Edict of Tiberius Julius Alexander on Egypt and Galba

The provincial governor of Egypt introduces Galba as a saviour of humankind in his response to many petitions sent by the local population.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Provincial Edict
Original Location/Place: North jamb of the Outer Gateway of the temple of Hibis (Kharga, Egypt)
Actual Location (Collection/Museum): In-loco
Date: 68 CE
Physical Characteristics:
The edict was carved directly on one of the buildings at the entrance of the temple of Hibis. The stone was remedied with plaster, some of which is lost. Letters are not symmetrical or cleanly finished, but can be perfectly read in most parts of the very large inscription.

Material: Local stone
Measurements: The inscribed area on the stone measures 2.45 metres in height, and 2 metres in width. Letters are on average 1.9 to 1.6 centimetres tall, except for the first line in which 3 centimetres are reached
Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek, Egyptian

Publications: Evelyn-White, Oliver, The Temple of Hibis II, p. 25-45, no. 4 [IGRR I.1263; OGIS 669; SB 5.8444]

Commentary:
A local magistrate (??????????/stratêgos) was in charge of publishing the edict (????????/?diatagma) of the provincial governor (??????/hegemôn) in one of Egypt’s most remote locations: the Thebaid Oasis. Also know in Antiquity as Hibis [4], modern Kharga, this site lies in the Libyan desert, approximately 200 kilometres away from the Nile. The oasis is mostly famous for a religious complex dating to the period of the Persian domination, the Temple of Hibis (see image below), and exactly on the walls of one of its entrance structures our text was carved (Evelyn-White, The Temple of Hibis II, p. 25-45). The inscription is particularly large, with 65 lines covering a surface of 2 metres. Actually, this is among the longest edicts dictated by provincial governors surviving from the Roman world. In our edition and commentary, only the first 10 lines are included.

These lines correspond to the preface of the document in which, first, the publication procedure is detailed and, then, the governor explains the motivations for the new regulations that are recorded from lines 11 to 61. Julius
Demetrius, the local magistrate, specifies that T. Julius Alexander is the author of an edict which he considered beneficent (?????????/eugерgesia) for the community and which consequently deserved conspicuous display. This concern for visibility explains the remarkable place on which the inscription still stands today. The positive bias towards the governor’s decisions is noteworthy as will later be Ti. Julius Severus’s long introduction. The dating formula closing the publication clause is worthy of note. The sequence follows the Egyptian practice and corresponds to the 6th of July 68 CE. Since the local calendar started in summer, the emperor Galba is considered to be in his second regnal year. However, this indication is slightly misleading and requires a more detailed discussion. Lucius Sulpicius Galba certainly succeeded Nero in Rome, but the last member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty only put himself to death on June 9th. On this date, Galba was still in Spain waiting for news of the senatorial conspiracy (Plutarch, Galba 6; Suetonius, Galba 11). Even if the Senate had already designated him emperor (Plutarch, Galba 7), the official delegation could only reach Narbonne probably around July (Plutarch, Galba 11). Furthermore, Galba may not have entered Rome until autumn. Given the distance from Italy to Egypt, and the aforementioned remoteness of the oasis, this edict is supposed to have been issued as soon as T. Julius Alexander knew with certainty – even without the official ceremony – that Galba was to become the new emperor (see Chalon, L’Édit, p. 43-52). There should therefore be no doubt that the Egyptian governor was aligned with the anti-Neronian faction and that this series of measures have to be understood in this context.

There is second preliminary factor that needs to be taken into account before analysing the actual words of the governor. Ti. Julius Alexander was a native to Egypt as reported by Tacitus at the beginning of his Histories (I.11). His family connections are also quite interesting. His uncle was the prominent Alexandrian and Jewish author, Philo, who seems to have introduced his nephew in some works (see Turner, Tiberiivs). The homonymous father of Alexander also played a prominent role in the Jewish community of the Egyptian capital, maintained close bonds with Judea, and even financed the new gates of the Jerusalem temple (see Burr, Tiberiivs Iulius). One of his sons, Marcus, married Berenice, daughter of Herod Agrippa. Julius, by contrast, decided to take up the Roman equestrian career and, according to Flavius Josephus (Jewish Antiquities XIX.276), “did not persevere in his ancestral religion.” Indeed, he authorised the repression of the Jews in Alexandria while he was still governor of the province (Flavius Josephus, Jewish War II.387), and is well known for becoming a loyal companion of Titus, supervising his army in the final siege of Jerusalem (Flavius Josephus, Jewish War V.45, VI.237; IGLS VII.4011), and participating in the subsequent imperial triumph (Juvenal I.131). This governor consequently epitomised the multi-layered and sometimes conflicting nature of a multicultural city such as Alexandria. One thing is nonetheless clear: being a Roman citizen, born in Egypt, and descendant of Jews, Julius Alexander had a profound knowledge of the province he was administering in 68.

The governor begins introducing his edict with a verb that is typical of official pronouncements (????????/legei, literally “says”). His preface can be divided into two sections. In the first, he explains his efforts in improving the state of the province. In the second, his actions are combined with the collaboration, concerns, and virtues of the new emperor Galba. Alexander’s decision is not presented as something impulsive, but rather heedful, which required a process of reflection or ?????????/pronoia. This remark is important in the complex historical context noted above. Imperial succession in 68 CE may have been chaotic, but the prefect of Egypt provided stability and continuity. Indeed, we know that Alexander was already holding the office in 66 (Flavius Josephus, Jewish War II.309). From this first moment, he had received petitions of all types of peoples as the edict specifies in lines 5 and 6. So, even if the text does not mention it explicitly, the governor wanted to convey the message that the accession of a new emperor in Rome gave him the possibility of applying a more favourable policy in which there will be “no new and unjust exactions (?????????????/eispraxeis).” The condemnation of Nero’s rule may not be completely obvious, but Alexander makes it manifest that the present times should be regarded as those of the “greatest good fortune” (?????????????/eudaimonia). His reforms in this case were not concerned with pressing matters (?????????????/epeigonta), but rather with a transformation that was going to benefit both the city of Alexandria – already favoured by the emperors as emphasised in line 4 – and also the rest of Egypt.

The emperor Galba is introduced in line 7 as a benefactor (?????????????/euergetês) “who cares about salvation of the whole race of men.” He is also presented as an astral force that is able to shine (?????????????/epilampsas) upon humankind. This largely solar allegory was not unprecedented in the provincial representation of Roman rulers in the early imperial period (e.g. Gaius-Caligula), and was particularly exploited by Nero. In a region such as Egypt and within the framework of a native religious landscape used to associating foreign powers to local deities, the reference is not surprising. And yet, the message of the governor could become even more powerful when one considers that his words were carved on the walls of an indigenous sacred complex. For all these reasons, the population should now be confident and hopeful. Julius Alexander was promising his utmost effort in making an efficient transition, he pledged the collaboration of mighty and truthful Galba, and, finally, he concludes with the divine favour of “gods who have reserved the safety of the world for this most sacred time” (lines 8 to 10). In sum,
the combination of human, imperial, and sacred powers would guarantee Rome’s successful administration, and hence the well-being of its subjects.

The Gods, nevertheless, did not turn out particularly favourable for Galba in the end. On January 1st he was murdered and the chaotic period of the so-called “four emperors” continued until the final victory of Vespasian. Julius Alexander, on the other hand, was more effective in his reforms as we know that some of his regulations were still valid in the 3rd century CE (P. Oxy. 899). Moreover, the edict was not only monumentalised on the stones of the remote oasis but also preserved in papyrological copies along the Nile (BGU 7.1563). The range of measures taken is remarkably wide; from taxes, land ownership, public and private privileges to judicial reforms (see Chalon, L’Édit, p. 101-236). Yet this document must, above all, be highlighted for illustrating how provincial communities were also susceptible to the biased messages of their governors, the shaky foundations of imperial succession, and the conspicuous presence of Roman elements even in their native religious spaces.

Keywords in the original language:

- ????????? [5]
- ????????? [6]
- ????? [7]
- ????? [8]
- ????????? [9]
- ??????? [10]
- ????? [11]
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- ??????????? [26]
- ??????? [27]
- ????????? [28]
- ????????? [29]

Thematic keywords:

- governor [30]
- salvation [31]
- humankind [32]
- divine favour [33]
- administration [34]
- justice [35]
- Galba [36]
- Jews [37]
- Rome [38]
- Egypt [39]
- local cults [40]
- succession [41]
• propaganda [42]
• hope [43]
• universalism [44]

Bibliographical references:  

Other sources connected with this document:  
Inscription

**Gaius-Caligula, the New Sun, and the Royal House of Thrace** [50]  
The city of Cyzicus decrees that the kings of Thrace and Antonia Tryphaena are to be honoured because the emperor Gaius (Caligula) has confirmed their rule

• Read more about Gaius-Caligula, the New Sun, and the Royal House of Thrace [50]

Inscription

**Nero and the Freedom of Greece** [51]  
Nero proclaims the “freedom” of Greece in a speech during the Isthmian games and the city of Akraiphiai prepares a decree in honour of the emperor, who is referred to as Zeus “the liberator”

• Read more about Nero and the Freedom of Greece [51]

Inscription

**Fulvius Asticus on the Tetrarchic Price Edict** [52]  
The governor Fulvius Asticus comments on the Price Edict decreed by Diocletian and his colleagues in the Tetrarchy.

• Read more about Fulvius Asticus on the Tetrarchic Price Edict [52]

Realized by:  
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