

ON THE QUESTION OF THE ALEXANDRIAN SENATE IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT.

By

LUTFY ABDUL-WAHID YEHYA

No decisive evidence has yet come to light on the much debated question of the Alexandrian senate. However, in view of the many controversial opinions which appeared on various points related to it, a reassessment and fresh interpretation of the evidence at hand might not fail to present the matter in a new light and to clarify some of its details.

The question falls broadly in two parts. The first is whether Alexandria had a senate at all when it was first founded and the second is, if it did have one, whether that senate (which was not in existence from the time of the Roman conquest until the reign of Septimius Severus) was abolished by Octavian or disappeared sometime during the Ptolemaic rule.

The first half of the query was started by Mommsen who declared that neither Alexandria nor Ptolemais could have possessed any deliberative assemblies, whether an *ἐκκλησία* or a *βουλή*, since such constitutional organs which were the mainstay of autonomous rule in Greek cities, were simply incompatible with a monarchy so firmly based on divine rule as that of the Ptolemies¹.

This assertion which was followed by Bouché-Léclercq and Tarn², was partly shaken by the discovery in Egypt, in 1896³, of three decrees passed by the senate and assembly of Ptolemais and the matter is now practically settled to the advantage of those opposing this view after the

1. Mommsen, *Römische Gesch.* vol. V p. 557.

2. Bouché-Léclercq, *Hist. des Lagides* vol. III pp. 152 ff.; Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation* (3rd. ed.) p. 185.

3. Dittenberger, *O.G.I.* I, 47, 8, 9.

discovery of the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians in which he refers to their claim that they had a senate under their old Kings¹. However, in view of the 1952 edition of Tarn's *Hellenistic Civilisation* in which the existence of such a senate is still denied, a brief reexamination of the claim of the Alexandrians and a quick review of the opinions expressed round it might not be out of order.

The claim of the Alexandrians, it could be said, might not be true, since Claudius refers to it by simply saying *οὐκ ἔχουσιν λέγειν*. But the Alexandrians could not have told such a flagrant lie. First, this would stand against their interests in the long run as it would soon be discovered by Claudius, whether through his own knowledge or otherwise. Secondly, he would have simply faced them with their lie and would not have been bound to resort to the many precautions which he took in his reply when he said that it was not an ordinary request and should therefore be examined in the light of his own interests and of what was good for the city and finally that he would entrust this inquiry to his prefect Aemilius Rectus².

Thus it was not that he did not know, but rather that he had nothing to say on the matter of their having had a senate under their old Kings. He chose to ignore those kings and their period and was going to be bound only by the precedent of the Roman emperors, especially Augustus, whose policy he followed and respected. And what he decided to ignore must have been to the advantage of the Alexandrians, otherwise his reply to them would have been that they were trying to get from him what their own kings never gave them.

Besides, providing Alexandria with a senate would not have stood in the way of a monarchical centralised rule. Greek cities have kept their senates and assemblies under similar conditions when they passed under Macedonian hegemony after Chaeronea and the formation of the Hellenic Union and even after Alexander showed them the strong hand. And it would be a weak argument to say that Alexandria was a new foundation and would therefore not confront Alexander or the Hellenistic rulers with the obligation of recognising an already existing

1. Bell, (P. Lond.) *Jews and Christians in Egypt, 1924*: See Hunt and Edgar, *Select Papyri*, II, no. 212, p. 84, ll. 66-72.

2. Jouguet, *Les Assemblées d'Alexandrie à l'Époque Ptolémétique*, (B)ull. de la (S)oc. d'(A)rch. d'(A)lexandrie, (1948) pp. 73 ff.

constitutional organ as was the case in the cities which were comprised in the Hellenic Union, since other cities also founded in the Hellenistic period, such as Antioch, were provided with such organs.

Again, the first Hellenistic rulers tried their best to attract the Greeks to their kingdoms and to tempt them to settle there permanently. In the case of the Ptolemies those Greeks would form the backbone of their striking force in the battlefield while their experience in matters of administration and economical planning would be an indispensable element. Under such circumstances, a primary condition would be to provide a Greek atmosphere to those immigrants — in which case the creation of deliberative assemblies, if they had not already been provided by Alexander, would be a foregone conclusion.

In view of these considerations although Alexandria belonged, in reality, to a new type of cities different from the old *πόλεις*, to use Turn's description,¹ the existence of a Senate in that city, from the time of its foundation, or at least from the beginning of the Ptolemaic rule should not be a matter of question. The question should be rather how much authority was vested in it in order to provide the autonomous form which would satisfy the sentiments of the immigrant Greeks who longed for a city-state atmosphere, without standing in the way of the centralised system of government which the Ptolemies chose to adopt.

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After this brief survey it would be reasonable to start my treatment of the subject with the assumption that the Alexandrian Senate did exist at the beginning of the Ptolemaic rule. The problem now is the time of its disappearance: whether this happened under Augustus, at the beginning of Roman rule, as part of the changeover to the new era or whether it took place at an earlier date. The method I shall follow will be, first, to reexamine the literary and documentary evidence known to us on the subject and then to discuss some social and economic circumstances which prevailed in Egypt towards the middle of the Ptolemaic period and which were likely to have a bearing on our question.

1. *Op. cit.* p. 185.

I will start with the inscription published by E. Breccia and restored by Plaumann'. The restoration, which is very plausible, records a decision passed by the demos and senate of Alexandria and reads as follows :

'Εφ' ἱερῶς Διατέλους Ἰε[.....]
 [Ἀπολλοδώρου γραμματέως τῆς βουλῆς (?)]
 [Πρωτά]νεων τῶν τῶν Λωσ[.....]
 [.....τρ] ἔτη φθίναντος [ἔδοξε τῆ βου-]
 5 [λῆι καὶ τῶι] δῆμῳ· πρωτά[νεων γνώμη·]
 [Ἐπειδὴ].....]μιος Δωριέ[ως.....]
 [ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλ?] ὅτιμος ἐ[γένετο περὶ]
 [τῆν πόλιν τῶν Ἀλεξανδ?] μέων [.....]
 [.....] Δ. [.....]

I cannot see on the inscribed stone at the Græco Roman Museum, Alexandria, the oblique trace which appeared clearly to Plaumann before *μεων* (8th. line) in Breccia's photograph, since the broken edge of the stone is well rounded by erosion and age — a trace which must have belonged to a thin Δ according to Jouguet.² It is evident, however, as Plaumann remarked, that the preceding letter must have been a triangular letter which was most probably a Δ.

This appears clearly from a comparison of the distance between the letters where a Δ or a P come in question. The distance between a P and a preceding E (which could also stand for plain vertical letters) is 2—3 mms. as in the first line of the inscription. When the preceding letter is an Ω — a rounded letter — the distance reaches half a cm., as in the second and sixth lines. The distance we have before the P in *μεων* to the edge of the broken stone is 9 mm. and we still have no trace of a letter. This is only compatible with a Δ since the distance between this letter and a following vertical letter (similar to the P) is 9—10 cmm. as in the case of the Δ I in the first line.

1. E. Breccia, *Iscrizione Greche e Latine* no. 164, Pl. XXVI, 64; O. Plaumann, *Bemerkungen zu den Ägyptischen Eponymendatierungen aus Ptolemäischer Zeit*, *Klio*, XIII pp. 485—90.

2. *Op. cit.*

The origin of the inscription, however, is open to dispute. The mention of the prytaneis in it has given rise to the possibility that it might have come from Rhodes.¹ Although this has a precedent in the inscription of Abu Mandour², Jouguet contends that this latter showed signs of the Dorian dialect while there is nothing in our inscription to stand against its Alexandrian origin. But the disputed origin is not the only weak point in it. There is nothing to indicate the time at which it had been inscribed and therefore it does not provide us with a date at and before which the senate was still in existence -- a fact which might have helped us in deciding, broadly, the time of its disappearance.

A second piece of evidence in this respect is the papyrus published by Girolamo Vitelli and Medea Norsa. The text contained in it is the arguments put forth by an Alexandrian embassy to "καίσαρ" in praise of a senate. Although the publishers see in it a plea by the Alexandrians submitted to Augustus in order not to dissolve their senate³, Oliver sees in it a request for a senate which they did not have and prefers to add it, on philological and other grounds, to the literary texts which were called the Acts of the Heathen Martyrs which always deal with an embassy before the emperor and in which the emperor is frequently referred to as *καίσαρ*⁴. Schubart places it at the time of Claudius basing his opinion on the fact that in his letter to the Alexandrians he mentions that their request for having a senate was the first of its kind - which is incompatible with the supposition that they submitted a similar request under Augustus⁵. Again on linguistic and other grounds Bell takes it to be "a semi-literary text based on official acts which records the proceedings of an Alexandrian embassy to Octavian either during his stay in Egypt or more probably at a later period or just possibly of an embassy to Claudius, sent to ask for the grant of a senate".⁶

1. Plaumann, *op. cit.*; see also A. Wilhelm, *Beiträge zur Griechischen Inschriftskunde*, p. 379.

2. Jouguet, *La Vie Municipale dans l'Égypte Romaine*, Paris, 1911, p. 27.

3. Resconto di una *προσβουλή* di Alessandria ad Augusto, *B.S.A.A.*, XV, suppl., pp. 9—11.; also by them, *Sul papiro della BOYAH d'Alessandria* *B.S.A.A.*, XVII.

4. J. H. Oliver, *The βουλή papyrus*, *Aegyptus* XI, pp. 165—7.

5. W. Schubart, *Die βουλή von Alexandria*, *Bulletin de l'Inst. Fr. d'Arch. Orientale*, XXX p. 407, ff.

6. Bell, *The Problem of the Alexandrian Senate*, *Aegyptus*, XII, pp. 173—184.

I am on the side of those who assign it to the reign of Claudius. The reason is that the main approach is common to both the request of this embassy and the Claudian letter to the Alexandrians. In their request, the members of the embassy enumerate the benefits of the senate to their city and to the government. This is the same line adopted by Claudius in his letter when he says: *αὐθιγὰν εἰ σὺνοί περ τῆ πόλει καὶ τοῖς ἔργοις πραγμασαί... κτλ.*

However, even if it were an official document addressed to Augustus whether at the time of the conquest or shortly after that, the text, as mentioned earlier, still falls short of any definite indication as to whether it is a request to establish a senate which did not exist before or an appeal not to abolish one which was already there and therefore we cannot depend on it as decisive evidence in our query.

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Thus we fall back on the three texts which usually form the basic evidence on the question. The two passages in Dio Cassius and Spartianus and Claudius' letter to the Alexandrians. Of these I will start with Dio's passage. After talking about the special circumstances which made Augustus treat Egypt in a different way to the other parts of the Empire, Dio goes on to describe the special constitutional measures which Augustus took in the case of its inhabitants. For the convenience of the discussion I shall quote the passage in full:

Ὅτι μόντοι αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ βουλευεῖν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐφθικεν. ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ὡς ἐκείνους, τοῖς δὲ Ἀλεξανδρείῃσιν ἀνεὶ βουλευτῶν πολιτεύεσθαι ἐκέλευσεν. τιμωρὴν πῶν νεώτεροποιῶν αὐτῶν κατέγραυ. καὶ αὐθιγὰν οἷσα τότε ταχθέντων τὰ μὲν ἄλλα καὶ νῦν ἰσχυρῶς φυλιωσεται, βουλευεῖν δὲ ἤδη καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ, ἐπεὶ Σευθήρων ἀποκρίτωρμα ἰρξάμενοι καὶ ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ, ἐπὶ Ἰουλιανῶν τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ πρόδου ἐν τῇ γεμουσίαν ἐγγραφεῖτες.

The sentence *τοῖς δὲ Ἀλεξανδρείῃσιν... το ἐκέλευσθε* can be taken, without any straining of the meaning to denote that in the case of the Alexandrians he (Augustus) commanded them to conduct their government or political life without senators the reference being to

1. Dio Cassius LI, 17.

the members of an Alexandrian Senate. However, Schubart,¹ who is now followed by Bell,² contends that *ἕως Βουδαίων* refers to Rome and not to Alexandria. The argument put forth is that he was talking, at the beginning of the passage, about depriving the Egyptians from membership of the Roman Senate (this would be a special measure different from what was followed in other parts of the Empire, such as Gaul, where natives enjoyed Roman citizenship)³ and therefore the rest of the passage should also refer to Rome, in which case the depriving of Alexandrians from the membership of the senate should simply be taken as a specification after he talked in general terms about the Egyptians as a whole.

This interpretation, however, meets with some difficulties. The first of these lies in the fact that Dio transfers his narrative from talking about Egypt's relation with Rome to describing its internal political life in the country before he talks about the Alexandrians—a fact which gives the description a purely local character. The description of the country's populousness, its wealth and the fickleness of its inhabitants had compelled Augustus to take certain precautions. Egypt was not going to be entrusted to anyone from the Roman senatorial class, nor was any Roman senator going to be allowed to enter the land without the express, and personal permission of Caesar. The sentence *ὡς μάλιστα...* to *ἐν τῇ Ἰαση* is a natural completion to this relation between Egypt and Rome. The writer now starts to talk about the constitutional measures taken inside the country. Proof of this is provided by the fact that he talked about the other cities or places in Egypt before he started to talk about the Alexandrians—*ἀλλὰ τοῖς μετ' ἄλλους ὡς ἐκάστωις*. The reference in *ὡς ἐκάστωις* must be to purely local conditions as these places (or their inhabitants) did not have any official or constitutional relations with Rome before. The description of the constitutional status of Alexandrians follows immediately in the same sentence and is governed by the same infinitive—*πολιτευέσθαι*. In this case his reference to the Alexandrians could not have been a specification after a general description of Egypt's relation with Rome on account of the interceding sentence in which he talks about the internal affairs of the country.

1. Op. cit.

2. Op. cit.

3. Suet. Vespas. 9; Tacitus. Ann., 3, 55.

Another difficulty follows from the fact that, far from talking in the whole passage only about Rome and its senate, Dio shows clearly that he was conscious of two senates, the Roman and the Alexandrian. At the end of his narrative he winds up his account by talking about the change which took place under Severus and his son Antoninus in a language which shows clearly that he was conscious of the two senates all the time — *βουλευουσι δὲ δὴ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ... καὶ ἐν τῇ Ρώμῃ...*

Now that it has been established that the reference in the phrase in question (*τοις δ' Ἀλεξανδρείταισι ἄνευ βουλευτῶν πολιτεύεσθαι ἐκέλευεν*) refers to the Alexandrian senate, the stress laid on the fact that the Alexandrians, as contrasted to the inhabitants of the other Egyptian cities, were going to conduct their government without a senate must mean that this senate had jumped to the centre of political interest by coming in question in one way or the other. There are only two ways in which this could take place. The first would be that Octavian abolished an already existing senate. The second would be that the Alexandrians, having no senate, requested Augustus for the grant of one but were refused that. Dio's way of describing this fact and of showing that it deserved a special mention, was the simple and concise contrast of the case of the Alexandrians to that of the other cities — where nothing out of the ordinary had taken place,

Against this second alternative there is an objection which, although advanced by Engers in relation to another text, bears on the same idea. After a battle of life and death, his argument proceeds, it is unlikely that the Alexandrians would have asked Augustus such a privilege as granting them a senate. One has only to know, he continues, how the Alexandrians felt and behaved towards the conquerer in order to leave out such a supposition.¹ The reference is to a passage in Plutarch's life of Antony where the historian says, talking of Octavian, "when he had entered the gymnasium and mounted a platform created there for him, the people were beside themselves with terror and prostrated themselves before him".²

This, however, is only half the picture and, as such, does not illustrate faithfully the relation between the Alexandrians and the conquerer. The other half is well portrayed by Dio and Plutarch³,

1. Maurits Engers, *Der Brief des Kaisers an die Alexandriner*, *Klio* XX p. 171.

2. Plutarch, *Antony*, LXXX.

3. Plutarch, *Ibid.*, Dio Cassius, *LI*, 16, 3—5.

"The fact is," Dio tells us, "he did not consider it wise to inflict any irreparable injury upon a people of such big numbers, who might be of use to the Romans in many ways." This is illustrated in the narrative of the two historians by more than one instance. Octavian spared the Alexandrian captives so that none of them perished. He also delivered in Greek the speech in which he declared his pardon to the Alexandrians so that they might understand it. Again, he expressed his admiration for their city and its founder and for their culture in the person of Areios, their fellow citizen, of whose learning and companionship he availed himself and for whose sake he pardoned many Alexandrians.

In this atmosphere the Alexandrians could not have remained in fear. In fact they did not. Realising their new situation and that Octavian's mastery was there to stay, they soon started to make the best of this situation. They tried to get Octavian on their side by trying to impress him with one thing or the other. After he visited Alexander's tomb they tried to make him visit the tombs of their Kings. They also tried to make him enter the sanctuary of Apis.

However, Octavian showed them, in a firm manner, that if he appreciated their Greek culture and admired Alexander, the founder of their beautiful city, he was not ready to accept their kings. "I came to see a king, not corpses," was his reply to their request to visit the tombs of the Ptolemies.

This gives us the clue to the situation. The Alexandrians would ask him for a reopening of their old senate. They would be encouraged by the leniency which he showed to them and which he wanted them, by words and deeds, to feel. They would not be afraid to ask him for what they had lost under their own kings. He had chosen to ignore those kings. Their approach, in this case, would be that Alexander, *whom he admired* and whose greatness he recognised, had provided their city, which Octavian also admired, with a senate and it was one of those very kings *whom he did not appreciate*, that abolished it.

But if that was the state of relations between Octavian and the Alexandrians, one might ask, why did he refuse to grant them their request? The question is quite easy to answer. Octavian drew a sharp line between what was desirable to alleviate the fears of the Alexandrians and win them over to his side and what was necessary to keep his newly won dominion under firm control. By its strategic

position as a front line defence against any encroachments upon the eastern frontiers of the Empire by the Parthians or the Nabataeans or any troublesome neighbours from that direction, by its central position which commanded the commercial routes between the east and west and last, but not least, by its agricultural wealth which would make it a granary for the citizens of Rome big enough to balance, to his advantage, the corn producing senatorial province of Africa—endowed with all these advantages Egypt was no ordinary addition to the Roman Empire and in particular, to Augustus' official sphere of influence within that Empire. Again, its geographical structure made it easy for any strong person (or, what is worse, any organised body) to have a centralised government with everything firmly in his grip and to be, therefore, a continuous source of trouble for him.

There, then, was the line that separated what was desirable from what was necessary. If he was going to prohibit the members of the Roman senate from entering Egypt unless he gave them personal permission, he was not going to establish an Alexandrian senate¹. To the request of the Alexandrians his answer would be a firm *No*. His policy of leniency was not going to entangle him into a promise where he did not want to give one. He would be no more compromising than when he gave a flat refusal to the invitation which they extended to him to visit the tombs of the kings or the sanctuary of Apis.

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I shall deal now with the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians, which is the second text bearing on our question. The lines² which concern us directly are:

περὶ δὲ τῆς βουλῆς ὃ τι μὲν ποτε σύνηθες [ὑμεῖν ἐπὶ τῶν
ἀρχαίων βασιλέων οὐκ ἔχωι λεγεῖν, ὅτι δε ἐπι τῶν | πρὸ ἐμπῶ
Σεβιωτῶν οὐκ εἶχεται (εἶχετε) σαφῆς οἶδατε. Καινοῦ δὲ |
πραγματος νῦν πρώτων (πρώτον) καταβαλλομένου ὅπερ ὕδηλον
εἰ συνοῖ | σεις τῇ πίλει καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς πρίγμασι ἔγραψα
Διμελλίωι Ῥήκτωι | διωκέσασθαι καὶ δηλώσατε (δηλώσαι)
μοι εἴ τι (τε) καὶ σὺν εἰστασθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν δεῖ | τὸν δε
τρόποι, εἴπερ ἄρα συνάγειν δέν (θεοί), καθ' ὃν γενήσεται τοῦτο.

1. Dio Cassius, LI, 17.

2. II. 66-72.

I will divide the argument of Claudius, contained in these lines into three parts. The first part is where he talks about the existence of the senate *ἐπι τῶν ἀρχαίων βασιλείῳ*. The line which the emperor follows here is simply to ignore the period of the kings which leaves us, at first sight, in the dark as to the fate of the senate in that period. This means that it was either there all the time till the Romans came or was abolished sometime under the Ptolemies. The first possibility I shall deal with when I talk about the next part of Claudius' argument. As to the first possibility—that the senate was abolished by the Ptolemies—the main criticism directed to it is that advanced by Milne. If that were the case, runs his argument, it would have been impolitic for the Alexandrian envoys to mention the Ptolemaic arrangements at all. Claudius could have replied "you say that you had a senate under your own kings, but your own kings took it away from you; they who lived among you and knew you intimately judged that you ought not to have one."¹

This assumption follows from Milne's rendering of *ἐπι τῶν ἀρχαίων βασιλείῳ* simply as "the kings of the old dynasty", thus making the adjective *ἀρχαίως* qualify the Ptolemaic kings in general as a dynasty. But here I would rather have the literal, direct and obvious meaning—the old kings, i.e. the first kings as contrasted to the ones who came after them. This would naturally imply a certain amount of defence, on the part of the Alexandrian envoys, of the policy of the earlier kings and a comparison with the policy of the later Ptolemies whom the envoys would naturally present in a dark picture in order not to weaken their own argument.

This line of approach, apart from not weakening their argument, is not unreasonable in view of two considerations. First, it is a fact that the late Ptolemies followed a line of harsh policy against the Alexandrians. The savage treatment which these had at the hands of Euergetes II whose massacres almost depopulated the city and the long struggle between them and Ptolemy Auletes during which they suffered from his intrigues, massacres, assassinations, the use of a Roman general, Gabinius, and Roman troops against them and from the financial exactions at

1. A History of Egypt under Roman Rule (3rd. ed. 1924), p. 284.

the hands of his Roman minister of finance Rabirius¹ — all these must have impressed upon the Alexandrians a sharp distinction between the rule of the first and later Ptolemies.

The second consideration is that the Alexandrians knew, from personal experience with Augustus, that the Roman emperors ignored the Ptolemaic kings while they showed their admiration to Alexander, the founder of Alexandria.² It would be natural for the Alexandrians, in this case, to try to connect the period of the first — i.e. the old — Ptolemies with the tradition of Alexander while they would show their acceptance of, and good will towards, the new Roman regime by lining up with the emperors — especially when they request them for a favour — in attacking the later Ptolemies. The approach of the Alexandrians would be that they enjoyed a senate under the first Ptolemies who were true adherents to the principles of Alexander and they only lost it when the later Ptolemies deviated from this tradition. It would be this contrast expressed in the phrase ἐπι ἀρχαίων βασιλείων that would be calculated to undermine any argument on the part of Claudius that their own kings took their senate away from them — and that might be another reason why the emperor found it more convenient not to discuss the conditions under the Ptolemaic rule.

I come now to the second part of Claudius' argument where he says that the Alexandrians knew well that they had no senate under the emperors who came before him. The first of these emperors, Augustus, is the one that concerns us since, if the senate had not been abolished under the Ptolemies, it would be he who abolished it. If Augustus actually did that, would not Claudius have mentioned the matter? This would certainly give added weight to his reply to the request of the Alexandrians in two ways. First, he would give, as a precedent, the reasons which must have seemed good enough to Augustus to abolish the senate³ and, secondly, because referring to what Augustus did in this particular case would be in accord with his policy which he declared, both explicitly and implicitly, throughout the letter — namely that he follows the main lines set by Augustus.

1. App. Mith., 114; Dio Cassius, XXXIX, 58; Cicero, Pro Rabir., 8—11; Plutarch, Anton. III; Polyb., V, 34 ff.

2. See above.

3. Belladdenda to his "Jews and Christians in Egypt", and Aegyptus, loc. cit.

In reply to this argument Milne says: "But surely the precedents implied in the words : you are aware that you had no senate under the emperors who preceded me. However, this is only a general reference in which the policy of Augustus himself is not specified, but rather the general policy of the Roman emperors and since we know that Claudius did not grant the Alexandrians their request (and probably never intended to) it is only reasonable to assume that he would have clung to Augustus' precedent in a more pointed way than just to mention it as part of the general policy of the Roman emperors, and that he would have dwelt on the reasons which drove Augustus to abolish the senate. And he would not have been at a loss looking for such reasons since the Alexandrians did not accept the Roman rule without first giving vent to their revolutionary sentiments. It would be strange indeed for Claudius to leave these ready answers which would put the Alexandrians in a weak position and to resort to the excuse of saying that he simply followed the general policy of his predecessors or to the method of half-hearted promises of looking into the matter and entrusting his prefect Aemilius Rectes with giving him a report on it' - which report, if it was ever made, never came, in any case, to anything concrete.

The third part of Claudius' argument is where he describes the idea of a senate as a new thing which was proposed for the first time. This seems to stand against the probability expressed earlier, which accrues from Dios' text, that the Alexandrians submitted such an appeal to Octavian and it was refused. This apparent contradiction, however, need not worry us. In the first place, if such an appeal took place, it had definitely remained on paper and it is not unnatural to forget or even to ignore an appeal of which nothing came out, especially if Claudius did not intend to do anything about it himself. Secondly he might have simply meant that it is the first time anyone came under *his reign* with a proposal of that kind and not necessarily the first time during *the whole period of the Roman rule*.

But even apart from these suppositions I am inclined not to take this phrase literally, but rather to take it as a general utterance simply calculated to make the request of the Alexandrians appear as a serious thing which should not be granted as a matter of course and could not easily be put into effect - without necessarily worrying about official accuracy. I have two reasons for this. First, he includes it among

the general precautions which he advanced, no doubt intentionally, since, in the end, he did not give the Alexandrians what they wanted. The whole proposal was completely new, he must see it in the light of what was good for the city and for his own interests, and he was going to ask his prefect to study the matter and submit the results to him for consideration. All these belong to one category—pretexts and non-committant promises calculated in the first place to be a substitute for a blunt refusal which might not have a desirable effect, and never intended to aim first and foremost at presenting or establishing truthful facts. The second reason is that Claudius himself was not accurate in another of these general utterances which belong to the same category. He says, "it is my will to have all things confirmed which were granted you by the rulers who preceded me and the kings and the prefects as Augustus confirmed them". Augustus could not have confirmed what was granted by the emperors who succeeded him and he did not confirm nor could he have confirmed all that was granted by the Ptolemaic kings. Thus we cannot and should not take literally all what Claudius said in the the section of his letter where it is question of general pretexts, precautions or promises never intended to be carried out.

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The third text which bears on our question belongs to Spartianus. Talking about Septimius Severus he says :¹

Deinde Alexandrinis ius bulcutarum debet, qui sine concilio publico ita ut sub regibus ante vivebant uno iudice contenti quem caesar dedisset.

Spartianus words are straight and plain. Before Severus the Alexandrians did not have a senate. That was the same under the emperors who preceded him as under the kings. However, the phrase "ita ut sub regibus" has been taken on two occasions in a sense different from its direct meaning. Engers made it refer to the Parthian kings who were contemporaries of Spartianus and Severus.² But this is plausibly refuted by Jouguet who contends that although Spartianus begins the chapter by describing the emperor's Parthian campaign, he ends this description early in the narrative and talks about the emperor's journey

1. Vita Severi, 17.

2. op. cit., pp. 164—170.

through Syria and Palestine before he finally comes to Egypt and finds himself in Alexandria. It is obvious what kings the reader is expected to think of when the writer talks about Egypt and Alexandria, especially if there is nothing to designate these kings as being Parthian.¹ I would add that it seems to have been a normal thing for the Romans to refer to the Ptolemies simply as "the Kings" when they wrote about Alexandria or the Alexandrians. In the letter of Claudius, which Bell takes to be a translation from the Latin,² the Ptolemies were described as the Kings, not as the Ptolemies. The other sense given to the phrase is "as in the case with the cities under the kings". But just here, as Jouguet remarks, Alexandria would be an exception among such cities — Antioch and Pergamon had senates.³

The words of Spartianus must therefore be taken in the direct sense which they convey. However, his denial of the existence of an Alexandrian senate under the Ptolemies stands in direct contradiction with the evidence of Claudius' letter. Jouguet tried to solve the difficulty by supposing that the writer might not have known that the Alexandrians had a senate under the first kings, while he certainly knew that they had none under the late Ptolemies.⁴ To this I would add that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Romans did not know or care to know much about Egypt before the visit of Scipio Aemilianus to it — which was the prelude to the the appearance of the Egyptian question on the programmes of the contending political parties at Rome. Scipio came sometime between 145 and 118 B.C., at the time of Euergetes II, to settle a dispute over the throne among the members of the Ptolemaic house, but his visit was really part of a tour which the Roman senate asked him to undertake in order to inspect the kingdoms of the eastern mediterranean.⁵ Before that the Romans did not have a great interest in Egypt. In 190, for instance, when Ptolemy Epiphanes, finding himself hard pressed by the intrigues and schemes of Philip V of Macedonia

1. Jouguet, *op. cit.* p. 78.

2. The discussion of P. London in his "Jews and Christians in Egypt"; see also U. Wilcken, *Arch. für Papyrusforschung*, VIII, pp. 308 ff.

3. *op. cit.* p. 78.

4. *Id.*, *ibid.*

5. Bouché-Leclercq *op. cit.*, p. 68; Bevan, *a History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, p. 310.

and Antiochos III of Syria, asked the Romans for help and accompanied his request with a present of corn and an offer to put the resources of Egypt at their disposal. Rome declined both the present and the offer.¹ Even when, in 168, the Roman senate sent their envoy C. Popilius Laenas to relieve Alexandria from its siege by Antiochos IV,² we find him leaving the country as soon as his mission was over, without any indication that Rome started to have any direct political interest in, or designs over, Egypt.

It is probable, with this outlook in view, that the Romans did not know a great deal about internal Egyptian affairs during the first half of the Ptolemaic rule and that when their politicians or writers talked about Egypt they only had in mind the period when the relation with Egypt became a burning question in the political arena in Rome after Scipio's visit, particularly during the last century B. C. Spartianus, in this case, would only be referring to that period and his evidence would therefore, not contradict that contained in Dio's narrative or Claudius' letter.

* * *

The above discussion of the literary and documentary evidence points, in a reasonable way, to one strong probability — Alexandria had a senate at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, but it lost it sometime during the reign of the later Ptolemies. I shall now try to show that the development of the social and economic conditions in Egypt took such a turn towards the middle of the Ptolemaic period as to cause a clash between the interests of the kings and those of the Greek settlers and, consequently, render, the abolition of the senate a desirable step for the Ptolemies to take, if not, indeed an actual necessity.

In the course of founding their new kingdom on a firm basis, the first Ptolemies depended increasingly on Greek immigrants both for their military qualities which, by that time, had reached a professional standard and for their capacity in the fields of administration and economic organisation. For this end the Ptolemies tempted those immigrants with privileges in one sphere or the other of their social and

1. Polyb. III, 2; XIII, 1—3, XV, 20, 24a.

2. *Ivan*, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

economic life.¹ However, rather than becoming a loose class of royal protégés who depended solely on the generosity of a king who needed their services, they started to develop rapidly into an independent middle and semi-middle class who were not content with working as civil servants who could keep their posts only as long as it pleased the government, but tried hard, as soon as they found their feet in their new home, to derive their strength from their solidarity as a class with an independent standing based on a secure economic foundation.

This is reflected in the big numbers of letters which appear in the Zenon papyri. In these letters many of these immigrants ask Zenon for help. Yet they do not expect charity and they very rarely ask for money, but rather ask in a business-like manner for ways and means to help them settle for good. They want work or a piece of land to cultivate or a loan, an *épave*, of which the repayment in full is guaranteed by a group of friends.²

It was the same attitude which made a good number of the semi-middle class of limited means look for their chance of a settled and stable livelihood in trade, despite the odds which were apt to confront them in a country run on the system of state monopoly and severely scrutinised economic regulations. It was the increasing numbers of borrowers among these merchants which made interests on bank loans jump to such figures as 3% and 4% per month despite a law which limited such interest at a ceiling level of 2% per month, and made interests on loans from private users leap to the almost incredible rate of 6% per month or 72% annually. Yet despite these fantastic figures an amusing letter among the Zenon papyri shows us a banker who was *besieged* by people asking for loans.³

Such businesslike perseverance was bound to help the Greek immigrants to develop into an independent middle and semi-middle class which would in time, in the course of its struggle for a sound, solid and independent economic basis for livelihood, encroach upon the monopolie

1. See for e. g. Claire Préaux, *Les Grecs en Egypte d'après les Archives de Zenon*, Bruxelles 1947, p. 68 ff.

2. P. Cairo Zenon 59284; P. Col. Zenon 41, 48; P. Mich. Zenon 33, 46; P.S.I. 375, 415, 570. Comp. C. Préaux, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

3. P. Col. Zenon, 83; P. Cair. Zen., 59062, 59173, 59341 comp. C. Préaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 65—66.

privileges of the king. Signs of this encroachment appeared early in the Ptolemaic rule. In the *χωρα*, for instance, in the case of the *κληροι* or plots of land allotted to the settlers, the practice under the first Ptolemies was for the *κληρος* to return to the king at the cleruch's death. The king would then allot it again to anyone else although, under ordinary circumstances it was usually allotted to the cleruch's ablebodied son if he had one. However, towards the end of third century B.C. this practice underwent a change. At the death of a cleruch, if he left a son, the son was allowed to take possession of the land immediately and, apart from minor details, the changeover became a mere formality. This is attested by a passage in the Lille papyrus, belonging to the year 218-17 B.C. in which a certain Lamiscos, the *ὁ ἐπὶ συντάξεως* at the time, talks of a Macedonian settler who was given a *κληρος* of thirty arouras in the Arsinoite nome and "to whom and whose decendants this land belongs" (*ὅτι ὑπηρχειν ἡ γῆ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐγγύθους*).¹ Again we have a demotic act belonging to the year 282 where a *κληρος* is described as "given forever" to a certain settler.²

This development, whatever the circumstances which might have led to it, was a sure sign of the growing solidarity of the Greek settlers as a class with an independent standing in face of which the king had to give up part of his monopolic privileges. The same signs were to be seen among the merchant class which carried out its most important transactions in Alexandria. There also, although the system of royal monopoly stretched all over the country, the Greek settlers managed to break through it in more than one place. The wine merchants, for instance, although their transactions were subject to certain regulations, such as not receiving the price of what they sold, which was deposited in a bank, till the tax of *apomoira* (which was imposed upon vineyards) was paid and apart from a few minor formalities, were left free to fix their own prices. Apollonios appears in a Zenon papyrus as sending to Zenon wine from the Heliopolite in order to resell it at a higher price which he could not get there.³ The same chances were to be found in the textile trade. There, also, the merchants seem to have been left free, apart from

1. Wilcken, *Chrestomatie*, no. 336. Préaux, *Economie Royale des Lagides* (1939) pp. 468-9.

2. Préaux, *op. cit.* p. 469.

3. See the reason given by Préaux, *op. cit.* p. 470.

4. P. Cairo Zen., 59170.

a state regulation that a certain part of the material manufactured in the Egyptian workshops should be delivered to him. In one of the documents we find a big order of ten thousand linen articles addressed to Zenon to be delivered after viewing a sealed sample with a commercial agent.¹ The trade in wheat presented a similar case. Prices, apart from those imposed when buying for royal consumption, were completely free, as appears from a comparison between the prices in Alexandria and those in the chora recorded in the Zenon papyri.²

All these commercial transactions were facilitated to a great extent by the spreading in Egypt under the Ptolemies of a vast banking system. We see the bankers advancing to the commercial agents of Apollonios the money which they needed.³ It also frequently occurred that these bankers, being on the actual spot of business, placed their services at the disposal of the agents in order to help them in their transactions and to supervise the putting into effect of the deals which they concluded.⁴

Such commercial enterprise reached considerable dimensions in Alexandria which rapidly developed under the Ptolemies to be the greatest trading port in the Hellenistic world. Against the Egyptian exports, which were in the third century B. C. on the advantageous side of the export-import balance of trade, there were imports of dates, figs, honey, special varieties of corn and wine, perfumes, aromatics, wool, leather, carpets, wood and even panthers and horses. They came from as widely different parts of the world as Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Rhodes, Miletus, Curia, Sicily and Greece. Commercial relations were carried out with all these places with tremendous zeal and activity. A vivid picture of this is presented on one occasion shortly after Palestine was conquered, where we find merchants following in the train of the Ptolemaic

1. P. Cairo Zen., 59470.

2. P. Cairo Zen., 59269, 59363, 59404, 59446; P. Col. Zen., 31, 75; P.S.I., 571. Comp. Præaux, *Les Grecs*, p. 61.

3. P. Cairo Zen., 59062, 95790.

4. P. Cairo Zen., 59470.

5. Præaux, *op. cit.* pp. 57-59; Rostowtzeff, *Alexandrien and Rhodes*. *Klio* (N.F.) 1937, pp. 70-6; *ibid.*, *Ptolemaic Egypt*, C. A. H., VII p. 134; H. I. Bell *Alexandria*, J. E. A., XIII p. 170; W. W. Tarn, *op. cit.*, pp. 215 ff.; P. Jouguet, *Trois Études sur le Hellenisme*, Cairo, pp. 98 ff.; M. K. Abdel Aliem, *Alexandrian Trade in Aromata in the Graeco-Roman Times*, 1954 (unedited thesis in the library of the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University), pp. 24 ff.

armies. In 259 Apollonios sent to Judaea a commercial mission which toured the country by carriage and on the backs of horses, donkeys, mules and even camels.¹

This growing sense of solidarity which must have appeared in a more pointed way among the Greek merchant class, first because they had more interests at stake and secondly because they were not as sparsely spread out as the settlers in the chora, but tightly concentrated in the commercial towns, and in the case of external trade practically solely in Alexandria was accompanied by an ever growing discontent among the Egyptians who became, under the Ptolemies a vast dispossessed and exploited class. They did all the manual work in the royal domains and in the Greek cleruchies and they could at best only occupy minor administrative posts, while in the economical field they had practically to give-up everything to the benefit of the Greeks who became the practical possessors and benefactors of the land apart from holding the commerce in their hands². This discontent showed itself in more than one way, extending from general strikes and taking asylum in the temples on the one hand to open revolt on the other³.

Thus the Ptolemies were faced with a situation which gradually and increasingly made itself pointed. On the one hand there was the privileged minority of Greeks who had rapidly developed into a middle class in the wide sense and who were increasingly assimilating, to their benefit, economic rights and gains at the expense of the king's monopolistic rights. On the other hand there was the vast majority of Egyptians, an irritated and discontented class who were far below the Greeks in social and economical scale, who were battling for recognition as a class and who could no doubt be content with far less than what the Greeks demanded.

The climax of this two sided situation came with the battle of Raphia in 217 B.C. in which the Egyptians were treated for the first time, as military equals to the Greeks and which marked at one and

1. Préaux, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

2. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

3. Tarn, *op. cit.* p. 199; Fr. von Woess, *Das Asylwesen Ägyptens*, 1923.

the same time the success of the Egyptians in their struggle and the beginning of the road downhill for the Greeks who proved not to be the seasoned fighters on whose valour and professional experience alone the first Ptolemies built their kingdom. This new turn was soon to be accentuated by two new circumstances which appeared on the scene for the best part of the second and first centuries B.C., and which were bound to affect the course of the government policy. First the members of the Ptolemaic dynasty started to quarrel among themselves over the throne and, secondly, Rome, the rising power who started to be a factor in Mediterranean politics, began to apply pressure on Egypt,¹ and even to take interest in supporting one claimant to the Egyptian throne against the other. These new circumstances must have given greater value to the Egyptians whose support as a class was to be solicited by one or the other of the members of the royal family.

A marked recognition of the contribution of the Egyptian warriors after the victory at Raphia was an order by Ptolemy IV to erect in celebration of the event, a number of statues for him and his sister Arsinoe in Egyptian (not Greek) style. It also appears in the strong Egyptian colouring of the priestly decrees issued after that battle in honour of Ptolemy IV and of Ptolemy V which gave the kings the titles of a native pharaoh.² Ptolemy V was further crowned in Egyptian style at Memphis which became henceforward a second royal residence. Euergetes II greatly extended the powers, privileges and possessions of the Egyptian priesthood. Under him also the struggle between the calendars ended in the Macedonian having to conform with the Egyptian and the right of asylum was extended to more and more Egyptian temples. After Raphia the Egyptian warrior class was revived and its members (the *machimoi*) were made cleruchs with allotments which started by being smaller than those of the Greeks but were soon to become the same in many cases.³

Was this policy followed for the simple end of reconciling the Egyptians to face the pressure of Rome with a firmly founded Graeco-Egyptian monarchy or for some Ptolemies to depend on the support of

1. Bell, *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford, 1948), p. 58.

2. H. Gauthier and H. Sotras: *Un Décret Trilingue en l'Honneur de Ptolémée IV* (1925), pp. 33-8 & 75; *O.G.I.S.*, I, 90; Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

3. Tarn, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-6.

the Egyptian class in their dynastic dissensions? That can only be part of the picture and a conciliatory attitude towards the Egyptians could not fully explain the restrictive economic measures which were taken against the Greeks. Already under Ptolemy II, long before Raphia, we begin to see these measures which were calculated to hamper the growth of their economic privileges at the expense of his monopoly. The *apomoira*, a tax of one-sixth of the produce of vineyards, orchards and gardens, which had belonged before 266/5 to the temples, was diverted in that year to the cult of the deified Arsinoë Philadelphos which probably meant that part of it went to the treasury. In addition to the *apomoira*, Ptolemy II imposed a tax of $33\frac{1}{3}\%$ on this produce in order to give the king, who owned a large part of the year's vintage, a marketing advantage over that of the Greek producers. At the same time he imposed a similar ($33\frac{1}{3}\%$) import duty on wines coming from abroad which was so calculated as not to spoil the king's wine-business and to admit only the fine brands of wine for which the Alexandrians were ready to pay a higher price². A further step in that direction was that, after Raphia, we find no more great estates, of the type of that of Apollonios, conferred on Greek officials. The produce of such estates was no doubt a great rival with that of the king's land and would only help to consolidate the growing sense of class independence among the Greeks.

Such class consciousness would no doubt be accentuated and accelerated by the existence of any organised bodies which would be looked upon by the Ptolemies as, and would in fact be, grouping centres for the interests of that class. A senate would even be more so than an assembly as it does not admit large numbers to its membership, but rather the selected few who would no doubt enjoy a higher social standing and would therefore be staunch supporters of the interests of their class. Under the circumstances which I have just described, the existence of such an organised body would certainly be a source of trouble for any monarch with a clear policy of keeping a firm grip over the fruit of the land. A minor sign of such tendency was probably what Euergetes II did when he temporarily broke up the Museum, no doubt considered a grouping centre of intellectual personalities, on the same occasion when he let loose his troops on the Alexandrians.

1. This seems to be the opinion of Bell, *op. cit.* p. 58 and Tarn, *op. cit.*, p. 205

2. Tarn, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

Again the fact that the Alexandrians took an active part, siding with this or that Ptolemy, during their dissensions over the throne, could not adequately be interpreted in the light of mere loyalty to one Ptolemy or the other, or in terms of differences over foreign policy. No such considerations are enough, in my opinion, to drive the Alexandrians to stand so staunchly on the side of Berenice IV against her father Ptolemy Auletes, an attitude which brought upon them particularly harsh treatment at the hands of Auletes culminating in the assassinations and massacres which befell all his daughter's supporters and in occupying the country with the support of the Roman general Gabinius¹. These Alexandrians must have sided with Berenice for regaining some of their lost rights - one of them was no doubt the senate which was an arraying and crystallising centre of their class privileges and interests.

* * *

In conclusion I feel I should sum up the opinions which I have either reached or confirmed. Alexandria had a senate when it was first founded. This emerges from the letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians in which they are mentioned as asserting this fact. That Claudius tried to ignore their assertion was a means, on his part, of evading the issue. The existence, at that time, of an Alexandrian senate was warranted by the desire of the Ptolemies to provide the Greek atmosphere necessary to attract the Greek immigrants, on whose military and other qualities they depended for founding their kingdom. Further, such deliberative assemblies proved not to be incompatible with the centralised authority of the Hellenistic monarchs.

The senate disappeared sometime during the Ptolemaic rule. This is reasonably attested by the literary and documentary sources. Dio's passage, which refers to the Alexandrian (and not the Roman) senate, can reasonably mean that the Alexandrians asked Octavian to grant them a senate and he refused - which implies that they did not have one at the time of the Roman conquest. This confirms and is confirmed by the wording of Claudius' letter which refers to the claim of the Alexandrians of having had a senate under their old kings. Here, the description "old" should be taken to mean the first, as contrasted to the later, Ptolemies. We need not be deterred by Claudius' claim that the request

1. Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 10; Dio Cass., XXXIX, 58; Cic. *Pro Rabir.*, 8 & 11.

of the Alexandrians to have back their old senate was the first of its kind to be made — a claim which could stand in the way of our conclusion from Dio's passage. Claudius might have been referring only to his reign or he might have been trying to make the request of the Alexandrians look like an unusual and serious matter which could not easily be granted, without worrying about the accuracy of his words — a fact which is not without a parallel in his letter. Spartianus' assertion that the Alexandrians did not have a senate under the kings does not necessarily present an uncontested fact. While his words may represent the true situation under the later Ptolemies, the same does not have to apply to the earlier period. The Romans did not care to know a great deal about Egypt till sometime towards the middle of the Ptolemaic rule and Spartianus, or his authorities, might simply be extending what was known about part of this rule to cover the whole of it.

The social and economic circumstances fall in line with this conclusion. The privileges which were granted to the Greek immigrants at the beginning of the Ptolemaic rule, have given rise to a steadily growing class consciousness among them, which gradually asserted itself in terms of increasing economic demands at the expense of the kings' monopolistic rights. The kings realised they had to combat this tendency if they were not to lose everything. Yet they had to tolerate it so long as they had to depend on the military qualities of the Greeks. Raphia, however, proved that these qualities were not indispensable and that they could successfully be sought with the Egyptian fighting columns. This made it easy for the Ptolemies to strike at the class-consciousness of the Greek settlers which was threatening to undermine their authority. One of the ways to achieve this end was, no doubt, to suppress any organised bodies which served as rallying points for Greek interests and public opinion — and among the most important of these was surely the Senate of Alexandria.