeks were styled *metropolitai* as they were the inhabitants of the district capitals, some “from the gymnasium”, as they could access gymnasia in the Egyptian *chora*. In addition, there were the “6475 Hellenic *katoikoi* of the Arsinoite nome”, a closed number of Greek soldiers of Ptolemaic origin, who had to pay a reduced rate for *laographia*. Apart from the gymnasial class, documented from 4/5 CE at Oxyrhynchus, we do not know when these groups were first registered.²⁶

BGU 4.1199 of 4 June 4 BCE is a copy of an official letter by which Turranius ordered an *epikrisis* of the personnel of Egyptian temples from top to lower ranks, most probably for fiscal purposes.²⁷ In *BGU* 4.1198 four priests petition Turranius against *laographia* claiming that they had been left alone since the

Glutz 4 (1993), 81–112 at 90, in 10 BCE Augustus decided to take a census to improve registration for the poll-tax.

- 25 P. Sanger, ‘In conclusion, Rome did not disarm Egypt’: Some Critical Notes on Livia Capponi’s Depiction of Roman Military Policy in late Ptolemaic and Augustan Egypt’, in C. Wolff, P. Faure, eds., *Les auxiliaires de l’armee romaine. Des allies aux federes* (Paris 2016), 97–106.
- 26 On the creation of the so-called ‘metropole orders’ under Augustus, Y. Broux, ‘Creating a New Local Elite. The Establishment of the Metropolitan Orders of Roman Egypt’, *Archiv fur Papyrusforschung* 59 (2013), 143–153. See also D. Canducci, ‘I 6475 cateci greci dell’Arsinoite’, *Aegyptus* 70 (1990), 211–255 and 71 (1991), 121–216; this class is first attested on *SB* 12.11012 of 55; O. Montevecchi, ‘L’*epikrisis* dei Greco-Egizi’, *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Papyrology, Oxford, 24–31 July 1974* (London 1975), 227–232 believed that it was created under Tiberius. A.K. Bowman, D.W. Rathbone, ‘Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt’, *JRS* 82 (1992), 107–127 at 121 refer to *metropolitai* as a creation of the Roman government; G. Ruffini, ‘Genealogy and the Gymnasium’, *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 43 (2006), 71–99 refers to the gymnasial class at Oxyrhynchus as a body of around 4000 people registered from 4/5 CE. On the humbler social standing of gymnasials in Upper Egypt, see S. Bussi, *Le elites locali nella provincia d’Egitto di prima eta imperiale* (Milan 2008), 17–19.
- 27 For Connor 2022 op. cit. (n. 4), 36 n. 19, “the exact process by which the restrictions were introduced remains unclear” and notices that the prefectural edict preserved in *BGU* 4.1199 [not 1099] “is likely an important part, but probably not the only one”.

times of the queen, Cleopatra VII, up to the twenty-sixth year of Augustus (4 BCE), when they were asked to pay the poll tax with arrears from 9 BCE. Analogously, in *BGU* 4.1140 (4/3 BCE) Helenos son of Tryphon, an Alexandrian Jew, complains that he was deprived of his *patris* (i.e. Alexandria), despite the fact that he received *paideia* in the gymnasium, and that he was forced to pay *laographia* including arrears from 9 BCE. Famously, the first line where Helenos defined himself 'Alexandrian' was erased and the scribe wrote on top "a Jew from Alexandria". Finally, *BGU* 4.1200 is a complaint to the prefect Octavius in 2/1 BCE about taxation over priests and temple land.²⁸

This evidence shows that the *epikrisis* of 4/3 BCE downgraded some Alexandrian Jews to the rank of Egyptians, under the same tax category as *peregrini*, "foreigners", and that Augustus imposed a stricter financial control over some Egyptian temples and priests, most probably to raise funds for the Parthian expedition of Gaius Caesar. These operations did not aim to damage this or that "privileged class", and had nothing to do with the religious policy of Augustus, but were dictated by pragmatic financial and fiscal considerations. One could even argue that the imposition of the provincial census in Egypt in 10 BCE was justified by the need to raise more regular revenues from Egypt, after the *regia gaza*,²⁹ brought to Rome in 30 BCE, had been gradually exhausted. To search temples for silver and gold in times of need was no novelty: Antiochus III attempted to pillage the temple of Bel at Elymais in his own territory in search of precious metals to pay off the Roman war indemnity, and the story of the relationships between Syrian kings (and Roman leaders and emperors) and the temple of Jerusalem is too well-known to be repeated here.³⁰ Substantially, Augustus' occasional extraction of funds from the traditional temples of Egypt as well as his use of local manpower for military purposes was not much different from the attitude of the Hellenistic kings and Roman predecessors of Republican times.

4 Gaius Caesar, the Jerusalem Temple and a Revolt in Egypt

A passage in Suetonius reports that Augustus "also praised his grandson Gaius for not offering prayers in Jerusalem as he passed by Judaea".³¹ Orosius adds that Gaius touched Egypt before his arrival in Syria, which is unparalleled

28 Rathbone 1993 op. cit. (n. 24), 90. Prefecture of P. Octavius: D. Faoro, *I prefetti d'Egitto da Augusto a Commodo* (Bologna 2016), 23–24.

29 Suet., *Aug.* 41.

30 Antiochus III and the temple of Bel at Elymais in Kūzestān (Susiana, southwestern Persia): Diod., 28.3; 29.15.

31 Suet., *Aug.* 93: *Gaium nepotem, quod Iudaeam praetervehens apud Hierosolyma non supplicasset, conlaudavit.*

in other sources.³² He also adds that Gaius' disrespect for the temple was believed (by the Jews) to be the cause of a disastrous famine in the year 48 of Augustus, that is, in 18/19 CE: a date when we know of a famine in Egypt and Rome, and when Tiberius expelled Jews and Egyptians from Rome, sending 4,000 Jews to fight brigands in Sardinia.³³ Apart from the obvious historical inaccuracy, Orosius shows that Gaius' offensive behaviour in 4 BCE towards the Jerusalem Temple was believed by some, perhaps not only Jews, to have been so sacrilegious that it could be deemed responsible for successive grain crises. E. Smallwood hypothesized that Augustus' praise of Gaius' decision not to pay homage to the Temple reflected a deliberate move against Archelaus, a punishment for the political unrest that took place on the death of Herod.³⁴ Conversely, E. Gruen thought that the infamous "praise" was just a private view of Augustus expressed in a letter, only in apparent contradiction with his public favourable attitude to the Jerusalem temple.³⁵ In my opinion, Augustus was certainly aware that his correspondence would be read by all, and was just trying to save Gaius from an unforgivable *gaffe* from which the young man clearly emerged as unfit to rule.

Other less known aspects of Gaius' expedition might cast light on this complex time in Augustus' Principate. A neglected passage of Dio reports that during this expedition there was a revolt in Egypt, which was suppressed by a tribune of the praetorian guard after prolonged fighting.

ἑτέρους ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπιστρατεύσαντάς σφισιν ἀπέωσαντο, οὐ πρότερόν τε ἐνέδοσαν πρὶν χιλίαρχόν τινα ἐκ τοῦ δορυφορικοῦ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς πεμφθῆναι. καὶ ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἐν χρόνῳ τὰς καταδρομὰς αὐτῶν ἐπέσχευεν, ὥστε ἐπὶ πολὺ μῆδ' ἐνα βουλευτὴν τῶν ταύτη πόλεων ἄρξαι.

They (*sc.* Gaius' troops) ejected other soldiers who attacked them from Egypt, and did not give up until a tribune of the praetorian guard was

32 Oros., 7.3.5: *Gaium nepotem suum Caesar Augustus ad ordinandas Aegypti Syriaeque provincias misit. Qui praeteriens ab Aegypto fines Palaestinae, apud Hierosolymam in templo dei tunc sancto et celebri adorare contempsit, sicut Suetonius Tranquillus refert. Quod Augustus ubi per eum conperit, pravo usus iudicio prudenter fecisse laudavit.*

33 On the expulsion of Jews and Egyptians of 19 CE, L.V. Rutgers, 'Roman policy towards the Jews. Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century CE', *Classical Antiquity* 13 (1994), 56–74. On the military service of Jews in 19 CE, S. Rocca, 'Josephus, Suetonius, and Tacitus on Military Services of the Jews of Rome: Discrimination or Norm', *Italia* 20 (2010), 7–29.

34 E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden 1976), 89, n. 99 and 117.

35 Augustan acts of official piety towards Judaism are mentioned (e.g. by Philo, *Leg.* 157, 317, *Jos.*, *BJ* 5.562, *Jos.*, *AJ* 5.562–3). Cf. E.S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge Mass. 2002), 266 n. 85.

sent to them. And he resisted to the raids of those at length, to the point that for a long time no councillor governed the cities here (*sc. in Egypt*).³⁶

This passage clearly states that the *boulai*, that is the city councils, of the Egyptian *poleis* (Naucratis, Ptolemais Euergetis, perhaps even Alexandria) were abolished as punishment for their participation in the revolt. The information that the tribune of the praetorian guard quelled this revolt may link to the evidence that in 3 CE Augustus appointed as prefect of Egypt Publius Ostorius Scapula, a brother or a relative of Q. Ostorius Scapula, who was appointed *praefectus praetorii* in 2 BCE.³⁷ We do not know the causes of this Egyptian revolt, but the fiscal pressure to supply the Roman army, as well as the political instability of the Near East due to the weakness of Gaius must have played a role. The consequence of the repression was the abolition of city councils in Egypt. This was a dramatic decision, with little echo in the sources; we do not know whether it was at this stage that Augustus suppressed the Alexandrian council, although I think that it was probably suppressed in 30 BCE.³⁸

Dio places the Egyptian revolt around 2 CE, but the exact chronology is unclear. Gaius Caesar was granted his powers for a mission to the East in 2 BCE and left Rome on 29th January 1 BCE.³⁹ There were great expectations that he could be successful against the Parthians, and that he could present himself as a new Alexander. During his consulship in 1 CE he led an 'Arabian expedition'⁴⁰ in Nabatea and in 2 CE he concluded a treaty with King Phraates V of Parthia on an island in the Euphrates, entertaining him with a lavish banquet; he then assigned the Armenian kingdom to Ariobarzanes II

36 Cass. Dio, 55.10a.1 (my translation).

37 Q. Ostorius Scapula: *PIR*² O 167. P. Ostorius Scapula *praef. Aegypti post* 3 and *ante* 10/11 CE. The *praenomen* Publius is confirmed by *SB* 16.12713 (5 CE); Faoro 2016 *op. cit.* (n. 28), 25–26.

38 The debate over the Ptolemaic or Augustan suppression of the Alexandrian *boule* has produced an immense bibliography; H.I. Bell, 'The problem of the Alexandrian senate', *Aegyptus* 12 (1932), 173–184 thought that Ptolemy Evergetes II Physcon abolished the *boule* at the end of the II century BCE; P.A. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972), vol. I, 95; vol. II, 797–798 argued that Physcon abolished the *ekklesia*, not the *boule*. For a review of the literature, see G. Geraci, *Genesi della provincia romana d'Egitto* (Bologna 1983), 180–183. I discussed this problem in a paper at the International Congress of Papyrology in Paris, August 2022 and am preparing a written version.

39 On the expedition of Gaius Caesar, see P. Herz, 'Der Aufbruch des Gaius Caesar in den Osten', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 39 (1980) 285–290; F.E. Romer, 'Gaius Caesar's Military Diplomacy in the East', *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 109 (1979), 199–214. On the repercussions of the downfall of Gaius Caesar on Tiberian historiography, A. Pistellato, 'Gaius Caesar or the Ideal Non-Princeps: A Tiberian Issue', *Arctos* 47 (2013) 199–217, esp. 201–202.

40 *CIL* 11.1420.

of Atropatene.⁴¹ A revolt took place soon hereafter – perhaps the occasion of a more general uprising – and in another meeting, this time in Artagira, Gaius was wounded.⁴² Soon after his brother Lucius died at Massilia in August 2 CE, in 3 CE Gaius became very ill and wrote to Augustus from Lycia that he wanted to give up politics. He died in February 4 CE in Lycia, and on 26 June of the same year Augustus adopted Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus. The failed expedition and premature death of Gaius constituted a political turning point and marked the beginning of a time of important reforms and of a more monarchical phase of the Augustan Principate.⁴³

5 The Deposition of Archelaus, the Census in Egypt and in Judaea, and the *aerarium militare*

Another important turning point was the deposition of Archelaus and the confiscation of his property. In the ninth year of Archelaus' ethnarchy, 4/5 CE according to *BJ* 2.167, or in the tenth year, 5/6 CE according to *AJ* 17.342, Jewish and Samaritan envoys came to see Augustus to ask for autonomy. Augustus exiled Archelaus to Vienne in Gaul and confiscated his property.⁴⁴ Archelaus' ethnarchy was added to the province of Syria, and Sulpicius Quirinius was sent to take a census in Judaea and sell the estate of Archelaus.⁴⁵ It was the famous census mentioned in Luke in the nativity story, which gave rise to riots under the leadership of Judas the Galilean in 6 CE. In Egypt there was a census, too, around 5 CE (hence, perhaps, Luke's idea that "all the world had to register"). The gymnasial class of Oxyrhynchus was registered for the first time in an *epikrisis* in 4/5, just before the census. We do not know whether the so-called "6,475 Greek *katoikoi* of the Arsinoite nome" or the *metropolitai* were registered in 4/5 as well, or, as Rowlandson thought, at a different time.⁴⁶ These census-like registrations may be compared with the contemporary Augustan

41 Cass. Dio, 55.10.19.

42 Vell., 2.102.2, Flor., 2.32 and Cass. Dio, 55.10a.6; further literature in Pistellato 2013 op. cit. (n. 39), 202.

43 A. Dalla Rosa, 'Gli anni 4–9 d.C.: riforme e crisi alla fine dell'epoca augustea', in S. Segenni, ed., *Augusto dopo il bimilenario. Un bilancio* (Firenze 2018), 84–100.

44 Jos., *AJ* 17.342; 344, 355. See Strabo, 16.2.46, Cass. Dio, 55.27. On the deposition of Archelaus as the most important turning point, see Millar 1994 op. cit. (n. 17), 44, 48.

45 Jos., *AJ* 17.355; cf. *BJ* 2.117; 2.167–168 mentions the procurator Coponius. On the census of Quirinius, Jos., *AJ* 18.1f, Luke, 2.2; *Acts* 5.37.

46 J. Rowlandson, 'Dissing the Egyptians: Legal, Ethnic, and Cultural Identities in Roman Egypt', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement 120, Creating Ethnicities in the Roman World* (2013), 213–247.

legislation at Rome imposing new marriage laws which aimed to increase demography in order to reinforce the army.⁴⁷

In 6 CE, after a widespread rebellion in the Empire, a military and a grain crisis, Augustus created the *aerarium militare* to fund the stipend of legionary soldiers, by injecting 170 million *sestertii* out of his own patrimony.⁴⁸ From Cassius Dio we learn that he obtained funds “from kings and peoples”, and that, in order to make the income more regular, he decided to introduce new taxes, the *vicesima hereditatum*, the *centesima rerum venalium* and the *vicesima libertatis*, levied on Roman citizens.⁴⁹ It is possible that among the money that Augustus allegedly took from unnamed ‘kings’ there was the former property of the Herodians. In 6 CE the annexation of the Herodian kingdom certainly brought to Rome a high revenue: from Josephus we learn that under king Agrippa I, between 41 and 44 CE, Judaea yielded an annual revenue of 12 million *drachmai* or *denarii* (48 million *sestertii*); and this was after Rome had already plundered the Herodian treasure.⁵⁰

The aforementioned gymnasials of Egypt registered in 4/5 CE may have been urged to contribute to the new military treasury, perhaps in the form of tickets paid to obtain access to the gymnasium. It is also possible that, by regulating the access to the gymnasium, Augustus was trying to stabilize the situation in Egypt after the revolt by granting this privilege to a constricted and controlled number of Graeco-Egyptians, who could help to prevent potential revolts.

The failure of Gaius Caesar’s expedition against Parthia, the end of the Herodian dynasty, and the subsequent annexation of Judaea as a Roman province had a strong impact on the situation of the Jews of Egypt. Strabo, quoted by Josephus, states that:

47 Cf. the municipal law of Troesmis, containing a *commentarius ex quo lex Papia Poppaea lata est*, dated 28th June 5 CE: W. Eck, ‘Die *Lex Troesmensium*: ein Stadtgesetz für ein *Municipium Civium Romanorum*. Publikation der erhaltenen Kapitel und Kommentar’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 200 (2016), 565–606; here Augustus anticipated the marriage provisions adopted in 9 CE; the Augustan attention to demography, as Dalla Rosa 2018, op. cit. (n. 43), 87–88 notes, was linked to a need to increase legionary recruitment. Cass. Dio, 56.3.6–7 reports a speech pronounced by Augustus in 9 CE, where the emperor states that it was a social duty to produce children in order to defend the Roman world hegemony; cfr. I. Mastrorosa, ‘I prodromi della *Lex Papia Poppaea*: la propaganda demografica di Augusto in Cassio Dione LVI, 2–9’, in P. Desideri, ed., *Antidoron. Studi in onore di Barbara Scardigli Forster* (Pisa 2007), 281–304.

48 RG 17.2.

49 Cass. Dio, 55.25. Cfr. Suet., *Aug.* 49.1–5, Cass. Dio, 52.28.1–6; 55.25.5–6; 56.40.2. For a detailed overview of the reactions to these provisions and of the following crisis lasting until 9 CE, cf. Dalla Rosa 2018 op. cit. (n. 43), 96–97.

50 Jos., *AJ* 19.352.

Territory has been set apart for a Jewish settlement, and in Alexandria a great part of the city has been allocated to this nation. And an ethnarch of their own has been installed, who governs the people and adjudicates suits and supervises contracts and ordinances, just as if he were the head of a sovereign state.⁵¹

The passage must refer to the situation before 10/11 CE, when we learn from Philo and Josephus that the last *ethnarches* died without heirs, under the prefect Aquila.⁵² Augustus did not appoint another one, but replaced him with a Jewish *gerousia* in the first year of the prefect Magius Maximus, that is, before 14/15 CE.⁵³ Josephus and Philo do not criticise this move. Josephus claims that Augustus did not prevent a new ethnarch from succeeding the old one.⁵⁴ However, this cancellation of a 'traditional structure' may be read as a cautionary measure after the revolts in the last decades of Herodian rule and the major revolts after the census of Quirinius, especially the rise of the *sicarii* of Judas the Galilean. Augustus probably tried to maintain firmer control over the Jews of Egypt in a time of crisis. After the end of the ethnarch, the most powerful post given to a Jew in Egypt became the *alabarch*: the family of Gaius Julius Alexander the alabarch, the brother of Philo and the father of Tiberius Julius Alexander, future procurator of Judaea, prefect of Egypt and praetorian prefect, *de facto* became one of the most important families in the late-Augustan and Tiberian administration of the province.

51 Strabo, *FGrHist* II, A91 F7 = Jos., *AJ* 14.117. Trans. R. Marcus, adapted. On Jewish *politeumata* in Egypt, S. Honigman, 'Politeumata and ethnicity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt', *Ancient Society* 33 (2003), 61–102. Cf. also P. Sängler, *Die ptolemäische Organisationsform politeuma. Ein Herrschaftsinstrument zugunsten jüdischer und anderer hellenischer Gemeinschaften, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 178 (Tübingen 2019).

52 Jos., *AJ* 14.117 and 19.283 mention the ethnarch, Philo, *Flacc.* 74 calls him *genarches*.

53 Philo, *Flacc.* 74. H. Box, *Philonis Alexandrini In Flaccum* (London 1939), 102 proposed that in 11/12 the ethnarch became the president of the *gerousia*, but this must be rejected as the passage shows clearly that the ethnarch ceased to exist under Aquila in 10/11 CE – the replacement with the *gerousia* must have followed immediately after the death of the ethnarch. On Magius Maximus as prefect in 14/15 CE, but probably from 12/13, Faoro 2016 op. cit. (n. 28), 28–29. On the ethnarch, Honigman 2003 op. cit. (n. 51), 71–76 and S. Honigman, 'Ethnic Minority Groups', in K. Vandorpe, ed., *A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt* (Hoboken 2019), 315–325 at 320–321.

54 Jos., *AJ* 19.280–285.

6 Conclusion

To sum up, in the later part of his reign, and especially on the death of king Herod in 4 BCE and when preparing the Eastern campaign of Gaius Caesar, Augustus introduced stricter control over the Herodian treasuries, as well as on Egyptian temple finances, which were periodically used to cover Rome's military expenses.

The settlement of 4/3 BCE, the edict of tolerance towards the Jews, the *epikrisis* and census of 4/3 BCE were directed to prepare Gaius' expedition to the East and probably also to recruit auxiliary units from among the 'Greeks' of Egypt. This settlement opened Near Eastern trade routes to Egypt through Gaza, and at the same time placed more importance on the office of the alabarch as the link between the East, the world of the Herodians, Alexandria and Italy. The petition of the Alexandrian Jew Helenos to Turranius shows that the *epikrisis* of 4/3 BCE generated frictions concerning the status of some Alexandrian Jews and their relationship with the city gymnasium.

An important landmark in the transition from an economy of war and war booty to an age of a more regular provincial taxation was the deposition of Archelaus in 4/5, followed by the provincialisation of Judaea and the census of Quirinius in 5/6; this brought about a stricter fiscal control over the Jews, both in Judaea and in the Egyptian diaspora. In 4/5 CE the gymnasia of Oxyrhynchus were registered as a privileged class; we have little information on the closed number of the 6475 Greek *katoikoi* of the Arsinoite, but they may have been registered in one of these late Augustan *epikriseis* too. Around 10/11 the ethnarchs of Egypt became extinct and were replaced by the Jewish *gerousia*. Alexandrian Jews like Philo accepted this turning point, as Augustus gave them some power to control trade routes, and guaranteed protection to the Jewish community from the attacks of their Greek neighbours.

Like the Jews, the traditional Egyptian clergy may have accepted a stricter control on the part of Rome, as a way to legitimise their survival and role in the province. The late-Augustan settlement, in sum, on the one hand tolerated the 'traditional structures', on the other reinforced the internal divisions of the provincial population into Greeks, Egyptians, and Jews, by bringing these groups and their internal administration under firm Roman control. It emerges that, behind Rome's grant of 'tolerance' and 'privileges' to Jews, Graeco-Egyptians or Egyptian temples and priests, there were interests of a military and fiscal nature, such as the consolidation of imperial revenues and the reinforcement of Rome's dominion in the Near East.