

**Between the good king and the cruel tyrant: the *Acta Isidori* and the perception of Roman emperors among provincial litigants**

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*Abstract*

After the reign of Augustus at the latest, the inhabitants of the Roman provinces were by and large convinced that the emperor was a crucial force in the legal process and—with time, effort, and connections—one might be able to receive a hearing from this highest of judges. The emperor, if he so wished, was the law, even in the provinces. However, the perception of the emperor, much like that of Roman power in general, varied greatly between observers, from unquestioning praise to descriptions of cruelty. When approaching these descriptions, it becomes apparent that they were intended for different audiences, from local partisans to Roman officials, and even the emperor himself. It could be said that by praising the emperor as right and just, the provincials may have hoped to persuade him to act that way.

The purpose of this essay is to explore this narrative dichotomy in the textual tradition in and around the text known as the *Acta Isidori*, part of a third-century corpus now called the *Acta Alexandrinorum*. The text is presented as a transcript of a trial held before Claudius in Rome, relating to the complex and long standing conflict between the Jewish and Greek inhabitants of Alexandria. This text, purporting to be from the trial between King Agrippa and Isidorus, an ambassador of the Greeks, clearly shows the propagandist value and the difficulties faced by

both those approaching the emperor, and the emperor himself, in projecting his power. The aim of the chapter is to explore the role of the narratives of kingship in the legitimation and delegitimation of imperial power in the provinces as it manifested itself in the jurisdiction of the Roman emperor.

*Keywords: Rome, Claudius, adjudication, Alexandria, anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, petition*

## **1. Introduction**

The literature on Roman emperors as judges contains numerous contradictory images that inform our understanding of how the imperial adjudication process was perceived in the provinces. Most provincials did not actually see the emperor over the course of their lives; for them, he and his predecessors existed mostly in the images that circulated on coinage and in the stories they heard. If they frequented larger cities, they may have seen a statue of the emperor, or read a statute by the emperor. The first may have been imposing, the second impossible to grasp, as the general population rarely had access to official documents and, even if they did, they may not have been literate.<sup>1</sup>

After the reign of Augustus at the latest, the inhabitants of the Roman provinces were convinced that the emperor was a crucial force in the legal process and—with time, effort, and connections—one might be able to receive a hearing from this highest of judges. The emperor, if he so wished, was the law, even in the provinces, controlling not only legislation, but also jurisdiction and administration.<sup>2</sup> However, the perception of the emperor, much like that of the Roman power in general, varied greatly between observers, from unquestioning praise to

depictions of cruelty. When approaching these descriptions, it becomes apparent that they were intended for different audiences, ranging from local partisans to Roman officials, and even the emperor himself. By praising the emperor as right and just, provincials may have hoped to persuade him to act in a way that would, for them, appear to be so.

The purpose of this essay is to explore this narrative dichotomy in the textual tradition in and around the text known as the *Acta Isidori*, which is now considered to form a part of a third century corpus called the *Acta Alexandrinorum*. The text presents itself as a transcript of a trial between King Agrippa of Judea and Isidorus, an ambassador of the Alexandrian Greeks, held before Claudius in Rome, relating to the complex and long standing conflict between the Jewish and Greek inhabitants of Alexandria. This reconstructed text begins with the Greek ambassadors, Isidorus and Lampon, addressing the emperor. Isidorus begins to speak, having been given a full day for his disposal, but is almost immediately interrupted by the emperor, who insults him. Isidorus responds in kind, prompting the emperor to order them to be killed. The narrative clearly shows the propagandist value and the difficulties faced by both those approaching the emperor, and the emperor himself, in projecting his power.

The aim of the chapter is to explore the role of the narratives of kingship in the legitimation and delegitimation of imperial power in the provinces as it manifested itself in the jurisdiction of the Roman emperor. While the text of the *Acta Isidori* purports to be a document describing the trial of Isidorus, it is much harder to say what it actually is. It is hardly an official transcript of a trial, as it is doubtful that a Roman scribe would have entered the insults to the emperor into the final record. Harker claims that the whole *Acta Alexandrinorum* was a type of literature typical of the

Egyptian Greek community. In fact, the geographical spread of the papyri text fragments demonstrates how it was clearly read all around Egypt. The similarity of the storylines in the genre also speak to the shared expectations of the authors and readers. The stories were about the heroic Greek ambassadors who travel to Rome, defend their community against a hostile emperor, and more often than not die a glorious death at the hands of the emperor. The emperors change from Augustus on to Caracalla, but the favoured enemy is the Jewish community, which has convinced the emperor of the justness of their cause. In most of the texts, the exchange between the ambassadors and the emperor descends into insults, wherein the Greeks are defending their honour and high birth.<sup>3</sup> However, due to this similarity it is impossible to know with any certainty whether the origins of the narrative are close to the events they are supposed to describe or later, even in the early third century.

Both the Jewish and Greek communities in Alexandria were known for their internal disputes and combativeness. The Jews in the region revolted repeatedly during the Roman period, deposing rulers installed by the Romans. The Greeks were likewise prone to rioting and unruly behaviour, and armed forces were needed to suppress them on many occasions. In this case, the clearest consequence was that the status of the Jewish community was downgraded by the Roman prefect of the city, Flaccus, or had been interpreted by the Greeks as having been done so. Alexandrian citizenship was a considerably higher status than being a mere Egyptian, and being reduced to the status of foreigners and removed from the commercial centre was an even larger blow to the Jews. The course of events that took place over these years continues to be debated, and the narrative traits of the sources have a tendency to exaggerate the losses suffered by their own communities and to minimize their culpability. Philo wrote a dedicated tract against

Flaccus, presenting him as the leader of the pogroms against the Jews, who tortured and crucified them and forced them to eat pork. Philo's account of Flaccus and his violent end were a continuation of the Jewish martyrology, his venality resembling a long line of persecutors in Jewish history. Philo mentions in his accounts also Isidorus, describing him as a leader of the anti-Jewish mob.<sup>4</sup>

That the provincials could petition the emperor, and that the emperor himself could respond, was a crucial feature of the Roman Empire, in the eyes of both emperors and provincials.<sup>5</sup> From the time of Augustus onwards, provincials inscribed accounts of their interactions with the Roman emperor as judge. Dualistic themes of the law intersecting with good king or the tyrant emerged already during the reign of Augustus. In an inscription relating to a killing in Knidos, Augustus appears as an avenging angel who saves a widow, Tryphera, from the corrupt local magnates who persecuted them, and brings justice (*IG XII 3,174=FIRA III,185*). In contrast, in a case described in an inscription from Cyrene (*SEG IX,8*), Augustus appears to be meddling in the affairs of the local community. These images of the emperor as judge mirror those found in authors in Rome, from poets like Ovid to Seneca, Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius.<sup>6</sup> This dualism—the emperor as good king or savage tyrant—does not allow for much nuance and has to be complemented with more legally astute definitions, that of the emperor as a legal expert and an administrator.

In the written sources we find another kind of emperor as judge, that of the legal expert who discusses minute issues of law with great care and diligence. This third face of the emperor appears almost solely in the legal sources, in the writings of lawyers or the imperial

constitutions. Yet even this emperor is not a pure mouthpiece for the law; he occasionally displays emotion and personality.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the good king, the savage, and the shrewd lawyer, there may be said to be a fourth kind of emperor as judge: the bureaucratic emperor. He was equally well known to provincials. This emperor answered in terse sentences, usually in the negative, giving brusque answers to petitions. A typical example appears in the *Apokrimata*, which depicts an emperor who gave no reasons or justifications for his decisions, often rejecting the petition.<sup>8</sup> The same type of emperor often appears in the rescripts, where he repeatedly advises the petitioner to turn to the relevant authorities, usually the provincial governor.<sup>9</sup> While we do not really know how imperial decisions were circulated, by the second century it was apparent to the emperors that their decisions would set a precedent for all provinces.<sup>10</sup>

It is thus clear from the sources that in the legal sphere there was a lively exchange, both real and imagined, between the provincial inhabitants and the emperor. This was of course just a small part of the provincials' interactions with the legal power of Rome, the majority of which took place on the local level. While there is plenty of information about the propaganda that was used to praise the emperor and his virtues in the provinces, as well as the propaganda used by the provincials to gain imperial favour,<sup>11</sup> little is known of how one gained knowledge of the various aspects of imperial justice in the provinces. There is no information of any official proclamation which would have authorized provincials to seek imperial justice.

The *Acta Isidori*, through its portrayal of the emperor in legal contexts, offers an interesting window into the provincial experience of both imperial power and justice. The sources for this discussion are primarily the known fragments (of which it has been suggested include *BGU II 511*, *P.Lond.Inv. 2785*, *P.Berol. 8877*, and *P.Cairo 10448*, *P.Oxy. XLII 3021*, *P. Gissen 46*) of the trial of Isidorus, dating mostly from the second to third century AD. However, these fragments should be read as part of the larger corpus of the *Acta Alexandrinorum*.

Scholarship on the *Acta Isidori* is fairly limited. Of the modern studies, Musurillo has provided the standard text, which has now been amended by the discovery of several new fragments. While earlier works had approached the texts through the lenses of antisemitism or the legal process, new work has portrayed them as literary works in the Alexandrian context, mirroring the internal disputes of the city and their developments. Of those, Magnani's works have proposed new interpretations and a new outline of the text, alongside the work of Rodriguez. Rodriguez has suggested that the *Acta* was in fact based on authentic texts, but later formed the basis of a literary genre. Regarding the cultural and political background of the whole *Acta Alexandrinorum*, Harker remains the main work, emphasizing the narrative nature of the *Acta*, where the documentary form was purely a literary *topos*, not a sign of authenticity. Natalia Vega Navarrete has recently studied the entire papyrological material of the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, arguing that the texts have a documentary foundation but were later adapted for political purposes.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to these earlier works, I seek to present the narrative context of the discourse of the *Acta Isidori*, and through it to propose a new way of reading the text. I will first outline its

textual and narrative traditions. Then, I will seek to set the narrative context of the work in contemporary kingship literature, and to discuss the intended audience and meanings of the narratives.

I argue that the narrative of the *Acta Isidori* should be seen not only in the narrative context of kingship, but also as a reflection of the Jewish and other traditions of martyrdom narratives. One of the most baffling features of the narrative of the *Acta Isidori* is its irrationality. The ambassadors arrive, gain an audience with the emperor, insult the emperor, and are killed. Why was this apparently senseless display of pride so important that it warranted not only a written account, but a whole textual tradition repeating identical narrative elements with different actors? Why does this Alexandrian narrative find no known comparable work from among the other great Greek cities of the Roman world, such as Athens? Rather than dismissing this as an aberration, I am suggesting that an unusual phenomenon such as the *Acta Alexandrinorum* reveals fundamental issues about imperial power in the provinces and the perceptions of the role of the emperor as judge.

## **2. Acta Isidori**

The fragments of the *Acta Isidori* form a part of the third-century corpus known as *Acta Alexandrinorum*. The texts are preserved in several papyrus fragments (within the literature, the following papyri have been suggested for inclusion in the corpus: BGU II 511, *P.Lond.Inv.* 2785, *P.Berol.* 8877, *P.Cairo* 10448, *P.Oxy.* XLII 3021, *P. Gissen* 46), though not all describe the trial explicitly. The provenance and dating of the text fragments is not clear and they offer little clue as to the original date of the narratives beyond the late second to early third century style of



writing. The extant fragments are from copies found dispersed around Egypt, as papyri from Alexandria has not survived. That these fragments form a corpus is thus more an invention of their modern editors than the provenance of the texts. It is disputable which of these should be included, and whether we may reconstruct the original narrative, or even whether there was one. Within the collection, it is clear that what is at hand is a larger dispute between the Greek and Jewish elites in the city as they jostled for power and imperial favour, which were increasingly becoming the same thing.

The dispute between AD 38 and 41 was triggered by King Agrippa, who had visited Alexandria and shown support to the Jewish faction. The visit led to riots and anti-Jewish pogroms in Alexandria. Both the Jews and the Greeks sent embassies to Rome to present their case to the emperors, first Caligula and later Claudius, who made efforts to restore peace. Roman rule in the region was based on client kings and alliances, and the Herodian dynasty was one of its staunchest supporters.<sup>13</sup>

There was earlier a controversy about the dating of the events described in the fragments, the two alternatives being 41 and 54, the first due to the Alexandrian riots, which would have prompted a hearing, the second by a mention of the thirteenth year of the reign of Claudius. The two alternatives presupposed that the Agrippa in question was either Agrippa I or Agrippa II.<sup>14</sup> In the following, we have adopted the first dating, due to the linkage it has with the events taking place in Alexandria. The trial is not attested in ancient sources beyond these fragments.

The fragments contain partially overlapping texts that continue what **appears** to be the same storyline. The narrative **presents itself as a** transcript of a trial between Isidorus, gymnasiarch of Alexandria, and King Agrippa, held in front of Claudius. The coherent sections begin from the second day of the trial.

An outline of the textual tradition with text and translation of the four main fragments:

BGU II 511<sup>15</sup>

The first column is very fragmentary, mentioning the first day of the trial on the fifth of Pachon, and the summoning of the Alexandrian envoys. Roman names like Tarquinius and Aviolus are possibly mentioned.

The second column appears to be the proceedings of the second day of the trial, when Isidorus begins to speak and is interrupted by Claudius, who accuses Isidorus of killing his friends, of whom Theon the exegete is mentioned.

Col. II

ἡμέρα [Δε]υτ[έ]ρα. Παχῶ[ν ζ̄.

ἀκούει Κλαύδιος Καίσαρ Σεβαστὸς Ἰσιδώρου

γυμνασιάρχου πόλεως Ἀλεξανδρέων

κατὰ Ἀγρίππου βασιλέω[ς ἐν τοῖς

λιανοῖς κήποις, συνκα[θημένων αὐτῶ

5

συνκλητικῶ]ν ἔικο[σ]ι, τ[ούτων δὲ

ὑπατικῶν δέκα ἕξ, πα[ρουσῶν δὲ καὶ  
 τῶν ματρωνῶν εἰς. [τὸ τοῦ  
 Ἴσ[ι]δώρου. Ἴσίδωρ[ο]ς ἐν πρ[ώτοις ἤρξατο.  
 κύριέ μου Καῖσαρ, τῶν γονά[των σου δέομαι 10  
 ἀκοῦσαί μου τὰ πονοῦν[τα τῆ πατρίδι.  
 ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ. μερίσω σο[ι ταύτην τὴν  
 ἡμέραν. συνεπένευ[σαν καὶ οἱ συν-  
 καθήμενοι [π]άντες σ[υνκλητικοὶ  
 εἰδότες ὁποῖός[εστιν ἀ]νὴρ ὁ Ἴσίδωρος. 15  
 Κλαύδιος Καῖ[σαρ. μηδὲν ὑπὲρ θεοῦς  
 κατὰ τοῦ ἐμοῦ [φίλου εἴτης. ἄλλους γάρ  
 μου δύο φίλ[ους ἀνήρηκας ἤδη.  
 Θεῶνα ἐξηγη[τὴν καὶ Ναίτιον ἑπαρχον.

Isidoros was the first to speak: ‘My lord Caesar, I beseech you to listen to my account of my native city’s sufferings.’

The emperor: ‘I shall grant you this day.’

All the senators who were sitting as assessors agreed with this, knowing the kind of man Isidoros was.

Claudius Caesar: ‘Say nothing (God forbid it!)(?) against my friend. You have already done away with two of my friends, Theon the exegete and Naevius the prefect ...’

The text overlaps with BGU II 511, and begins almost from the beginning of the second day, continuing with Isidorus insulting Agrippa as a three-obol Jew.

Col. I

[.....-λια]νοῖς [κή]ποις συν[καθη-]  
 [μένων αὐτῶ σ]υνκλητι[κῶ]ν κ̄, ὑπατι-  
 [κῶν δέκα ἕξ, ὀμ]ίλουσῶν δὲ ματρωνῶν  
 [εἰς.....] τὸ τοῦ Ἰσιδώρου.  
 [ὁ δὲ Ἰσίδωρος πρ]ῶτον λόγον ἤρξατο, λέ- 5  
 [γων. κύριέ μου Καῖσ]αρ, τῶν γονάτων σου δέ-  
 [ομαι ἀκοῦσαί μ]ου τὰ πονοῦντα τῆ πα-  
 [τρίδι. Κλαύδιος] Καῖσαρ. μερίσω σοι τὴν ἡ-  
 [μέραν. συνεπένευσα]ν καὶ οἱ συνκαθήμενοι  
 [πάντες συνκλητικοί,] εἰδότες οἷός ἐστιν ἀνὴρ 10  
 [ὁ Ἰσίδωρος. Κλαύδι]ος Καῖσαρ, μηδὲν ὑπὲρ θε-  
 [οὺς κατὰ τοῦ ἐμοῦ] φίλου εἵπησ. καὶ γάρ ἄλλους  
 [.....μου δύο φί]λους ἀνήρηκας. Θέων[α]  
 [γὰρ ἐξηγητὴν καὶ Να]ίτιον ἑπαρχον Αἰγύπτου  
 [τὸν καὶ ἡγεμονεύ]σαντα τῆς Ῥώμης τῆς 15  
 [παρεμβολῆς ἤδη ἀν]ήρηκας, καὶ τοῦτον τὸν  
 [ἄνδρα διώκεις. Ἰσίδ]ωρος. κύριέ μου Καῖσαρ, τί  
 [μέλει σοι ὑπὲρ Ἀγρίπ]που Ἰουδαίου τριωβολείου  
 [.....]λαι. Κλαύδιος Καῖσαρ. τ[ί

[φής ἀθάδέστατος] εἶ πάντων ἀνθρώπων 20

[c. 18 lett. ἐ]κείνη εἰρηκέναι.

[Ἰσίδωρος. ....] οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι κα-

[20 ]υ ἡσυχάζει

[20 ]ερ τύψας εἰχ[

[20] Ὀλύμπιε Καῖ- 25

[σαρ, ]σου

]ης

. . . . .

... in the .. gardens. With him sat twenty senators, sixteen men of consular rank, women of the court also attending ... Isidoros's trial. Isidoros began by saying:

‘My Lord Caesar, I beseech you to hear my account of my native city’s sufferings.’

The emperor: ‘I grant you this day.’

All the senators who were sitting as assessors agreed with this, knowing the kind of man Isidoros was.

Claudius Caesar: ‘Say nothing (God forbid it!)(?) against my friend. You have already done away with two of my friends, Theon the exegete and Naevius, prefect of Egypt and prefect of the praetorian guard at Rome; and now you prosecute this man.’

Isidoros: ‘My Lord Caesar, what do you care for a two-penny-halfpenny Jew like Agrippa?’

Claudius Caesar: ‘What? You are the most insolent of men to speak....’

Isidoros: ‘... I will not deny ... be quiet ... beaten ... Olympian Caesar....’

Col. II

· · · · ·

[

σω[

Ἴσ[ίδωρ-

π[ 30

εἶπεν.[

τὸν καὶ πρ[

περὶ τὸν Σεβαστ[όν

ἐπάγομαι γυμ[νασίαρχος Ἀλεξανδρείας,

ἔτων ν̄ς, Ἑλλ[ην- ὁ] 35

ρήτωρ τῆ δεξι[ᾶ

τὸ ἱμάτιον ἔρρι[ψεν

καὶ εἶπεν. οὐ δεῖ ε.[

Κλαύδιος Καῖσ[αρ. Ἴσί-

[δ]ωρε, ἐπὶ τὸν Θε[ῶνα 40

μήτε Ῥώμην μή[τε Ἀλεξάνδρειαν

Ἴσίδωρος, ἐπὶ το[ γυ-

μνασίαρχος Ἀλεξ[ανδρείας

χη τῆ φύσει τι[

ἐπτὰ Σεβαστεῖα τ[ 45

σας οὐκ ἔαν με δι[ ἄπα-

γόμενον ἐν σχ[ήματι γυμνασιαρχικῶ

[Κλα]ύδιος Καῖσαρ.[

Ἰσίδωρε, Ἰσίδω[ρε, ὑπὲρ θεοῦς κατὰ τοῦ

ἐμοῦ φίλου εἵπη[ς

50

[...]η κ[α]ταλαβ[

. . . . .

... about Augustus ... I am brought here, a gymnasiarch of Alexandria, fifty-six years old, a

Greek ... an orator, with right hand ... he threw off his cloak ... and said: ‘One must not ...’.

Claudius Caesar: ‘... Isidoros, against Theon ... neither Rome nor Alexandria....’

Isidoros: ‘... a gymnasiarch of Alexandria ... by nature ... seven temples of Augustus ... not allow me ... being taken away in the robes of a gymnasiarch.’

Claudius Caesar: ‘Do not say anything, Isidoros, Isidoros,—God forbid!—anything against my friend....’

*P.Berol. 8877*<sup>17</sup>

This is a stand-alone text with no overlaps. Isidorus accuses the Jews of stirring up trouble and being almost on the level of Egyptians, Agrippa defends the status of the Jews, a person named

Balbillus sides with Isidorus, accusing the Jews of insolence.

Col. I

]συναρχα

(ὁ δεῖνα) ? ]

]εται, ὅτι ἀπὸ

ἄλλο τι νῦν

]· ετο 5

(ὁ δεῖνα) ? ]-

]αις γενα-

μεν- ]ρης κατε-

]ν φασιν

] αὐτοῦ τόλει 10

ε]ἰσεκλήθησαν

] ἀπό τινος

] ἔθνος τὸ

Ἰουδαϊκὸν (?) Ἀλεξα]νδρέων

τ]ελοῦσι τοῦ 15

-ειλ]κύκασι ᾧ

Π]οσειδῶνι

· · · · ·

... the Jewish people (?) ... of the Alexandrians ... who pay ...

Col. II

Ἰσίδωρος

κ[αλὰ] λέγει, κύριε Σεβαστέ, β[άλβιλλος,

[περὶ τ]ῶν σῶν πραγμάτων. τ[οῦναντίον 20

[σοὶ δέ,] Ἀγρίππα, πρὸς ἃ εἴση[γεῖ περὶ Ἰου-



[δαίων] ἀντικατασῆσομαι. ἐνκ[αλῶ αὐτοῖς  
 [ὅτι κ]αὶ ὅλην τὴν οἰκουμένην [ἐπιχειροῦσιν  
 [ταράς]σειν. δεῖ δὲ τὸ κατ' ἕκα[στον σκοποῦντα  
 [κριν]εῖ[ν] τὸν ὄχλον. οὐκ εἰσιν Ἀλ[εξανδρεῦσιν] 25

ὁμοιοπαθεῖς, τρόπῳ δὲ Αἰγυπ[ίων ὁμοῖοι.

οὐκ εἰσι ἴσοι τοῖς φόρον τελ[οῦσι];

Ἀγρίππας

[Αἰ]γ[υπτ]ίοις ἔστησαν φόρους [ο]ἱ ἄρχ[οντες  
 [..].[..].[...]ν. τούτοις δὲ οὐδεῖς. 30

Βάλβιλλος

ἴδε ἐπὶ π[ηλί]κην τόλμην ἢ θεὸς αὐτοῦ ἦ

. . . . .

Isidoros: ‘My Lord Augustus, with regard to your interests, Balbillos indeed speaks well. But to you, Agrippa, I wish to retort in connexion with the points you bring up about the Jews. I accuse them of wishing to stir up the entire world.... We must consider every detail in order to judge the whole people. They are not of the same nature as the Alexandrians, but live rather after the fashion of the Egyptians. Are they not on a level with those who pay the poll-tax?’

Agrippa: ‘The Egyptians have had taxes levied on them by their rulers.... But no one has imposed tributes on the Jews.’

Balbillos: ‘Look to what extremes of insolence either his god or ...’

This text overlaps partially with *P.Lond.Inv.* 2785. Musurillo interpreted it as the third column of BGU II 511. Isidorus defends himself against the emperor's accusations, this fragment has Lampon as his sidekick. Claudius insults him as a son of an actress, he defends his status as gymnasiarch and in turn accuses Claudius of being the abandoned son of the Jewess Salome. Claudius orders them to be executed.

## Col. III

[...]ε πρέσβευα[.....] ἢ πατρίς.

[Λά]μπων τῷ Ἰσιδώρῳ. ἐγὼ μὲν] ἐφεῖδον

[ἤδη] τὸν θάνατ[όν μου. Κλαύ]διος Καῖσαρ.

[πολ]λοὺς μου φίλους ἀπέκτ[ει]νας, Ἰσίδωρε.

[Ἰσί]δωρος. βασιλέως ἤκουσα τοῦ τότε 5

[ἐπ]ιτάξαντος. καὶ σὺ λέγε τίνος θέλεις

[κα]τηγορήσω. Κλαύδιος Καῖσαρ. ἀσφαλῶς

[ἐ]κ μουσικῆς εἶ, Ἰσίδωρε. Ἰσίδωρος.

[ἐγ]ὼ μὲν οὐκ εἶμι δοῦλος οὐδὲ μουσικῆς

[υἱ]ός, ἀλλὰ διασήμευ πόλεως [Ἀ]λεξαν- 10

[δρ]εῖ[ας] γυμνασῖαρχος. σὺ δὲ ἐκ Σαλώμη[ς]

[τ]ῆς Ἰουδα[ίας υἱ]ὸς [ἀπό]βλητος. διὸ καὶ ἀπο[.]

.εἰας ἐπ[...].ατη[..]ως. ἔφη Λά[μπ]ων

[τ]ῷ Ἰσιδώρῳ. τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἔχομεν ἢ παρα-

[φ]ρονοῦντι βασιλεῖ τόπον διδόναι; 15

[Κ]λαύδιος Καῖσαρ. οἷς προεκέλευσα

[τ]ὸν θάνατον τοῦ Ἰσιδώρου καὶ Λάμπων[ος]

Lampon to Isidoros: 'I have looked upon death....'

Claudius Caesar: 'Isidoros, you have killed many friends of mine.'

Isidoros: 'I merely fulfilled the wish of the king then ruling. So too I should be willing to denounce anyone you wish.'

Claudius Caesar: 'Isidoros, you are really the son of a girl-musician.'

Isidoros: 'I am neither a slave nor a girl-musician's son, but gymnasiarch of the glorious city of Alexandria. But you are the cast-off son of the Jewess Salome! And therefore...'

Lampon said to Isidoros: 'We might as well give in to a crazy Emperor.'

Claudius Caesar: 'Those whom I told (to carry out) the execution of Isidoros and Lampon....'

*P.Oxy.* XLII 3021

This stand-alone text, incorporated by Magnani (2009), describes a meeting at the Serapeum, with Isidoros, Afrodisia, and Dionysios meeting with Flaccus, with a discussion of a payment of money. This has sometimes been seen as an indication that there was a secret pact between Flaccus and the Greeks in the context of the riots of 38 CE where Flaccus would have supported the Greeks against the Jews in exchange for their support against the emperor.

*P. Gissen* 46

A very fragmentary text with no overlaps with others, it is another Magnani (2009) addition. It mentions a case of false citizenship, Isidorus, and Gaius Caesar, who then writes to the Alexandrians.

There are many unusual features in the narrative. The setting, in one of the gardens of Rome, is not typical, but can be seen as within the bounds of possibility. The exact location is not mentioned, simply the ending -illian, which has normally been interpreted as indicating four possible alternatives, the *horti Sirviliani, Luculliani, Lolliani* or *Statilliani*.<sup>19</sup> The location of the trial was naturally not relevant for its validity; a Roman magistrate or emperor could essentially make decisions from any location.

The presence of a large number of women from the court in addition to the senators may be equally unusual, and shows that the event was considered to be both important and entertaining. A similar indication is the reference that the Senators knew “the kind of man Isidorus was” (BGU II 511). The use of trials or hearings as entertainment was not in any way unusual; beyond the accounts in Rome about listening to trials as popular entertainment, we have some indications of the imperial court possibly using trials as a form of intellectual exercise. Pliny’s account of having assisted Trajan at Centumcellae suggests that they were at least combining business with pleasure. Similarly, the trial described in the Dmeir inscription appears in a similar way to be organized at Caracalla’s pleasure. For example, the advocates representing the parties were members of the imperial *consilium*.<sup>20</sup>

What is really in question is whether the underlying event would have been actually a trial at all. What would, for instance, King Agrippa actually be accused of? One possibility is that the event was simply a hearing to give the embassies a chance to air their criticisms, an adjudication by the emperor. However, this is something of a non-issue, because the texts clearly state that it is a trial. Equally, there was no practical difference between a trial and an adjudication regarding the capability of the emperor to pronounce legally binding judgments.

The structure of the events is not clear, due to the various lacunae. First, the emperor, senators, and various members of the court are in attendance, and the trial begins in earnest. Isidorus is given a full day to lay out the grievances of his city, Alexandria. This is a very long time for a trial—most sources give a limit of an hour or even half an hour.<sup>21</sup> Again, if Isidorus was on trial, or even if he was accusing Agrippa, why discuss the sufferings of Alexandria? Due to the riots caused by the Greeks? Or the insolence of the Jews?

In any case, we hear nothing of the trial itself, as Claudius makes a remark about his friends, Theon the exegete and Naevius, the prefect of Egypt and a *praefectus praetorio*, who were presumably killed after being accused by Isidorus during the reign of Caligula. Isidorus replies that he was only following orders, and is available if Claudius needs a good accuser. Then Claudius insinuates that he is the son of an actress, i.e. a prostitute. Isidorus, enraged, then defends the glory of his city and his own position, but insults Claudius as the abandoned son of a Jewess. Claudius summarily orders them to be killed. The timeline is a bit unclear on where the insulting of Agrippa took place. Similarly, it is not easy to see where the accusations against the Jews in *P.Berol.8877* would fit in, because the main narrative jumps from beginning of

Isidorus's speech to the insults almost immediately. It is possible that there were different iterations of the narratives, where there would have been time to insult Jews before the inevitable execution of the Alexandrian envoys.

In conclusion, the meaning of the texts relating to the *Acta Isidori* is not self-evident. The Alexandrian Greeks sent an embassy, which sought to persuade the emperor. Isidorus was no doubt famous for his rhetorical skills. The emperor agrees to hear them, sitting with his consilium and giving Isidorus an unusually lengthy time to speak. Almost immediately, the fortune of the Alexandrians is reversed, as Claudius begins accusing Isidorus of killing his friends. When Isidorus accuses Agrippa and the Jews in general, Claudius becomes enraged and slanders Isidorus, who retorts in the same measure. Isidorus thus makes two mistakes. Firstly, impugning the emperor's friend and ally, Agrippa, in addition to having a history of accusing Claudius's friends and allies. The second mistake is all the more fatal, and that is forgetting to whom he was speaking. If Isidorus was brought down by his prejudice and his temper, why is he the hero of the story?

### **3. Good kings and cruel tyrants in the kingship literature**

Roman emperors did not exist in a vacuum, and it should be emphasized that the cultural continuum that they inhabited was both complex and multifaceted. There was, first of all, a wider kingship literature that sprung from the Persian, Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultural experience with the implications of kingship, tyranny, and other forms of single rule.

It is impossible, and also quite pointless, to attempt to synthesize the enormous primary and secondary literature that has developed from this. Much of it stems from the general forms of what was later described as the “mirror for princes” literature (*speculum principis*, the German translation *Fürstenspiegel*), literature that sought to provide guidance to rulers.<sup>22</sup> A second theme was the psychological impact that an encounter with absolute power, wielded inhumanely, causes in humans. A good example of the pervasiveness of this literature is the work of Seneca, which recycles quite a lot of the examples from Greek and Hellenistic literature. For instance, in Seneca’s *De Clementia* this materializes in the form of Persian kings and Hellenistic tyrants acting as characters in the philosophical treatise.<sup>23</sup>

What the purpose of these kingship narratives was is something of a question of its own. Are these narratives actual historical *exempla*, or simply literary devices invented to fit a character with comparable traits in the tradition? The examples of horrors, of fathers made to watch their children die or being fed the flesh of their family,<sup>24</sup> are in many instances clearly exotic embellishments, a parade of unspeakable cruelty meant to describe what happens when the bounds of human society are being tested, primarily by giving an individual enough adulation and unlimited power.

The narratives of kingship literature, but equally the narratives of historical rulers, illustrated both positive and negative examples for both provincial and imperial audiences. One of the more useful concepts in this regard is that of the negative example. For the imperial audience, meaning the imperial centre as a whole, the negative examples act as a warning.<sup>25</sup> If you act in this way, we consider you to be a tyrant, and our stories will reflect that. Thus positive and negative

examples of the actions of real or imaginary rulers also carried a normative weight. They implied a type of judgement that the ruled could impose on the ruler, and in the case where there was no effective means of popular representation or even sanction, this rather weak form of expressing approval or disapproval was a rare method of attempting to influence the ruler to act as you wished.

A continuing theme in the kingship literature is the separation of power and human emotion. Both tyrants and wise kings are in some sense superhuman characters who are not really bound by human emotions or the ties of affection that underlie the human community. The cruelty of the tyrant demands the servility of the courtier, who must hide his own humanity and his own emotions in the face of the acts of the tyrant.

In the narrative of the *Acta Isidori*, Claudius is unquestionably a tyrant. However, he is not a superhuman tyrant, but simply a small man who has been elevated to the throne and seeks to avenge his friends and support his allies. The folly and tragedy of Isidorus in this narrative is that he does not recognize this, but blazes ahead trusting his instinct. When that fails, he makes his second mistake, thinking that the setting is one between equals, fellow members of the elite. It is wholly possible that the situation did not register on him as being before an omnipotent ruler, as this was hardly the only time that Claudius had trouble asserting his authority. In fact, Suetonius mentions how Claudius would be repeatedly abused by pleaders in court, who would insult him, throw objects at him, and prevent him from leaving.<sup>26</sup> Suetonius does not mention what happened to the abusers afterwards.



The fate of Isidorus therefore illustrates the difficulties of not only social convention, but that of humanity. He emerges as a tragic antihero due to his pride and vanity.

#### **4. Audience and narratives**

The audience of the text is quite clearly the Alexandrian and Egyptian Greek community, but without doubt the text sought to extend the Greek grievances even further. After the Roman conquest, the Alexandrian Greek community shared a long-held hostility to both Rome and the Jews. The hostility to Rome was perhaps due to a deep-seated loss of status, the fall from being a centre of the civilized world to a capital of a Roman province. The Romans had of course a long history of interference in the affairs of the city, but they had as a rule treated it leniently, and suffered the odd incident without massive reprisals. The Romans were also cautious in their dealings with Alexandria, as it had been the base of Mark Anthony in his struggle against Octavian. The richness of the city and its position as the main port for the grain supply of Rome meant that precautions had to be taken, such as prohibiting Roman Senators from traveling there. Anti-Semitism or Anti-Judaism in the Greek community has been attributed to their purported alliance with Rome, but tracing a long term dispute dating at least to the Ptolemies to a single cause is too simplistic.<sup>28</sup>

The beginning of the dispute in question between the Greek and Jewish communities originated from the visit of King Agrippa I to the city, likely to have taken place in June of 38. As always in disputes with two extremely vocal sides, the real causes and effects are impossible to ascertain with any certainty. Nevertheless, King Agrippa had visited the city, and was received with enormous pomp and circumstance by the Jewish community. The Greeks took offence and began

attacking the Jews, destroying property and killing them in large numbers. The main narrative of the events is by Philo, who attacked Flaccus for tolerating the mayhem in exchange for protection against the emperor. After the riots ended, Flaccus was arrested and sent to Rome in the autumn. Embassies of both Greeks and Jews were dispatched soon after, meeting with Caligula himself. The matter was then postponed due to Caligula's campaign in Germany, and was taken up on his return in the fall of 40. Upon Caligula's assassination on January 24, 41, the Jews rioted in turn, leading to a new round of embassies. Both embassies were nominally going to Rome to congratulate Claudius on his accession, but in reality sought to gain his favour. Claudius finally gave a ruling on the matter in October 10, year 41, ending the conflict for a time by issuing a series of settlements meant to restore peace by ordering that Jews should not attempt to gain an equal position and that Greeks should not attack them.<sup>29</sup>

The narrative of the *Acta Isidori*, and especially the wordings of the text, is one of deep bias against both Rome and the Jews. Claudius is an insane tyrant, the crazy king (παραφρονοῦντι βασιλεῖ, P. Cairo inv. 10448, col. i, ll. 14-15). Isidorus also calls him the “cast-off son of the Jewess Salome” (ἐκ Σαλώμης τῆς Ἰουδαίας υἱὸς ἀπόβλητος, P. Cairo inv. 10448, col. i, ll. 11-12), a somewhat bizarre insult for the Roman emperor, questioning his legitimacy. Agrippa, then, is named as a three-obol Jew (Ἰουδαίου τριωβολείου, P. Lond. 2785, col. i, l. 18), a curious insult as well, meant to denote his worthlessness or covetousness. While there have been innumerable theories on the background of these insults, the first meant simply that Claudius was insane, the second that his lineage was illegitimate, and the third, about Agrippa being a three-obol Jew, was about his worthlessness. While there may not have been a specific historical background motif for each insult, they do reveal a deep-seated animosity towards Jews, if they were the kind of

insults that one would hurl during the heat of an argument.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Claudius's earlier insult, calling Isidorus the son of an actress or musician (ἐκ μουσικῆς, P. Cairo inv. 10448, col. i, ll. 7-8), was a more run of the mill suggestion that one's mother was a prostitute. Isidorus's reply that he was neither a slave nor an actress' son (οὐκ δοῦλος οὐδὲ μουσικῆς υἱός, P. Cairo inv. 10448, col. i, ll. 9-10) derives from a similar tendency to obsess about status and its heritability.<sup>32</sup>

The narrative is very nationalistic, or at least favourable to the city—the ambassadors being the symbols of the city.<sup>33</sup> The robes of the gymnasiarch are a crucial point of this symbolism: Isidorus casts them off dramatically, but is then led to his execution wearing the robes. When talking about the glorious city of Alexandria, he presents himself not only as its representative—which he, of course, is as its ambassador—but almost as its physical representation in his pride and suffering.

What does the text then pertain to, and why was it so popular? What then was the source of the Alexandrian Greek enthusiasm for the death of their ambassadors?

It is evident that it had some documentary aspirations, being as it is a transcript of a trial, real or fictitious. Isidorus and Lampon, both men reviled by Philo, were presented as heroes, martyrs to their city who bravely opposed the mad king, and by extension the Jews.

In the example of the *Acta Isidori*, the message could be interpreted as twofold. For the imperial centre, it carried the message of demanding respect for Alexandria. This demand for respect was not only aimed at Rome, but more importantly at their neighbours. The provincial disputes,

between population groups and cities could be bitter and hard fought. For the local audience, the message was one of respect for bravery in defence of the city, but equally one of caution. In the imperial world, foolhardiness was not a virtue, as a new emperor could reverse the fortunes of the city in an instant.

For the imperial audience, the lesson repeatedly learned in these kinds of disputes was one of caution and diplomacy. Even though the emperor was in theory vested with unfettered power, provoking rebellions among the provincial elites was not wise policy. We have a few accounts of instances where the emperors intervened in local disputes, answering petitions from provincials. For example, in the cases of Tryphera by Augustus (*IG XII 3,174=FIRA III,185*) and the Goharians by Caracalla (*SEG XVII 759*) mentioned earlier, the imperial intervention appeared to be a clear case where the emperor could be seen as a good king. In contrast, there were cases where the local disputes were brought to the emperor, where the sides were locked in a bitter and long dispute, and where there was little chance of not making enemies. One such example is the case of Herodes Atticus and the Athenians in 174/175, where Marcus Aurelius attempted to mediate the dispute. In the letter, preserved in an inscription, Marcus seeks to smooth the dispute, resolve some issues, and punish some slaves in order to make the issue go away.<sup>34</sup> While they were endowed with almost limitless powers, the Roman emperors cared about their legitimacy and sought to reinforce it by presenting themselves as rulers through common consensus.

There is one issue that is very important here: there are no Athenian versions of Isidorus or Lampon, no sacrifices to the noble city, let alone Rhodian versions. Why is this? What was

special about Alexandria? This is both a very difficult question and an issue that is potentially very revealing. One possibility is pure chance, that this particular case happened to come about in Alexandria. However, this does not answer the question of its popularity. The *Acta Isidori* marked the beginning of a tradition of literature in the same genre, indicating that there was something special about Alexandria that provoked such a response. There is the phenomenon which Musurillo calls the “will to death”, the idea of the martyrdom or sacrifice that was so prevalent in early Christian literature, but was also common in the Greek and Jewish literary tradition.<sup>35</sup>

Why did the will to death become so popular? One explanation is that it was one of the only ways to confront unfettered power. Death, as later remarked by Seneca, was the ultimate weapon of the powerless and the true freedom.<sup>36</sup> It combined the ultimate sacrifice with the ultimate statement against the emperor, or any ruler.

A very good possibility of why the narrative of self-sacrifice or martyrdom became popular in Alexandria was the knowledge of and response to the Jewish and Christian narrative traditions of martyrdom. Of course, the Greek tradition of parrhesia, the intellectual demand of speaking truth to power, also valorised the philosophers who regardless of the personal risk spoke their mind in front of kings. In the Jewish tradition of martyrdom, there was a long narrative continuity of the sacrifice of the representatives of the Jews in the face of powerful enemies or rulers. It was a matter of pride to Jewish authors like Philo or Josephus how willingly the Jewish heroes were able to face death in the defence of their religion. The reverence of suicide and dying for a noble cause was of course not solely a Jewish or Greek tradition. The Roman cultural heritage

contained a significant dose of heroic suicides and self-mutilators, from the Scaevolus to Verginia. Not only Seneca, but also Roman Stoics in general valorised suicide, with opponents of tyrants such as Thrasea Paetus proving their resolve by taking their own lives. Josephus presented religious martyrdom as the defining characteristic of the Jewish people, overcoming historical adversaries and indomitable empires from the Egyptians to the Persians and the Romans through their perseverance. Josephus was, of course, writing to a Roman audience, and perhaps mirrored the Roman perspective on self-sacrifice.<sup>37</sup>

The emergence of the narratives of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* can thus be explained, at least partly, through the contact with and popularity of Jewish and Roman martyrology, in addition to the narratives of Christian martyrs and the parrhesia associated with Greek philosophers. That the Jewish example served as an important model can be reasoned through three significant points. First, that the narratives are set at the same time as Philo's and Josephus's influential narratives. Second, that the narrative reinforces the idea of the essential powerlessness of the community against its oppressor, that they possessed only the mental power of self-sacrifice to make their point against the emperor. Third, the main issue is about the pride and value of the community, not religious sentiments as in Christian martyrology.

## **5. Conclusions**

One of the issues regarding the admittedly vague notions of narratives and beliefs is that they do not actually accomplish anything. What does it matter what was written, especially in a work that is fictitious? The narratives of the encounter between the emperor as judge and the provincials,

such as the narrative of the *Acta Isidori*, are literature not legal documents. Thus, they were neither accurate and reliable sources of what really happened, nor do they inform us of the official regulations that may or may not have been in place.

What is more, the *Acta Isidori* is atypical of the depictions of emperors as judges that we have from the provinces. It resembles more the negative examples from the imperial centre, the negative *exempla* of imperial actions meant to signal disapproval, and to indicate a better way to act. Even within the kingship literature the narrative is atypical, although it is not without parallels. In the face of unfettered power, the actions of Isidorus simultaneously portray his superiority and his powerlessness in relation to the emperor. Through Isidorus' mistake of displaying human emotion, the narrative demonstrates the business end of unfettered power: it is an inhuman and irresistible power, one that is beyond the bounds of the human realm.

The *Acta Isidori* is thus a narrative of provincial pride that resembles stories of martyrdom: self-sacrifice in the face of injustice becomes the only acceptable course of action. This shows that, for the ruled, an unpredictable emperor appeared as a tyrant. Because there were no fixed rules that they would know of, the provincials, much like everybody else in the Roman world, were left guessing what the emperor would or could do, seeking from precedents some hints to help predict how the ruler would resolve an issue. Thus, when the emperor deviates from expectations, he turns, de facto, into a tyrant. A tyrant has no legitimacy.

This is perhaps the most important lesson of the narrative of the *Acta Isidori*: it provides a glimpse of the convictions and expectations held by the provincials. From the spread of the

narrative tradition, we may infer that the popularity of the narrative shows its resonance within parts of the provincial population, most likely the Greek speaking portions. Whether this resonance meant that these were shared and firmly held beliefs is beyond our knowledge. However, the spread of the narratives of emperors as judges demonstrates the spread of the conviction that the emperor would and could be the ultimate judge, and as such could act with caprice. By telling and retelling the stories, one reinforces the expectations of the populace that would be placed on the ruler, namely that by acting contrary to established practices, one would become a tyrant in the eyes of the provincial population. Again, it is impossible to know whether these stories would ever have reached the ear of a single Roman emperor, but due to the circulation of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* literature it is highly likely that they would be well known among the sizable quotient of Alexandrian Greeks in the imperial court, not to mention the upper class Romans living and visiting there. The narratives would thus work more as a hint, a nudge, a cautioning example, and as such they could have been very effective in subtly guiding imperial behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup> On the emperor as judge, see Tuori 2016; Rizzi 2012; von Schilling 2010; Wankel 2009; Coriat 1997; Hauken 1998; Honoré 1994; Millar 1992; Bleicken 1962; Kelly 1957; Volkmann 1969. On the provincial petitions, Orestano 1962; Marotta 1991; Gallo 1982; Nörr 1981; Arcaria 2000.

<sup>3</sup> On the Acta literature, see Navarrete 2018; Harker 2008; Musurillo 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Gambetti 2009. On the narratives of Jewish martyrology, Flaccus and Philo, see Shepkaru 2006, 36-37.

<sup>5</sup> For example in the Severan period copies of a letter confirming the right to reach the emperor spread widely. MacMullen 1976, 81; *POxy.* 17,2104 = *POxy.* 43,3106.

<sup>6</sup> On the narratives of imperial jurisdiction in literary sources, see Tuori 2016.

<sup>7</sup> In the Digest, we have numerous descriptions by jurists about the deliberations of the emperor, see *Dig.* 37,14,17pr (Ulpian). For example, on Trajan's deliberations as judge, see *Dig.* 48,19,5, 48,22,1. On Marcus's deliberations, see *Dig.* 28,4,3, 37,14,17, 48,7,7. Especially Hadrian was prone to express his frustration and anger. *FIRA* III,100, 1. 4-9 (*P. Teb.* 286); Williams 1976, 70.

<sup>8</sup> *P. Columbia* 123, 10; Westermann and Schiller 1954, 81; Oliver 1989, 451-8; Katzoff 1981; Youtie and Schiller 1955; Pringsheim 1956; David 1956; Coriat 1997, 190, 588; Haensch 2007, 215-18; Plisecka 2017.

<sup>9</sup> This became a general rule in *Dig.* 49,1,21pr.

<sup>10</sup> Fronto, *Ep. ad M. Caes.* 1,6,2-3.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Ando 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Musurillo 1954; Harker 2008; Magnani 2009; Rodriguez 2010; Navarrete 2018. Of the earlier literature, some essays such as von Premerstein 1923, are still relevant in their political and cultural interpretations. On the earlier literature, see Navarrete 2018, 3-9.

<sup>13</sup> During the various conflicts between Rome, not only Agrippa but even Philo (described in his *On the Embassy to Gaius*) acted as ambassadors and mediators between Jews and Romans, attempting to prevent conflicts from escalating. On the historical events, see Gambetti 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Navarrete 2018, 124-127. The dispute on the date of the trial dates back to Reinach and Wilcken, see von Premerstein 1923, 15.

<sup>15</sup> *CPJ*, II, 71-72.

<sup>16</sup> *CPJ*, II, 74-76.

<sup>17</sup> *CPJ*, II, 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> *CPJ*, II, 80-81.

<sup>19</sup> Navarrete 2018, 141 for discussion.

<sup>20</sup> About trials as entertainment, see Bablitz 2007, 200-202; Plin. *Ep.* 6,31; Sherwin-White 1966, 391; Fell 1992, 119–20. On the motives of the Dmeir trial (*SEG XVII 759*), see Kunkel 1953; Crook 1995, 91–5; Magioncalda 1999; Stolte 2003.

<sup>21</sup> For instance in the Dmeir trial one of the advocates announces that he will speak under half an hour. *SEG XVII 759*. However, there was little regularity over speech restrictions, but the general trend was towards restricting time. Bablitz 2007, 172-173.

<sup>22</sup> Within the Roman tradition, the main examples are Seneca's *De Clementia* and *De Ira*. They were in turn inspired by works like Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. The ancient examples were emulated in the Medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern genre of *Fürstenspiegel*.

<sup>23</sup> On the immense literature on Seneca and the difficulty of writing to authority, see Romm 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Sen. *De Ira* 3,15.

<sup>25</sup> Such as the idea of Seneca that Nature had produced Caligula as an experiment to see what absolute vice and power combined could produce. Sen. *Helv.* 12,10,4: *C. Caesar [Augustus], quem mihi uidetur rerum natura edidisse ut ostenderet quid summa uitia in summa fortuna possent.*

<sup>26</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 15: *adeo causidicos patientia eius solitos abuti, ut discedentem e tribunal non solum voce revocarent, sed et lacinia togae retenta, interdum pede apprehenso detinerent. . . . Equitem quidem Romanum . . . graphium et libellos, quos tenebat in manu, ita cum magna stultitiae et saevitiae exprobratione iecisse in faciem eius, ut genam non leviter perstrinxerit.*

<sup>28</sup> Gambetti 2009, 23-55; Harker 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Philo, *Leg.*; *CPJ*, II, n. 150-159 contains some of the documentary evidence. Claudius' letter to the Alexandrians (*P. Lond* 1912; *CPJ*, II, n. 153) attempts to quell the disturbances with a mixture of reassurances and threats, demanding that the persecution of Jews ends and that the Jews on their part will stick to their lot. On the chronology, see Harker 2008, 10-34.

<sup>31</sup> Some have suggested that the reference to Salome may have something to do with Claudius' association with members of the Herodian dynasty when he grew up or an implication that he was no rightful heir to Mark Antony (his maternal grandfather) because he had forsaken the alliance with Alexandria. The mention of three obols is not clear, since it has no apparent correspondence to any cultural reference. It is less than the temple tax or the Flavian tax on Jews. In papyri, it is mentioned in several cases an interest of three obols (τόκος τριωβολείος) per 100 drakhmas (έκάστης μνᾶς) each month (τοῦ μηνός): τόκου τριωβολείου έκάστης μνᾶς τοῦ μηνός έκάστου (*P. Oxy.* 3,506,12);

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[τριωβο]λειτοιοις τόκοις ψειλοῖς τ' ἐκάσ[της] [μ]νᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος μην[ὸς] (*P. Flor.* 1,46,16); ... [τοῦ] ἀφήλικος τόκου τρει[ωβολείου] [ἐκάστης] [μνᾶς] κατὰ [μῆν]α ἕκαστον (*P. Flor.* 1,46,12). However, there are also mentions of a four obol interest per month, so this demands a leap of faith as well. Other theories have been presented, suggesting that it was a reference to Agrippa's money problems, a reference to a specific class of cheap prostitutes or something else entirely. On the theories, see *CPJ*, II, 77, 81; Harker 2008, 42-3. The author wishes to thank Dr Heta Björklund for the comparative survey of the papyrological literature.

<sup>32</sup> Pullen 2005, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Harker 2008, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Wankel 2009, 17–68; Millar 1992, 512; Williams 1976, 79; Williams 1975; Oliver 1989, 366–95.

<sup>35</sup> Musurillo 1954, 236.

<sup>36</sup> *Sen. Ep.* 26,10; 70,14-16. Seneca was obsessed with suicide as freedom from oppression.

<sup>37</sup> Shepkaru 2006, 41-52.