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The Greek Papyri from the Cave of the Letters

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The Greek papyri consist entirely of legal documents, extending from A.D. 110 to August 19, 132. Apart from a gap between the earliest document and the rest, we have a continuous series of at least 15 documents starting in A.D. 124.

These documents constitute the family archive of Babatha (Βαβαθά or Βαβαθάς Σίμωνος τοῦ Μαναήμου) and of her second husband Judas (Τουθάς Ἐλεαιζάρου τοῦ καὶ Χθονιώνος). While Judas was originally a resident of En-gedi where his father Eleazaros owned property, Babatha's home was at Ma(h)oza (Μαωζα Ἀραμα) in the Provincia Arabia, probably somewhere on the south-east shore of the Dead Sea, and it was here that most of the Greek documents were written. They thus shed a welcome light on certain aspects of life in that interesting but inadequately known province.

Most of the documents are fully dated by the regnal years of Hadrian. Moreover, in addition to the years of the consuls and the Roman months and days, several pieces bear dates by the era of the 'new' Provincia Arabia, (κατὰ τὸν ἀρίθμὸν τῆς νέας ἐπαρχίας Ἀραβίας) which began in A.D. 106 (not 105), the Aramaic months being rendered as usual by their Macedonian equivalents; in one case the Macedonian and the Aramaic forms appear side by side: μηνὸς Ὡπερβερεταῖον λεγομένου Ἡσσωί.

We are introduced to administrative centres like Petra, the μητρόπολις τῆς Ἀραβίας and Ραββαθωμαβα and we encounter the names of high Roman officials.

The list of the governors of Arabia, defective for the time of Hadrian, receives some welcome additions:

1 The large work of R. E. Brünnow and A. v. Domaszewski: Die Provincia Arabia, 3 vols., Strassburg, 1904, 1905, 1909, is a summa of what was known at the beginning of this century; see in particular Brünnow's chapter 'Überblick über die Geschichte der Provinz Arabia' in vol. III, pp. 249–360, esp. the 'Chronologische Tabellen', pp. 308 ff.
125: Julius Julianus, who cannot be identified with certainty with any of the known bearers of that name.

127: T. Aninius Sextius Florentinus, whose name, somewhat damaged, has long been known from his tomb at Petra where one of his titles is leg(atus) leg(ionis) VIII Hisp(anae). By skilful use of epigraphical evidence P. v. Rohden had already conjectured that he must have held office under Hadrian.

130: Haterius Nepos, either the well-known T. Haterius Nepos whose career included the prefecture of Egypt in 121–4 or possibly his son, who was consul suffectus in 134.

Our papyri make a modest contribution even to the Fasti Consulares:

128: In two documents the colleague of M. Annius Libo is given as P. Metilius Nepos II (Πουπαλίου Μετείλου Νέπωνος το β). P. Metilius Nepos is believed to have been suffectus in 91.

132: There is some uncertainty about the praenomen of Trebius Sergianus, both C. and M. being attested; one of our documents furnishes a third variant, P. (Πουπαλίου).

The following brief account will introduce the reader to the dramatis personae and provide some notion of the contents of our papyri.

In 124 there is still no indication of a union between Judas and Babatha. Each of them appears separately — Babatha only implicitly — without any mention of the other.

On May 6, 124, Judas, of En-gedi, borrows from Magonius Valens, centurio of the cohors I miliaria Thracum (ο ο ς ο ς ά ο ς π ω ρ ά ς μελιαρίας Θρακών) the sum of 60 (Corr. from 40) denarii, equaling 15 staters, against a mortgage on his father’s house, ‘of which I have the authority of hypothecating and letting from the said Elazaros’ (ης εκω επιτροπὴν δυνατον και δυμισθον παρα το αυτω Ελαξαρθου). This house is described as situated across the road from the Roman military post, the praesidium (προασίδιον) and flanked by (presumably military) tents (κατανά). The document resembles in some of its details and in general character Muraba’at No. 114.

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To the same year belongs an official extract from the *acta* of the City Council (or Senate) of Petra (αἵπο ἄκτων βουλῆς Πετραίων τῆς μητροπόλεως) which would have been quite unintelligible by itself. The extract runs 'And of Iassouos the Jew, son of Iassouos, of the κόμη of Mauza, Abδobdas Illoutha and Ioanes Eglas' (καὶ Ἰασσοῦον Ἰουδαίων νεότ. Ἰασσούον κόμης Μαωζα Ἀβδοβδας Ἰλινθα καὶ Ἰωάνης Εγλας). From other documents we know that Ιωάνης (Ἰωάνη— που τοῦ) Ἐγλα and Ἀβδοβδα Ἐλλουθα (a Nabatean) were appointed by the βουλῆ Πετραίων to be the guardians of Jesus son of Jesus, the orphan son of Babatha. The document is therefore an extract from the register of guardians; the entry consisted of the name of the ward in the genitive, followed by the names of the guardians in the nominative (Pl. 48B).

Problems of guardianship are dominant among Babatha’s legal preoccupations. To begin with, one of the two guardians — the Jew, as it happens — seems to have been remiss in his monthly payments for the food and clothing of his ward, and Babatha had to go to law for the paltry sum of two *denarii* per month. The whole arrangement, in fact, seems to have been financially unsatisfactory to her. In a document dated October 12, 125 she suggests a new arrangement, the gist of which seems to be that the money held in trust by the guardians be transferred to her against an adequate mortgage, in exchange for which she offers to pay interest to the guardians. In this document Judas appears as Babatha’s ἐπίτροπος *ad actum* (τοῦτο τοῦ προμηθατος χαρίν). He is not expressly described as her husband, but we have evidence that in one other case a husband acts as ἐπίτροπος for his wife without explicit reference to his marital status. At any rate the suggested cessation of the guardianship appears more plausible, if Babatha had re-married.

Of the documents referring to the affairs of Babatha and Judas three well-preserved pieces are worth mentioning.

On December 2, 127 Babatha, with Judas acting as her guardian, declares her property at Rabbath-Moab (ἐν Ραββαθημαβοῖς). An interesting detail is the fact that she confirms her declaration, as a matter of course, with an oath by the τύχη of the 'Lord Caesar' (δυνητι τύχην κυρίου Καίσαρος καλῆ πίστει ἀπογεγράψει). On February 20, 128 Judas receives from Babatha, now expressly described as 'his wife', a deposit (παραβάθη) of 300 *denarii*. Such deposits are suspected of being disguised marriage-gifts.

Judas had a grown-up daughter by the name of Ἱεροσεληνή. On April 5, 128 she is given in marriage to Judas ἐπικαλούμενος Κύμβερ, the son of Ana-nias, from En-gedi.
Judas did not survive his daughter’s marriage very long. By 130 Babatha was again a widow.

The death of Judas causes Babatha prolonged litigation with certain members of his family, who enter at this point and force the widow to defend her rights. These troubles come from two quarters. First of all, it appears that Babatha had a rival wife at En-gedi, by the name of Μαριάμ Βετανου. In a document of A.D. 131 the two women accuse each other of unlawful acts regarding the estate of their deceased husband.

The other adversaries are 'the orphans of Jesus the son of Eleazaros Χθονοσων i.e. of a member of Judas' family. We hear of them only as a group, not individually. They are legally represented by their guardian Βησας 'Ηροουν 'Ηνγαθνος. He contests in the name of his wards Babatha's right to a certain palm-grove (...κεκοιμων ων άνικον [sic] τοις αποικοις δραπανοις δε μία διωκατισς).

Besas is in some way associated with a Roman woman by the name of Julia Crispina, whose personality is not the least interesting feature of our papyri. She is described as επισκοπος, but the documents throw no light on the nature of her 'overseership'. Nor is the nature of her association with Besas stated in clear terms. In a document of June 19, 130 Besas and Julia Crispina, who appends her own signature in Greek,' jointly cede to Judas' daughter, here called Σελαμιον (dative), a compound (αυλή) at En-gedi 'from the estate of your grandfather Eleazaros'; and in the summer of 131 (June 7 or July 9) she appears in lieu of Besas, who is prevented by illness (διανοιας και ουκ ἰδυναύθη [π]ομανγύλε) in a legal dispute with Babatha (whose επισκοπος on this occasion is a Nabatean of Petra), in which the two women summon (παραγγελω) each other to a law-suit before the governor. Unfortunately this long and interesting document is in a tantalizingly incomplete state of preservation.

In a papyrus at Berlin published nearly 70 years ago, dated July 24, 133, a [J]ulia Crispina declares her property in the village of Dionysias in the Fayyûm. It would be a strange coincidence indeed if two women of the same Roman name had been living at about the same time in the same area. The dates would seem to suggest that after the spread of the Jewish revolt Julia Crispina broke off her Jewish connections and transferred her activities to Egypt. The question of iden-

7 Ιουλία Κρισπίνα επισκοπος ομολογώ συνεκχωρηκένε ἄκολοθόως.
8 Berliner griechische Urkunden, I, No. 53.
9 If indeed they had not extended to Egypt even before. The Egyptian name Βησας is perhaps significant.
tity could have been decided if both documents bore signatures. But what the first editor had thought was 'a rather illegible signature' was read quite differently by Wilcken.\textsuperscript{10}

The last document in our series brings us back to the orphan Jesus and his guardians. On August 19, 132 Babatha acknowledges the receipt of 6 \textit{denarii} for the three months Panemos to Gorpiaios (August to October). The guardian is Simon the hunchback (\textit{πυγρός}), the son of \textit{Ἰωάνης Γηλα}, i.e. the son of the unsatisfactory guardian appointed in 124.