

THEOPHANES OF HERMOPOLIS MAGNA ¹

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THEOPHANES of Hermopolis Magna would be no more than a name to us without the letters and other documents belonging to his archive which are in the possession of the John Rylands Library. The bulk of his archive was edited by Mr. C. H. Roberts and published in 1952 in the fourth volume of the John Rylands Papyri.² It consisted of thirty-six papyri purchased by A. S. Hunt c. 1896 and acquired by the Library in 1901 : there were two private letters, a Latin letter of introduction, a petition to the Emperors, a taxation list, itineraries, travel accounts and memoranda relating to a journey to Antioch, wine accounts and a building account connected with Theophanes' estate, and several fragments. Mr. Roberts observed that the Latin letter of introduction,³ though incomplete, was " identical in script and phrasing (except for the name of the addressee) " with a complete version in the Strasbourg collection first published in 1903,⁴ and that, apart from this Strasbourg letter and the Rylands papyri, there was no other mention of Theophanes. The deficiency was supplied by the publication in 1964 of papyrus documents from Hermopolis which were then the property of the Egypt Exploration Society but have since been purchased by the John Rylands Library⁵ ; amongst them were five more letters either addressed to Theophanes or referring to him. It is not possible to determine with any degree of certainty at what date Grenfell and Hunt acquired these papyri, except that the

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 13th of December 1967.

² *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, Vol. IV. nos. 616-51 (= P. Ryl. IV). Anyone who reads this lecture and, in particular, those parts of it which deal with the itineraries and accounts will realize the extent to which I am indebted to Mr. Roberts.

³ P. Ryl. IV. 623 (= CPL 263).

⁴ P. Lat. Argent. 1 (= CPL 262), first edited with plate by H. Bresslau in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, iii. 168-72.

⁵ *Papyri from Hermopolis*, edited by B. R. Rees (Egypt Exploration Society, 1964), nos. 2-6 (= P. Herm. Rees).

sheets from the *Oxford University Gazette* in which they had been placed after being relaxed were dated from May 1907 to October 1908, but it is not impossible that they were acquired at the same time as the papyri in the Rylands Library's archive and became separated from them during, or soon after, purchase. Since the appearance of this volume yet another letter has been identified by Dr. John Rea,¹ and it will be discussed later in this paper. It may well be that there are other documents from the archive in existence, either in the John Rylands Library or elsewhere, and the account which will be given here is subject to correction and amplification if and when they come to light.

Theophanes was a native of Hermopolis Magna in the Thebaid. He was a *scholasticus*, as we know from the two Latin letters, and is assumed by Roberts to have been employed in the public service as legal adviser to Vitalis, tentatively identified as *rationalis* on the staff of the Prefect of Egypt. The letters of introduction were given to him by this Vitalis and were addressed to important officials in Syria on the occasion of his departure for Antioch on what may have been government business c. A.D. 320. The itineraries and travel accounts relate to that journey, but the other accounts are concerned with purely domestic matters affecting Theophanes' estate at Hermopolis. One of the private letters was from two of his sons, the other written by him to Anysius, who, as Roberts thinks, "may have been a member of his household". Taken together, these Rylands papyri show Theophanes to have been an influential member of society and a man of high standing; this impression is confirmed by the letters published in *Papyri from Hermopolis*, in which he is addressed or referred to with the greatest possible respect. Clearly he occupied something akin to the position of a leader in the cultured, pagan circle to which he belonged.

What was happening in the Eastern Empire and, in particular, Egypt at this time? One thing is certain: it was a period which represented a turning-point in the history of both. The adoption of Diocletian as Emperor in A.D. 284 led to reforms

¹ I wish to thank the Egypt Exploration Society for placing this papyrus at my disposal and Professor E. G. Turner for encouraging me to edit it.

which completely transformed—to use our term, rationalized—the imperial administration. At first the new Emperor was content to appoint a Caesar to act as his deputy but in the seven years following he found the burden of government so onerous and complex that he went even further in delegating authority: from A.D. 293 an Augustus, assisted by a Caesar, was to rule in each of the two halves of the Empire with the senior Augustus, in this case Diocletian himself, retaining general control; at the same time, the unwieldy provinces which Diocletian inherited were reduced in size and grouped in larger units known as dioceses, the distinction between imperial and senatorial provinces was abolished, and civil and military power dissociated. The outlines of this reorganization were to persist for three centuries, and the new administration brought to the Empire, for a while at least, an unwonted degree of stability and efficiency. But the abdication of Diocletian and his fellow Augustus, Maximian, in A.D. 305 was followed by fresh intrigues and disputes between their successors, Galerian and Constantius, and their Caesars, Severus and Maximin. It was only after a period of confusion and open hostilities that Constantine eventually emerged in A.D. 312 as senior Augustus and by A.D. 324, after more civil war, was able to establish his supremacy over the whole Empire and begin the transformation of Byzantium into its Eastern capital, destined to give its name to a new and brilliant epoch of world history.

The ferment of these forty years was not confined to the political scene: it was also the period during which the position of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Empire became assured. After the persecutions authorized by Diocletian and Galerius the blood of the martyrs truly became the seed of the Church, and the papyri from Egypt reflect the great expansion of Christianity in the first half of the fourth century. The Eastern Caesar Maximin was, if anything, even more violent than his Augustus Galerius in his opposition to Christianity, and the latter's recantation from his deathbed in A.D. 311 brought the persecuted only momentary relief. It was not until A.D. 313 that the so-called Edict of Toleration gave them complete immunity; Licinius' failure to honour this undertaking in the

East led as much as anything to the final rupture between himself and Constantine in A.D. 324 and to his own defeat.

Constantine now moved steadily further and further away from paganism and passed many measures conferring privileges on the Christian Church, and his increasing interest in its welfare led to his assumption of the right to intervene in its doctrinal disputes. As Professor A. H. M. Jones¹ has well said, "The Church had acquired a protector, but it had also acquired a master". His final war against his fellow Augustus took on the appearance of a crusade—if the term is permissible in this connection—and his success in it encouraged him to summon and preside over the first council of the universal church which assembled at Nicaea in A.D. 325. This was the first of Constantine's many attempts to apply rational principles of administration to ecclesiastical politics, and he was to find himself, like many others after him, powerless in the face of the righteous obduracy of squabbling priests and theologians. But the doctrine of Caesaropapism survived its author to divide the Christian Church, which was never to recover from its recognition as a state religion, necessary though this may have been in order to establish its universal authority.

Such was the period of political and religious revolution in which Theophanes lived. Nor did the comparatively remote situation of Egypt entirely insulate it from the shocks experienced by the rest of the Empire. As recently as A.D. 298 Diocletian had found it necessary to visit Egypt in order to quell the revolt of L. Domitius Domitianus²; and did not two of Constantine's greatest stumbling-blocks in trying to cement ecclesiastical unity, Athanasius and Arius, both hail from Alexandria? By the reorganization of the provinces Egypt had become three provinces, instead of one, and a part of the diocese of the Orient, to whose *vicarius* its three provincial governors, a *praefectus* and two *praesides*, were responsible, while its military commander came

¹ *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, p. 125.

² On the dispute over the date of the Revolt see J. Lallemand, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte*, p. 35, n. 2., and P. Beatty Panop. 1 (edited by T. C. Skeat), *Intro.*, pp. x-xv.

under the *dux Orientis*.¹ At the same time the process of municipalization was completed and accompanied by an apparent increase in local autonomy. The Thebaid, under a *praeses*, was one of the three provinces of Egypt. Traditionally and geographically it was likely to be the least sensitive to contemporary trends, and no doubt its ordinary folk, locked between the fastnesses of its sheer rocks and arid desert, reacted but slowly to change and always remained the chief stronghold of Egyptian nationalism. Elsewhere the bastions of Hellenic culture in Egypt were being eroded both by the romanizing policy of the central government and by the solid advances of the adherents of Christianity. But we can be sure that Upper Egypt would have held out longest against the new faith and new-fashioned ways, making its own distinctive and characteristically Egyptian contribution to Christianity through its development of monastic communities. It comes as no surprise therefore to discover that Theophanes himself, though probably legal adviser to one of the weightiest officials in the imperial machine of government in Egypt, was also closely associated with worshippers of Hermes Trismegistus, traditionally the pagan lord of Hermopolis and the identifiable successor of the ancient Egyptian deity, Thoth. In Theophanes we have an excellent example of the cultured Hellenist who learned to live with the Roman government but not with the Christian Church.

So much for the general background of the period in which Theophanes lived ; we must now see whether it is possible to assign a more precise date to the documents contained in his archive. Unfortunately none of them can be dated with certainty, though it seems very likely, as Mr. Roberts has suggested, that the petition to the Emperors² on the verso of which part of the travel account is written belongs to the beginning of the period A.D. 317 to 324 : it is dated in the joint reign of Constantine and

¹ The *vicarius* was replaced by a *comes* probably in the reign of Constantine (G. Downey, *A Study of the Comites Orientis and the Consulares Syriae*, p. 9, and *A History of Antioch in Syria*, pp. 354-5). On the creation of the Egyptian provinces see Lallemand, *op. cit.* p. 44, where the view is expressed that a precise dating is not possible ; P. Beatty Panop. shows that the Thebaid was a separate province as early as September, A.D. 298, but Lower Egypt does not appear to have been subdivided until A.D. 314-15.

² P. Ryl. IV. 617.

Licinius at the time when their three sons were joint Caesars, and the same mistake is made in Crispus' name as we find in two inscriptions from A.D. 317, suggesting that this mistake and that in the name of another Caesar, Licinianus, might have been the result of an initial uncertainty as to their precise nomenclature. If this were so, our *terminus a quo* would be A.D. 317. Mr. Roberts has also suggested that the Vitalis who is the writer of both letters of introduction may well be the same Vitalis whose instructions as *rationalis* are transmitted by the *procurator* to the *exactor* of the Hermopolite nome in the Vienna papyrus published as P. Vindob. Boswinkel 14. These instructions are concerned with the government's requirements of wood for the repair of men-of-war stationed at Memphis and Babylon, which was necessitated either by the imminence of a naval war or by the losses already sustained by Licinius' fleet in its early stages.¹ Added to this is the level of prices recorded in the travel and domestic accounts of the archive, which would accord very well with a dating not long before A.D. 325. However tentative the evidence, it would therefore seem very reasonable to accept Roberts' suggestion that it belongs to the years A.D. 317 to 324, which led up to the final struggle for ascendancy between Constantine and Licinius. Roberts goes further than this and suggests that Theophanes' journey may have been connected with the financial preparations for the war, but we should be wise to postpone consideration of this suggestion until we have examined the documents for other possible reasons.

The course of this journey can be worked out from the itinerary which Theophanes had drawn up for his use and which survives in part, supplemented by the topographical notes in his accounts.² After a preliminary excursion to Babylon and thence to Alexandria, the journey proper began at Niciopolis, and the first stage was from Niciopolis to Athribis, where he arrived on 6 April, proceeding in an east-north-easterly direction via Leontopolis, Thmuis and Tanis and joining the main Babylon-Pelusium road at Heracleopolis Parva on the "great road" of the Antonine itinerary. From there he made for Pelusium,

¹ See C. H. Roberts, "A Footnote to the Civil War of A.D. 324", in *JEA*, xxxi (1945), 113.

² P. Ryl. IV. 627-38.

Gaza and Ascalon along the coast, inland to Lydda (Diospolis), back to the coast at Caesarea, thence up through Tyre, Sarepta, Sidon, Beirut, Byblus, Tripolis, Arcae (Orthosia), Antaradus, Balanea, Laodicea and finally Antioch, where he arrived on 2 May. In all there were 25 stages in the journey, involving an average day's travelling of between 31 and 32 miles, according to the distances recorded in the accounts. The shortest day's journeys were from Pentaschoenum to Casium on the 8th day and from Tripolis to Arcae on the 21st, the longest 64 miles on the last day. Two and a half months were spent in Antioch, for which we have itemized daily accounts, and the return journey began on 20 July. By 5 August Theophanes was back in Pelusium and by the 16th in Heliopolis. The accounts for the return journey are more confused, consisting of fair copies and drafts which sometimes overlap and occasionally seem to disagree with each other, and the itinerary stops at the Egyptian border. The only mention of the mode of transport is at Babylon on the outward journey, where a payment is made to "the sailors leaving for Hermopolis"; one assumes that he travelled as far as there by boat, afterwards by government post.

The accounts are detailed and precise, beginning with an inventory of wardrobe and equipment for the journey—tunics, cloaks, veils, mantles, loin-cloths, towels, face-cloths, napkins, bandages; mattresses, counterpanes, blankets, cushions, rugs, carpets, footstools; boots, breeches; lamps of all kinds; wine, honey, olive oil, meat, bread, cheese, vinegar, sauce, salt fish, lentils, vegetables, artichokes, eggs, fruit. Theophanes clearly was not the kind of man to travel light if it meant travelling hard, and his provision of clothes and other items was at least adequate. Similarly, in the course of the journey, though by no means extravagant, he does not seem to have stinted himself when stores were available, the main items of expenditure being for wine, food, baths, soap and papyrus, while at Ascalon he seems to have bought a gilded statuette in the temple and to have paid for entry to a theatre and music-hall. The diet becomes more varied, as one would expect, in Syria, when figs, apricots, damsons, mulberries, and clingstone peaches appear in the accounts. Perhaps the oddest items are water from snow purchased at

Byblus and what appears to have been a wine jar in the shape of Silenus. The average expenditure is between 2000 and 3000 drachmae a day with 900 a day for the slaves, and the daily totals are added up at the end of each five-day week. Theophanes' retinue is not listed but there are several references to Silvanus, elsewhere in the archive described as his steward, Horus, son of Bellus, and others who may have been slaves, for example, Hermes, Heracleon, Dion and Alexander. A man named Eudaemon and his party are mentioned several times, twice in connection with the *rationalis*, and may well have been detailed to escort Theophanes on the outward journey.

Theophanes did a limited amount of entertaining on his travels and during his stay at Antioch—though perhaps this is an item which we should not expect to find over-emphasized in the accounts: there is mention of Antoninus and his party at Antioch, of Eulogius and his party and Theon, *officialis* and *ὀξυγράφος* throughout, and of Hermodorus and his party on the return journey. Antoninus may well have been another official encountered at Antioch, as he does not appear elsewhere in the archive. Hermodorus, on the other hand, does appear as the writer of P. Herm. Rees 5 and was clearly an intimate friend: he addresses Theophanes as "brother" and gives him news on his travels of his sons, their sisters and mothers, and of his whole household. In fact, we owe all the letters relating to Theophanes to the travels which he undertook. P. Herm. Rees 6, which is by the same hand as P. Ryl. 624, is addressed to Theophanes by another friend, Besodorus, and speaks of the pleasure given by his short stay "in the city", probably Alexandria, and of the enquiries he makes of all strangers about him; the journey referred to is surely that to Antioch, as a hope is expressed for Theophanes' return to his native country and great interest is shown in the business which he has gone to transact and about which Besodorus seems at one time to have "raised a conspicuous clamour". P. Herm. Rees 4 is yet another letter addressed to Theophanes by his friends, this time John and Leon, who pray for his safe and successful return, and also mention his meeting with a man named Dionysius at Athribis—and we cannot help recalling that Athribis was on the first stage of the outward

journey. Anatolius, the writer of P. Herm. Rees 3, tells Ambrosius of his good fortune in falling in with Theophanes and of this communication which Theophanes is to bring for him. The same Anatolius wrote P. Herm. Rees 2 to another friend, Sarpion, promising to come to visit him as soon as his other commitments, mainly of a domestic and religious nature, permit, and also referring to a visit from Theophanes, who is probably again the courier, or intended courier, of the letter. Indeed, the presence in the archive of these two letters from Anatolius to his friends suggests the possibility that for some reason or other they failed to reach their destination. But then, Theophanes seems rather to have hoarded letters: he kept the letters of introduction, for instance, yet does not seem to have had the need to use them. What a blessing that incinerators had not yet been invented!

All these letters refer to the travels of Theophanes, and it is reasonably certain that it is the same journey, that to Antioch and back, which is referred to. One of the remaining letters in the Rylands collection¹ tends to confirm this suggestion: it is addressed to Theophanes by his sons, Hephaestion and Horigenes, whom he has taken to Alexandria (and left there) before setting out himself for Antioch. The hand is the same as that in which Besodorus' letter, also from Alexandria, was written, and here too, as in that letter, the scribe uses breathings, accents and punctuation to a degree almost unparalleled in papyrus letters. It is conceivable that both letters were written by the boys' tutor, who took some pride in this demonstration of the high standard of education which he himself had attained. Though Besodorus may well have been in some way responsible for the care and supervision of the two young men while they were at Alexandria, he was probably not their tutor himself, as the second hand conveying the greetings in his letter is much more likely to have been his own and is very different from the practised, professional hand in which the main body of the letter is written; in any case, the sentiments expressed are those of a friend, not of a servant. The last letter in the Rylands collection² is from Theophanes himself to Anysius; it would be

¹ P. Ryl. IV. 624.

² P. Ryl. IV. 625.

tempting to see this as a letter from father to son, since Anysius and Aphthonius are both mentioned as the "sons" of Theophanes in P. Herm. Rees 5, granted the correction made to line 16 of the text. But the form of greeting and salutation employed is against this suggestion, if Roberts' readings and supplements are correct. In this letter Theophanes also mentions his own father, Dionysius.

The picture which now emerges is something like this: c. A.D. 320 Theophanes had occasion to travel to Antioch, capital of the province of Syria and headquarters of the diocese of the Orient. Armed with letters of introduction in Latin supplied by Vitalis, who was probably the *rationalis*, to high officials in Syria, he took two of his sons with him but left them in the care of one of his friends, Besodorus, at Alexandria before setting out on his long journey. For the whole of his journey and his stay of over two months at Antioch he required his steward to keep detailed accounts of expenditure. While at Antioch he mixed socially with Antoninus and others, and, before his departure, Hermodorus, the friend who had already written to him during his stay at Antioch, joined him and travelled back with him to Egypt. During his journey he received other letters—from Besodorus, Leon and John, Hephaestion and Horigenes—and also met Anatolius who gave him letters to deliver to Ambrosius, Sarapion and Nilus, letters which he was apparently prevented from delivering; he himself wrote to Anysius, who may have been a member of his household, if not another son. It would be fair to conclude that all these documents have an equal claim to belong to the archive of Theophanes and that their separation was indeed simply the result of the hazards of discovery and sale. To this conclusion the last batch of documents from the archive in the Rylands collection¹ would seem to lend further support, as they are domestic accounts and memoranda connected not with his travels but with the day-to-day running of his estate: after his return to Hermopolis he filed away his travel accounts and the letters received or entrusted to him on his journey along with the records of his domestic expenditure—only for them to be exposed to the public gaze 1600 years later. The domestic

¹ P. Ryl. IV. 640-9.

accounts again show that Theophanes was a man of some standing and substance : his establishment is a large one, and it is not unexpected that some names already met with in the travel accounts and letters recur here, even allowing for the fact that some of them were common at the time—for example, that of Aphthonius, that of Dion, one of Theophanes' retinue on the Antioch journey, that of Silvanus, his steward, who also accompanied him to Antioch. The items of domestic expenditure are of the kind which one would normally expect to find in accounts relating to a large estate ; one less normal payment is for acrobats apparently on the occasion of a visit by the strategus.

Theophanes, then, was the possessor of a fair-sized estate and ample means, he was highly respected by his friends and held in high enough regard by the chief officials of Egypt to be given letters of introduction to other officials in Syria. He was also a member of a circle priding itself on its standards of education and culture and on its pagan associations. Of the letter sent to him by his sons when they were at Alexandria Roberts writes, "As a combination of a genuine private letter and an essay on filial piety it is unique among the papyri". Beginning with a brief reference to the rigours of the journey to Alexandria, they express deep appreciation of the honour their father has done them in bringing them and making it possible for them to see things for themselves, and add that they have made enquiries about his affairs after his departure : "for we hold this to be an action which takes pride of place over all others, taught as we are by natural law to care above anyone else for a good father, from whom springs too our high reputation in the city. . . ." Already the courtly phrases of Byzantine epistolography are being shaped by the writer of this letter, very likely the boys' tutor in the employ of Besodorus. But, unlike most letters of the later Byzantine period, this one still seems to retain some trace of humanity and sincere affection, even if, like most of them, it conveys absolutely no news at all. Already the letter is becoming less and less a means of providing information and news, and more and more of a kind of emotional symbol, employing words, phrases and formulae as if to create a mental impression of a personal attitude, be it appreciation and gratitude as here, or

regret at absence, or disappointment, or criticism. And along with the eloquence of form and expression go elegance of handwriting and decoration: the enlarged capital *omicron* in line 3, the breathings, accents and punctuation, the *iota* adscripts, the general impression of a professional scribe who was taking a few minutes off from his more accustomed task of transcribing the treasures of Greek literature. And the letter from Besodorus by the same hand¹ is similarly adorned, with an occasional diaeresis as well for good measure. The tone is set from the start: "I had in very truth a longing, pressing heavily on my mind, which by the mere sight of you caused me to be filled with pleasure and to find my heart's desire on every occasion when the brightness of your presence appeared in the city. But now this short period of your absence has made the sight of you more desirable to us who pray to see you, since even time spent in sleep, very short though it is, seems long and immeasurable to those who love and yearn." And so on, piling compliment upon compliment until the recipient sinks back replete with confidence in his correspondent's good will—and no wiser than when he started. The letter of Hermodorus to Theophanes² is a good example: "I am giving myself joy in writing to you, and I pray that my letter be given to you when you are in good health and spirits. It is reasonable that you also, when you are writing to others, remember us too, so that we may rejoice all the more, knowing from what you write of your safety and good health, for which we pray. And may it be possible for us soon to enjoy the greatest of good cheer over you, which we pray and hope to receive from the favour of the omnipotent god, getting you back strong in spirit and body and having fared well! Be of good heart too in the matter of your sons Anysius and Aphthonius, for they are in good health and do what is needed, attending at once to their business and to their public services, and also in good health are their sisters with their mother and all in your house. Many salutations from your sister and our children and all in our house. I pray for your good health for many a year, lord brother, and may we soon get you back in good spirits in all respects." The phraseology of this letter suggests that Hermodorus may have

¹ P. Herm. Rees 6.

² P. Herm. Rees 5.

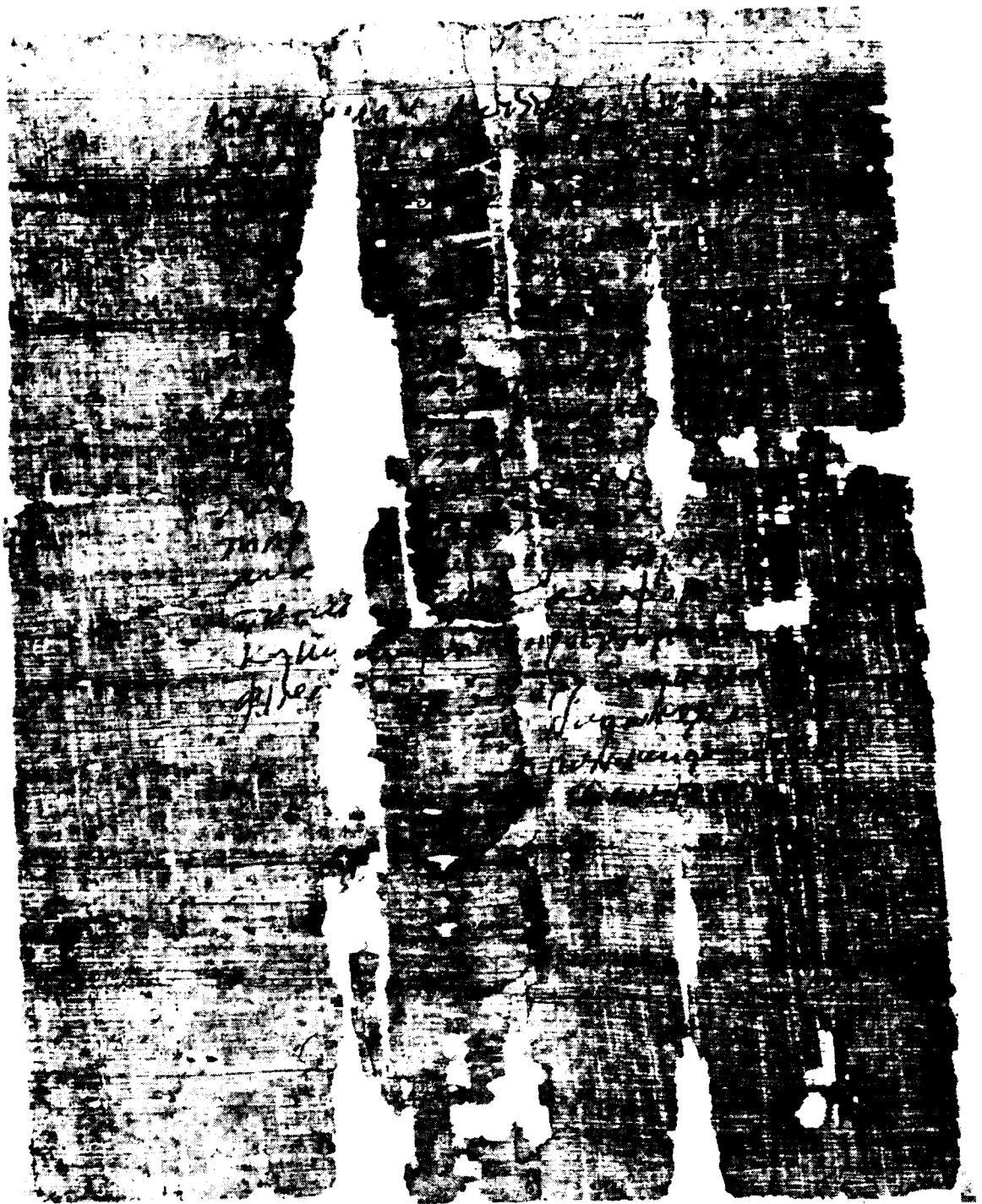
been more than just a friend to Theophanes, even possibly his brother-in-law, but the use of such terms as "brother" and "sister" is so common in letters of this period that it does not provide a sure criterion of family relationship.

The letters of Anatolius¹ are in much the same vein, if not quite so poetic; they are specially worthy of note for their tone of religiosity, prompting the rather unkind suggestion that Anatolius' connection with the cult of Hermes Trismegistus, paraded as it is on several occasions, is a professional one. The first letter is mainly an explanation of his continued absence from his friend Sarapion, whom he describes as "my champion and among champions most admirable", the second a briefer note of greeting to inform another friend, Ambrosius, whom he describes as "all-wise . . . the champion of the wisdom of the Greeks", of the writer's good fortune in meeting Theophanes.

The third letter, from Anatolius to Nilus, is written in the same hand as the other two, though it tends to become more cursive in a number of places, perhaps because this was the last of the batch to be written before the departure of Theophanes, who was to deliver it; in this connection we must also note the possibility that the only spelling mistake Anatolius commits in all three letters may occur in this one, again a hint of haste perhaps. The papyrus has a *collema* in the middle which has been very badly made and clearly caused the writer much embarrassment, in that he is not sure whether he ought to try to write at the point of juncture or avoid it altogether. There are also large holes running roughly parallel to each other for the length of the papyrus and following the direction of the folds. It is not an easy papyrus to read for these reasons, and there are many passages which remain unsatisfactory, as there are in the other two, while the highly individual, literary style of the writer does not help us to solve the problems of decipherment and supplementation which are raised. The letter's general sense is, however, clear, and it is now published for the first time with the permission of the Egypt Exploration Society.²

¹ P. Herm. Rees 2, 3.

² I wish to acknowledge my great debt to Dr. John Rea, Mr. Peter Parsons and Dr. J. D. Thomas for the help which they have given me in editing this



Letter of Anatolius to his brother Nilus.

25.2 × 19.5 cm.

Κυρίῳ μου ἀδελφῶι Νείλωι

Ἐνατ[όλι]ος χαίρειν.

καὶ δι[α] τίνος ἦν εἰκός σοι γρά—

φειν [ώς] διὰ τοῦ κυρίου μου

5 πάτ[ρω]νος Θεοφάνους εἰς Ἄλε—

ξαν[δρεί]αν ἀποδημοῦντος; πέ—

πεισό [μοι γ]ὰρ εἰ β[ούλ]η ὅτι ὁ [[μου]] πατέρ

μου [ἔτι τῆ]ς αὐτῆς προ[θ]έσεως

ἔχετ[αι ὡ]ς σε βουλόμενος ἦκειν.

10 ἐπε[ί]χε δὲ αὐτὸν τὸ συμ[β]εβηκός

ἀνθρ[ώπι]νον τῆ ἀδελφ[ῆ] αὐτοῦ

τῆ προ[ε]β[υ]τέρα. μετὰ δὲ τὴν κηδί—

αν α[ὐτ]ῆς ἦξει ἑλεύσεται. προσαγόρευε

τὰς κυρίας μου ἀδελφὰς Νειλογεν[ί]αν

15 καὶ Κομασίαν. προσαγόρευε πᾶν ὅτι μοι

φίλον. ἐρρώσθαί σε θεοῖς

πᾶσιν εὐχομαι

πανοικησία τῶν

ιερέων τὸ ἀγλαΐσμα.

Translation :

“ To my lord brother Nilus, Anatolius, greetings. And through whom would it be so natural to write to you as through my lord and patron Theophanes, leaving town for Alexandria? For I want you please (?) to believe me when I say that my father still holds to his original intention in wanting to come to you but was prevented by the fact that his elder sister met the fate of all humanity. But he will come after her obsequies. Salute my lady sisters Nilogenia and Comasia. Salute all who love me. I pray to all the gods that you, the glory of the priests, may enjoy good health along with your whole house.”

Notes :

4. [ώς] : this fits the lacuna rather better than the alternative [ῆ] and seems to me to be more idiomatic ; reading [ῆ] one would supply μάλλον with εἰκός.

6, 7. The delayed γάρ is somewhat unexpected but πέπεισμαι does not seem to be possible.

εἰ β[ούλ]η : possible but by no means certain ; εἰδώς and εἰσχυρῶς have also been considered but the former is an unlikely reading and the latter too long nor is εἰ for ι found elsewhere in Anatolius' letters except for P. Herm. Rees 2, 7—ἀφείξεως.

7, 8. Also possible is ὁ [[μου]] Πατερμου[θ]ις τῆ]ς; this would have the advantage of removing the error in spelling, which, even allowing for haste, is not what

papyrus : it is to them that the major share of the credit for its decipherment belongs, but they bear no responsibility for the final version of the text.

one expects to see in Anatolius. The traces, albeit faint, of *μου* and the use of the definite article lead me to prefer the suggested text nevertheless.

10. *ἐπέ[σχε* is also possible but *ἐπέ[χει* would leave the hasta of *χ* without trace. If the reading adopted is correct, we may emend P. Herm Rees 2, 7 to read *[ἐ]πεῖχον*.

12. *κηδί*—: we should expect *κηδεῖ*—in Anatolius, and this is not entirely impossible.

13. *ἔλεύεται*: the writer must have felt that it was preferable to *ἤξει* but forgot to erase the latter. The interlinear insertion is a nice comment on his sense of linguistic fitness.

15. *Κωμμασίαν*: although the masculine form is quite common, there does not seem to be another example of the feminine in papyri, but the reading is a reasonably good one.

15, 16. *πᾶν ὅτι κτλ.*: if correct, this is a literary refinement, entirely in keeping with the style of the writer, on the formula *πάντας τοὺς με φιλοῦντας*.

19. *τὸ ἀγλαῖσμα*: an odd term but not unexpected in the correspondence of Theophanes' circle of friends; cf. P. Herm. Rees 3, 4-5.

This letter is very similar in style and phraseology to the other two letters of Anatolius but it adds nothing to our knowledge of Theophanes. The farewell salutation is undeniably pagan, especially if the reading suggested for the last two words is correct; indeed, one of the most interesting and significant features of the correspondence contained in the archives is its pagan associations. The cult of Hermes Trismegistus, twice referred to by Anatolius, is by no means the sole indication of paganism: all three letters of Anatolius end with pagan greetings invoking the blessings of the gods on the addressee, and the phraseology has a pagan flavour in many places—phrases, for example, like “it was one of the gods who in malice sent these (illnesses) upon me”, “if the gods co-operate and make it possible”, and “it is the work of the gods to provide the means”. But at the same time it would be difficult to distinguish some of these pagan letters from Christian without a knowledge of their context. Phrases like “if god assists you in every action”, “many honours are reserved for good men by god”, and “the would I render thanks to the highest god”, are in this respect ambiguous. The best example of this ambiguity is the letter of John and Leon: “To Theophanes, our beloved brother, John and Leon greetings. We thought it necessary to greet you by letter, praying that the letter be given to you when you are in

good health and in good cheer in all respects. And we pray to get you back soon in prosperity. All the brothers who are with us salute you and so does Dionysius from Attinu, who met you at Athribis. We pray for your good health for many a year. To Theophanes, our beloved brother, John and Leon." If we could remove this letter from its known context and forget all we know about Theophanes and his friends, we might well imagine ourselves back in the world of Paul and his Epistles. This difficulty of deciding whether a letter is pagan or Christian purely on the basis of its language and sentiments has often been remarked on in connection with papyri from the fourth century A.D. : the religious formulae of pagan and Christian letters are so similar that it is always dangerous to identify them firmly as one or the other without contextual support, and even the apparent use of *nomina sacra* is sometimes not as conclusive evidence of Christian affiliations as might at first appear.

That Theophanes should be a pagan is not at all unexpected. It is reasonable to accept the view that it was not until after the imperial government's official recognition of Christianity that it began to make a real impact on the educated classes : patronage succeeded where theology had failed. At the same time it is also extremely probable that Christianity's appeal to the lower classes was much more successful in the cities and large towns than in the countryside, where the grip of paganism remained strong.¹ Theophanes was both well-educated and from a rural district, so that it would be strange indeed if he had turned out to be a Christian convert. His close association with paganism, the obvious respect in which he was held by his pagan friends as a defender of their faith, the reference by his sons to " those who are of another persuasion " and by Besodorus to " matters about which he had raised a conspicuous clamour "—these are perhaps pointers to the direction in which we ought to look for at least part of the motivation for a journey which involved almost two months of travelling and a stay of over two months in a distant city. Roberts' view, already mentioned, that Theophanes was

¹ See, for example, A. H. M. Jones, " The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity ", in *Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, edited by A. Momigliano, pp. 17 ff.

engaged in government service possibly connected with financial preparations for the coming clash with Constantine, is based on two assumptions : that Theophanes was a *scholasticus* working for the imperial administration and that the archive can be dated to the years A.D. 317-324 ; it is supported by the fact that public documents of the kind that might well be expected to have come into his possession only in the course of official duties were used by him as scrap for his own travel accounts and itineraries, and by the probability that the Vitalis of the letters of introduction was the same man as the *rationalis* who was demanding timber supplies for repairs to men-of-war just before the final outbreak of hostilities in A.D. 323-4. The second of these assumptions is very likely to be near the mark, since all the evidence seems to point to a date not much later than A.D. 320 for Theophanes' journey ; the first is also probable, since the *scholasticus* is known to have been closely associated with the *rationalis* in the fourth century, and such a development could well have been one of the effects of the administrative reforms of Diocletian. But here one must enter a caveat : there is, so far as I have been able to discover, no documentary evidence of a *scholasticus* in government service until considerably later than A.D. 320. In addition, it is not a little strange that a briefing on financial preparations should have taken two and a half months, if this were the sole purpose of the visit to Antioch.

In this connection it may be worth while to subject the Latin letters of introduction to a rather closer inspection than they have as yet received. Two phrases are particularly interesting in lines 8 and 9, which read as follows :

qui ex suggestione domini mei fratris nostri Filippi usque ad officium domini mei Dyscoli uexationem itineris quodammodo sine ratione sustinere uidetur.

Professor A. H. M. Jones has collected examples¹ of the phrase " ex suggestione " which seem to indicate that the reference is to a proposal or report of an inferior to his superior. That being so, in this case there would be two possibilities at least : either Philip was Prefect of Egypt and had made a report to his superior, the *vicarius Orientis*, or Philip was *praeses* of the Thebaid

¹ In *The Later Roman Empire*, iii. 69-70.

and had made a report to the Prefect, who held a position of seniority in relation to the two *praesides*; as a result of something contained in this report Theophanes decided to undertake the journey to Antioch and to the official headquarters of the Orient. The second phrase "sine ratione" is more difficult: clearly it can hardly mean "without reason" or "without due consideration",¹ even with the qualification "quodammodo" ("in some measure"), unless Vitalis wished to throw some doubt on the wisdom of the report which Philip had submitted and of the intentions of Theophanes. Unfortunately *ratio* does not seem to bear a technical sense elsewhere, for example, of "a formal commission" or "an official brief".² If it could bear this sense, it would tempt one to suggest that an official who "appears to be undertaking an arduous journey in some measure without a formal commission" might well be doing so because his motives were no more than semi-official or even of a private nature and that, the purpose of his mission not being strictly official, letters of introduction were needed by way of justification and to provide safe conduct.

What I am venturing to suggest is that the purpose of Theophanes' visit might not be entirely unconnected with his standing in educated pagan circles and the need for someone to present the complaints of pagans in Egypt to the highest authority. After all, the bitter struggle between paganism and Christianity was far from resolved in the Eastern half of the Empire and was soon to lead to the final break between the two Emperors. Quite recently, probably in A.D. 313, Theotecnus, *curator* of Antioch, had organized an embassy to the Emperor Maximin to petition for the banishment of the Christians from the city and its territory, and we may well believe that such a device was employed elsewhere, too, in order to prosecute the case against the encroaching

¹ Cf. W. Schubart, *Ein Jahrtausend am Nil*, p. 131, "gewissermassen ohne Bedenken".

² The use of *ratio* in imperial administration, however, as "account" or "office" is not dissimilar; the same applies to *λόγος* in the administrative terminology of Roman and Byzantine Egypt, and in one letter, dated by the editor to the sixth or seventh century, P. Grenf. I. 64, the Greek word is used in a sense which is close to that of an "official instruction". (Ironically, this letter is addressed to a *comes* named Anatolius and refers to a Theophanes!)

Christians.¹ If the archive could be dated shortly after the defeat of Licinius, when the victory of Constantine had further weakened the position of paganism, it would be useful evidence for pagan reaction to the fresh advances of Christianity. But even if we insist, as I think we must, that it be dated rather earlier, we should not preclude the possibility that a report made by one of his superiors gave Theophanes an opportunity to defend and further the interests of paganism and Hellenism at the headquarters of the Orient at Antioch, itself a traditional stronghold of both. Despite its historical connections with Christianity it had never ceased to be regarded as a major centre of Hellenism and of education in the Hellenic tradition and had been given an increasingly important part in the imperial organization by the establishment of the Tetrarchy; Diocletian had built a royal palace there as well as other important buildings, and he also found various ways of interesting himself in the Olympic Games of Antioch, for example, by constructing or reconstructing a shrine of Olympian Zeus and establishing a shrine of Nemesis in the stadium, on one occasion even serving as Alytarch himself.² And, in later times, it was Antioch that Julian looked on as one of the main centres for his activities in the cause of paganism's rehabilitation. If there was a city to which pagan pilgrims might turn as a kind of Mecca in the Eastern Empire, it was surely none other than Antioch. The Olympic Games held there would have been by themselves a sufficient attraction for anyone as steeped in pagan and Hellenic tradition as Theophanes. Normally they were held in the months of July and August in leap years and lasted up to forty-five days, and there are known celebrations in A.D. 300 and 326 in this period. But Theophanes left for home on 20 July, and there is no evidence which would enable us to connect the length of his stay with attendance at the Games in a year between A.D. 317 and 324.

Perhaps we may permit ourselves one further speculation. It arises from the reference of Besodorus to complaints which he had raised, from the fact that Theophanes was a *scholasticus* and

¹ See G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria*, pp. 333-4, nn. 70-71. (On p. 336 and in the Index "Theophanus" should, of course, be corrected.)

² *Ibid.* pp. 317 ff.

thus eminently suited to the task of dealing with complaints, appeals and petitions, and from the presence in his archive of one whole, and five fragmentary, petitions,¹ one of which was from the *archiprophetes* of Alexandria. I have already shown elsewhere² reasonable grounds for holding that the office of *defensor civitatis* existed in Egypt in the early fourth century A.D. long before the constitution³ by which Valentinian I introduced it in Illyricum (probably in A.D. 368), since there are several fourth-century papyri referring to it before that date and others even earlier which mention a *σύνδικος* or *ἑκδικος*. It is also possible that this *defensor civitatis* developed as a result of, or in connection with, the municipal reforms of Diocletian and that the reference to the office in a constitution of A.D. 319⁴ need not therefore be dismissed as a clerical error. It is not entirely inconceivable that Theophanes himself was undertaking the journey to Antioch in order to present, either as *defensor* or in an analogous, though not strictly defined, role, certain complaints which had been voiced by his pagan and Hellenic friends about their treatment, whether as a result of alleged injustices in the matter of personal rights or property or perhaps, in the case of the *archiprophetes*, of concessions being made to the adherents of Christianity.⁵ (The name of the *archiprophetes* has unfortunately not survived: it would not surprise me if it were Besodorus!)

But all this is pure hypothesis, and the most that I can claim is to have thrown up a few suggestions in addition to that made by Roberts as to the reason for the long journey and the equally long stay in Antioch. The problem remains to be solved. We might be nearer a solution if only Theophanes' friends had used their letters for conveying news and information instead of greetings. As it is, we are forced to attempt to explain *incerta per incertiora*.

¹ P. Ryl. IV. 617-22.

² "The *Defensor Civitatis* in Egypt" in *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*, vi (1952), 72 ff.

³ Cod. Theod. I. 29. 1.

⁴ Cod. Just. VI. 1. 5.

⁵ On the persistence and duration of pagan resistance to Christianity in Egypt and the part played in it by Alexandria and Upper Egypt see R. Rémondon, "L'Égypte et la suprême résistance au christianisme (V^e-VII^e siècles)", in *BIAFO*, li (1952), 63-78.