

# ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XXIX

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1995

## INDEX

CHRISTER BRUUN	<i>Pericula Alexandrina: The Adventures of a Recently Discovered Centurion of the legio II Parthica</i>	9
ANNE HELTTULA	<i>Names and Cases. Observations on CIL IV 1364</i>	29
MAIJASTINA KAHLOS	<i>The Restoration Policy of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus</i>	39
IIRO KAJANTO	<i>The Body Politic. On the History of a Famous Simile</i>	49
KLAUS KARTTUNEN	<i>Early Roman Trade with South India</i>	81
JUKKA KIVIHARJU	<i>Notice of a New Manuscript of John of Seville's Latin Translations of Sahl Ben Bišr's Kitāb al-<u>I</u>k̄tiyārāt (Liber de electionibus) and Kitāb al- Auqāt (Liber temporum)</i>	93
UTA-MARIA LIERTZ	<i>Über das Fehlen von Inschriftentypen. Einige Beobachtungen am Beispiel Kaiserpriester</i>	103
BENGT LÖFSTEDT	<i>Notes on Marius' De elementis</i>	111
MARIA MASLANKA SORO	<i>Alcuni aspetti della sofferenza tragica nell' Aiace di Sofocle</i>	115
OUTI MERISALO	<i>Classical Philology in Eighteenth-Century Finland: Henrik Hassel and Carl Abraham Clewberg</i>	137
OLLI SALOMIES	<i>Praenomina Recorded Erroneously in Inscriptions. With an Observation on the Grandfather of Q. Aulus Cerretanus (cos. II 319 BC)</i>	155
ERKKI SIRONEN	<i>Statue Base Epigrams in Honor of a Restorer from Early Byzantine Athens</i>	163
HEIKKI SOLIN	<i>Analecta epigraphica CLIX–CLXIII</i>	175
	<i>De novis libris iudicia</i>	183
	<i>Index librorum in hoc volumine recensorum</i>	223
	<i>Libri nobis missi</i>	227

**PERICULA ALEXANDRINA: THE ADVENTURES  
OF A RECENTLY DISCOVERED CENTURION  
OF THE *LEGIO II PARTHICA***

CHRISTER BRUUN

**1. A recent discovery at Albano Laziale**

In 1992 Pino Chiarucci, the Director of the well-organized and delightful Museo Civico Albano at Albano Laziale near Rome, found an interesting military inscription in the course of some municipal works. The inscription, which is incompletely preserved, was immediately published by Stefania Modugno Tofini and Dott. Chiarucci in the following format and with the following emendations (some of them only tentative, as stressed by the publishers themselves):<sup>1</sup>

*[Iovi] O[ptimo Maximo]  
Pro s[alute et reditu]  
Imp. Caes. [L. Septim. Severi]  
[et Imp. Caes. M. Aurel. Anton-]  
5 [ini et P. Septim. L. f. Get-]  
ae nobiliss[i]mi [Caesar.]  
C. Cassius Sever[ian.]  
praep. militum [- - -]  
leg. II Parthica[e Sever.]*

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Modugno Tofini & P. Chiarucci, "Nuovi rinvenimenti ad Albano", *Documenta Albana* 2. ser., 12-13 (1990-91) [1994] 37-48, esp. 37-42. The editors print *pro sa[alute et victoria]* on l. 2 on p. 38, while the version given here appears on p. 42. – This paper was made possible by the Norwood Travel Grant from the Classics Department at the University of Toronto, for which I here extend my warmest thanks. For useful comments I am most indebted to Prof. Silvio Panciera (Univ. of Rome "La Sapienza"), and I also wish to thank Mr. Simo Örmä and Mr. Kaj Sandberg of the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae for their ready assistance. I am indebted to Ms. Aara Suksi for correcting my English.

- 10 *p(iae) f(idelis) f(elicis) aet(ernae), eiusdemqu[e]*  
*princeps et primuspil.*  
*et quod Alexandriae*  
*cum 7 (centurio) ageret in pericu-*  
*lis constitutus numi-*  
 15 *ne eius adiuvante libera-*  
*tus sit ex voto posuit.*

The swift publication of this highly interesting inscription in the first available issue of the *Documenta Albana* merits the gratitude of all interested scholars. An important testimony to some of the vicissitudes of the *legio II Parthica*, encamped in antiquity at Alba, on the site where Albano Laziale later grew up, has now become accessible to the scholarly world.

The *editio princeps* is accompanied by a photograph of the text and the base on which it is inscribed (Fig. 1 on p. 39). The photograph provides a laudably true image of the original, as the present writer was able to verify during a visit in May of 1995 to the Museo Civico di Albano, where the inscription is prominently displayed in Sala XV on the basement floor of the Museum.<sup>2</sup> However, during my visit some suspicions about the original wording of the inscription, based on the published photograph, were confirmed by a careful scrutiny of the text itself. The presentation and discussion of some different readings and emendations of the text will be the subject of this paper.

## 2. The "autobiography" of a centurion

Although the upper line (or lines? It does not seem possible to establish the original height of the inscribed surface) is almost completely lost, and two lines in the first half of the text (ll. 4-5) cannot be read (they were deliberately erased in antiquity), the general character of the text is clear enough. We are dealing with a votive inscription (l. 16: *ex voto posuit*) dedicated to a deity (l. 1), in connection with a wish for the wellbeing of the

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<sup>2</sup> The visit to the Museo Civico was made on May 27th 1995. I wish to thank Prof. R. Kallet-Marx (Univ. of California at Santa Barbara) for his stimulating companionship during this expedition and inspection. Naturally I remain solely responsible for any errors of reading (or interpretation).

rulers of the Roman empire (ll. 3-6). On l. 7 we find the name of the dedicant, C. Cassius Sever(ianus?). (Other names are possible, e.g. Severus or Severinus.)

After the first part, which is quite regular in this sort of inscription, there follows an interesting and unusual resumé of Cassius' career, in which first (some of) his offices in the *legio II Parthica* are registered. The legion is given certain epithets, *p(ia)*, *f(idelis)*, *f(elix)*, *aet(erna)*,<sup>3</sup> and an imperial honorific title, which might be important in dating the inscription and its context.

Next there follows an even more remarkable section, which could be called "autobiographical": *et quod Alexandriae cum (centurio) ageret in periculis constitutus numine eius adiuvente liberatus sit* - "because he (the dedicant, who speaks of himself in the third person) was saved by the spirit of him (meaning the god, to whom the inscription is dedicated) at Alexandria, where he met with dangers while he was acting as centurion, he erected (this inscription) in fulfilment of a vow."

### 3. The date of the "Alexandrian dangers"

Formulaic expressions abound in inscriptions of Roman soldiers, and such inscriptions therefore rarely reveal very much about the experiences of an individual soldier. There are nevertheless occasional exceptions where we can catch a glimpse of a more personal experience.<sup>4</sup> Such instances often enable us to put the career of the person in question into context, and sometimes to shed new light on historical events.

In the case at hand, the mention of "dangers in Alexandria" was rightly used by the first editors as a 'terminus ad quem'.<sup>5</sup> We know that, since the *legio II Parthica* was founded by Septimius Severus in about A.D.

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<sup>3</sup> On the order of *pia* and *fidelis* see below n. 41.

<sup>4</sup> A by now classic case is that of the so-called Captor of Decebalus, see M. P. Speidel, "The Captor of Decebalus, a new Inscription from Philippi", *JRS* 60 (1970) 142-153 (= *Idem*, *Roman Army Studies I*, 1984, 173-187). Other (auto)biographical inscriptions are, e.g., D 2244 (a soldier who fell in the *bellum Varianum*), D 2259 (a legionary *occisus finibus Varvarinorum*), D 2311 (a soldier listing his expeditions, commanders, and family members), B. Gerov, *Inscr. Latinae in Bulgariae rep.*, 18 (a soldier rewarded for having fought against the Carpi and at Tyras).

<sup>5</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 41.

197,<sup>6</sup> any mention of events in Egypt must date to sometime under Severus or later. Furthermore, from what we know about the history of the *II Parthica* and its character as a special guard of the Emperor with its location only a few hours march from the palace in Rome, it can safely be assumed that it would either have been stationed in its Alban camp or been accompanying the emperor(s) on campaign.<sup>7</sup>

A first step in dating the "Alexandrian dangers" is therefore to identify imperial visits to that city under Septimius Severus or later. Modugno Tofini and Chiarucci pointed out that Septimius Severus and his sons are known to have visited the city in 199-200 after their Eastern campaign.<sup>8</sup> The problem with this dating is however twofold: firstly, nothing is found in our sources that would indicate that the emperors or their troops encountered trouble in Alexandria.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, it would seem that the *II Parthica* had been left at Alba when Severus and his sons set out for their second Parthian campaign.<sup>10</sup> The legion presumably never visited Egypt at this time. Unless we want to assume that Cassius Sever(ianus) had been serving in a different legion during his stay in Alexandria, this means that the early date suggested by the first editors has to be discounted.<sup>11</sup>

Most interestingly for our investigation, the next imperial visit to Alexandria, by Caracalla in 215-216 led to severe disturbances and bloodshed. Caracalla was jeered at and insulted by the people in the streets as he arrived accompanied by his soldiers,<sup>12</sup> and this led to stern punitive actions by the emperor. According to Halfmann, these events constitute the

<sup>6</sup> E. Ritterling, *Legio*, RE XII (1924-25) 1211-1828, esp. 1476.

<sup>7</sup> Ritterling 1479f.

<sup>8</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 41. For the documentation, see H. Halfmann, *Itinera principum. Geschichte und Typologie der Kaiserreisen im römischen Reich*, Stuttgart 1986, 218.

<sup>9</sup> For the events during this imperial visit, see Halfmann 220f.; A. R. Birley, *The African Emperor Septimius Severus*, London 1988, 135-139.

<sup>10</sup> Thus A. Birley 129 with 249 n. 1, apparently mainly based on an *argumentum e silentio*.

<sup>11</sup> Promotions within the centurionate from one legion to another are by no means unusual; see the survey by E. Birley, "Promotions and Transfers in the Roman Army II: the Centurionate", *Carnuntum Jahrbuch* 1963/64, 21-33 (= *The Roman Army. Papers 1929-1986*, Amsterdam 1988, 206-220), but since there are many other reasons why a date around A.D. 200 is impossible, it is unnecessary to even consider the possibility that Cassius Sever(ianus) had served in a different unit earlier on.

<sup>12</sup> The accompanying soldiers are mentioned by Dio 77,22,2 and Herodian. 4,8,9.

most violent episode among all the recorded imperial visits during the empire.<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, minutes have been discovered of a *cognitio extra ordinem* held by Caracalla himself at Alexandria, apparently in connection with this commotion. In these (fragmentary) proceedings, written on papyrus, a centurion is also mentioned, but unfortunately we are given neither his name nor even his unit.<sup>14</sup>

After this visit by Caracalla, we do not hear about emperors visiting Alexandria.<sup>15</sup> The year 215 clearly looks like a more probable date for the adventures of Cassius Sever(ianus) in Alexandria.

#### 4. Who are the emperors in the inscription?

Before accepting the date of 215 for Cassius' adventures at Alexandria, we must obviously confront the editors' suggestion that Septimius Severus and his sons are mentioned in the dedication on lines 3-6. If this were so, A.D. 211 would constitute a *terminus ante quem* for both the dedication and the Alexandrian event, which of course took place even earlier.

Very little remains of the imperial names and the titulature in our inscription, but even so, there seems to be one decisive element that without doubt permits its attribution to Septimius Severus and sons: the letters AE at the beginning of line 6. An imperial name ending in -AE and followed by *nobilissimi*, and therefore obviously in the genitive, can only be *Get-ae*.

The problem here is that the letters AE on l. 6 do not show on the

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<sup>13</sup> Main ancient sources: Dio 77,22,1-24,1; Herodian. 4,8,6-9,8 (with the comments by C. R. Whittaker in the LCL-edition). In general, see Halfmann 225, 229 and above all 123 for the commotion in Alexandria. More in detail in P. Benoit & J. Schwartz, "Caracalla et les troubles d'Alexandrie en 215 après J.-C.", EPap 7 (1948) 17-33; F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1972, 97-111. See now the broader treatment in J. Sünskes Thompson, *Aufstände und Protestaktionen im Imperium Romanum. Die severischen Kaiser im Spannungsfeld innenpolitischer Konflikte*, Bonn 1990, 159-166.

<sup>14</sup> For Caracallas *cognitio extra ordinem*, see Benoit & Schwartz; see also H. A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs Acta Alexandrinorum*, Oxford 1954, 229-232. That the *leg. II Parthica* (in whole or in part) would have accompanied Caracalla at this point has not been doubted. Whether the regular garrison of Alexandria, the *II Traiana*, was at Alexandria seems to be more uncertain; ambiguity in Ritterling 1318. 1321f.

<sup>15</sup> For imperial itineraries, see in general Halfmann, esp. 232 for the travel project of Severus Alexander, which was never realized.

photograph and – more importantly – are not visible on the base at Albano (at least not to the present writer). The initial space on l. 6 seems completely empty. There is no trace of inscribed letters, but neither can any trace of erasure be seen.<sup>16</sup> This might seem surprising, since if it is the case, we would have to assume that originally the beginning of l. 6 was indented. Fortunately, such an outlay of the text would not be without parallels<sup>17</sup> and could be explained by the wish to create symmetry for l. 6, which being the last line of the imperial titulature was perhaps shorter than the preceding lines.

If this observation about a vacant space at the beginning of l. 6 is correct, the most pressing reason for connecting our inscription to the reign of Septimius Severus disappears. We are left with just two elements of imperial titulature: *Imp. Caes.* at the very beginning, and *nobilissimi* towards the end. We are indeed dealing with two (or more) rulers, firstly because the length of the space allotted to this part of the inscription indicates that more than one person was mentioned, and secondly, because the person styled *nobilissimus* should be the junior co-regent (a son, natural or adopted) of the preceding *Imperator Caesar*. There are many pairs of rulers that fulfill this condition: Macrinus + Diadumenianus, Elagabal + Severus Alexander, Maximinus + C. Iulius Verus Maximus, Balbinus and Pupienus + Gordianus III, Philippus Arabs + M. Iulius Philippus junior, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

The pair Macrinus + Diadumenianus must undoubtedly be excluded, since during their brief reign the *legio II Parthica* was in the East. The situation is different when we come to the emperor Elagabal and Severus Alexander. In A.D. 221 on June 26, Elagabal adopted his young cousin, who thereafter was called M. Aurelius Alexander *nobilissimus Caesar imperi et sacerdotis* and *princeps iuventutis*.<sup>19</sup>

We now need to attempt to insert the names and titles of Elagabal and

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 38: L'operazione di levigatura della pietra non è riuscita bene e all'inizio della l. 6 si legge, sia pure con difficoltà, AE seguito da NOBILISS[i]MI [CAESAR(is)] ...

<sup>17</sup> For various ways in which to arrange epigraphic texts, see S. Panciera, "La produzione epigrafica di Roma in età repubblicana. Le officine lapidarie", H. Solin et al. (eds.), *Acta Colloquii Epigraphici Latini Helsingiae ... 1991 habiti*, Helsinki 1995, 319-342, esp. 334 for the increasing popularity of the "schema con asse centrale" during the first century A.D.

<sup>18</sup> For the titulature of these rulers, see D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle. Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie*, Darmstadt 1990, 169-199.

<sup>19</sup> For Severus Alexander and his titulature, see Kienast 177.

Severus Alexander on lines 3-6 of our inscription. The first entirely preserved line is l. 11 *princeps et primuspil.*, which contains 19 letters. The other complete lines contain respectively 17, 16, 18, 21, and 18 letters. The letter size of the first line seems to be equal to that of the later lines (and in no case would one expect the imperial titulature to have been written smaller), and therefore one should work on the assumption of 17-18 letters per line.<sup>20</sup> The following restoration of the names and the essential titles of the emperor Elagabal and Severus Alexander adheres to this scheme:<sup>21</sup>

	<i>Pro s[alute et reditu]</i>	(17 letters)
	<i>Imp. Caes. M. Aureli Anto-</i>	(18)
	<i>nini Pii Felicis Aug.</i>	(17)
5	<i>et M. Aureli Alexandri</i>	(18)
	<i>nobilissimi Caesar.</i>	(17)

This reconstruction inspires some confidence also because each of the two rulers occupies two entire lines. The reconstruction moreover accommodates for the fact that the name on l. 4 was erased: that would have been the regular practice concerning Elagabal's name (the second half of l. 3 ought to have been erased as well, but the damaged state of the stone prevents us from ascertaining this). It is admittedly puzzling that also l. 5, where according to our proposal the name of Severus Alexander appeared, suffered the same fate. Here, no better explanation than a mistake by those responsible for the intervention can be offered. (If one were to adopt the suggestion by the editors, one would be faced with a similar problem: the erasure of Geta's name would be natural, but why would Caracalla's name

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<sup>20</sup> Thus also Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 47 n. 3. The restoration of Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 42 for lines 2-6 seems somewhat tight (with 17, 20, 20, 19, and 19 letters), even though, as the photograph on p. 38 shows, lines 1-7 are marginally longer than the following ones. But the extra space thus available does not amount to more than half a letter or at the utmost one extra letter.

<sup>21</sup> The titulature given here does conform to epigraphic practice, as can be gathered from Dessau, *ILS* 467-475, even though no exact match can be found. There is no place for a priesthood though, which seems somewhat unusual. M. Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal*, Stuttgart 1989, 85f. has pointed out that among seven inscriptions mentioning Elagabal that are firmly dated to A.D. 221-222, six mention his priesthood of the Sun.

on l. 4 have suffered the same fate?)<sup>22</sup>

The slight disquietude caused by the erasure of both lines 4 and 5 prompts us to look further. The next possible reigning pair is Philippus Arabs and his son (it is inconceivable that an inscription had been erected to Maximinus at Alba, and there does not really seem to be room for the three rulers Balbinus, Pupienus and Gordianus III). We know that both father and son suffered *damnatio memoriae*, an aspect that accords with the stone from Albano. Their names and titlature do fill out the space quite as well as the above reconstruction for Elagabal and Severus Alexander. Based on the sample of inscriptions in Dessau's *ILS* 505-513 one could suggest the following text for lines 3-6:

	<i>Imp. Caes. M. Iulii Phil-</i>	(17 letters)
	<i>ippi Pii Felicis Aug.</i>	(-"-)
5	<i>et M. Iulii Philippi</i>	(-"-)
	<i>nobilissimi Caesar.</i>	(-"-)

This gives 17 letters throughout. We therefore have to take into account two possible ruling pairs and must make the decision between them based on other aspects of the inscription.

## 5. The imperial epithet of the *legio II Parthica*: not *Severiana*

The imperial epithet attributed to the *legio II Parthica* is important for the dating of the inscription. Old imperial honorific epithets were abolished when a new emperor took up power. The epithets were intended to show the loyalty of the troops towards the ruler and the close ties between emperor and army.<sup>23</sup>

The epithet in our inscription, which was inscribed on l. 9, is no longer legible, and the line is restored by the editors as *leg(ionis) II (secundae)*

<sup>22</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 38 are aware of this problem, and suggest that Caracalla's name had been removed too, in the first phase, so that a new and different titlature could be written in.

<sup>23</sup> Thus G. M. Bersanetti, "I soprannomi imperiali variabili degli auxilia dell'esercito romano", *Athenaeum* n. s. 18 (1940) 103-135, esp. 113; J. Fitz, *Honorific Titles of Roman Military Units in the 3rd Century*, Budapest - Bonn 1983, 83.

*Parthica[e] [Sever(iana)].*<sup>24</sup> Personally, I would prefer printing the line simply as *leg. II Parth(icae) [--]*. The photograph gives the impression that the letters following *Parth.* have been erased on purpose, as undoubtedly happened to the imperial titulature on ll. 4-5. That we are dealing with a wilful erasure is made more likely by the fact that neither the line above (l. 8) nor the line below (l. 10) have been damaged in the corresponding place.<sup>25</sup> Personal inspection of the inscription has indeed convinced me that we are dealing with an erasure on line 9 (surely carried out in antiquity). This erasure in all likelihood targeted the honorific epithet of the legion.

A wilful erasure of the honorific epithet of the legion would definitely strengthen the possibility that we are dealing with an inscription erected either under the emperor Elagabal or Philippus Arabs, since both the Elagabalian epithet *Antoniniana* and Philippus' epithet *Philippiana* are known to have been deleted in some inscriptions.<sup>26</sup>

Even if the honorific epithet of the *leg. II Parthica* in our inscription were not erased on purpose, the suggested emendation [*Sever(iana)*] by the editors is not very likely. We have no certain evidence that the *II Parthica* used the honorific epithet *Severiana* during the reign of Septimius Severus.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars even argue that Septimius Severus did not bestow honorific epithets upon army units at all<sup>28</sup> – if this is true, the existence of a honorific epithet in the inscription would necessarily mean that it must

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<sup>24</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 42.

<sup>25</sup> I can find no opinion of the editors on this question.

<sup>26</sup> On the erasure of imperial honorific epithets, see Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, passim and esp. 90-123 for epithets under Severus Alexander. In those cases where *Severiana* has been erased on purpose it was practically always part of the larger expression *Severiana Alexandriana* and obviously belonged to the reign of Severus Alexander.

<sup>27</sup> A controversial inscription is CIL VI 32877 = D 9046 from Rome, a private tombstone mentioning the (*legio*) *secund(a) Parthica Sever(iana)*. The ambiguous dating employed has caused some scholars to suggest a date of A.D. 201, thus Bersanetti 111; M. P. Speidel, "*Severiana* as a Title for Army Units and the Three *legiones Parthicae* of Septimius Severus", *PACA* 17 (1983) 118-123, esp. 118 (not reprinted in his *Roman Army Studies I-II*). Other scholars interpret the dating as indicating that the inscription was erected in A.D. 229, thus already Ritterling 1478, and most recently B. Lörincz, "Zu den Kaiserbeinamen der römischen Truppen im 3. Jahrhundert", *AAntHung* 37 (1985) 177-189, esp. 183. On the use of the epithet *Severiana Antoniniana* under Septimius Severus, see below n. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 34 for the alleged practice of Septimius Severus of not awarding epithets. According to Fitz (*ibid.*, p. 90-140, esp. 124), *Severiana* as a honorific army epithet refers to Severus Alexander.

belong to after 211.

Although Septimius Severus clearly did not bestow honorific epithets on army units in general, there are a handful of cases where both *Severiana* and *Antoniniana* (the latter epithet referring to Caracalla's name) can be found before 211.<sup>29</sup> But these examples are rare exceptions, and all but one come from the provinces of the empire. The only case from Rome (including the neighbouring area) is a dedication to Caracalla made by the *cohors I vigilum Antoniniana* in A.D. 205 (CIL VI 1056). Firstly, this is an inscription specifically honouring Caracalla (while our inscription from Albano refers to both a senior and a junior ruler). Secondly, Fitz argues that *Antoniniana* has been added at a later date (as we know happened in many inscriptions of Severan date), obviously after Caracalla became sole ruler.<sup>30</sup>

All this means that on the grounds of probability alone one should avoid restoring the epithet *Severiana* in our inscription.<sup>31</sup>

Of subsequent epithets, *Antoniniana* refers to either the reign of

<sup>29</sup> The reason might be the wish of an individual to demonstrate his loyalty, or, as Bersanetti 108-113 suggests, perhaps two of these epithets that can safely be dated to A.D. 201 are connected to Caracalla's assumption of the *toga virilis* in that year; cf. Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 32-34. Essentially the same viewpoint was taken by Fitz in a later work, when answering criticism of the more categorical views in his book of 1983, see J. Fitz, "Les épithètes honorifiques *Antoniniana* à l'époque Sévérienne", *StudClas* 24 (1986) 139-142, esp. 140. For criticism of Fitz's monograph, see above all Lörincz 178f.

<sup>30</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 33. The inscription was demonstrably reworked after Caracalla took up power, since the name of Geta (as part of the consular dating) has been erased. In general for inscriptions dating to the reign of Septimius Severus, many of which contain later additions, see Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 32-34. Furthermore, as pointed out by Lörincz 179, the *coh. V Afrorum* is, strangely enough, using the epithet *Severiana* in A.D. 212/213 in Arabia in an inscription honouring the emperor Caracalla; for easy reference, see Speidel, *Roman Army Studies I*, Amsterdam 1984, 248 = ANRW II.8, 706.

<sup>31</sup> Since the inscription did contain an honorific epithet, it is altogether unlikely that it could belong to a period before Caracalla's reign. Fitz, *Les épithètes honorifiques*, 140 presents a certain revision of earlier views and argues that if Septimius Severus had bestowed an honorific epithet after he instituted co-rulership with his son, one would expect to find the combination *Severiana Antoniniana*. But only one such case is known, an inscription from Mesopotamia mentioning the *legio I Parthica*, see BCH 9 (1885) 81 (repeatedly cited in scholarly literature). AE 1975, 170 from Albano was thought to give the same combined epithet for the *leg. II Parthica*, thus e.g. Speidel, *Severiana*, 119, but a new and careful scrutiny of the inscription has shown that the crucial passage reads *leg(ionis) II P(arthicae) Se(veriana) 7 (centuria) (cohorte) I (prima) ha(stati) p(rioris)*, see S. Modugno Tofini, "Osservazioni su alcune iscrizioni edite di Albano", *DocAlb* 2. ser., 11 (1989) [1991] 55-64, esp. 56, who now confidently dates the inscription to the reign of Severus Alexander.

Caracalla or of Elagabal, while the origin of the epithets *Severiana Alexandriana*, *Maximiniana*, *Gordiana*, and *Philippiana* is self-evident.

## 6. The *legio II Parthica* from Caracalla to Elagabal and Philippus Arabs

Under Caracalla, the honorific epithet *Antoniniana* was awarded to many military units. According to one view, the awarding took place mainly in two phases: many units received the epithet in 212, after the accession of Caracalla, for having shown loyalty to the emperor after the fratricide; others were called *Antoniniana* after the outbreak of the Parthian war, which took place in May 216.<sup>32</sup>

Of the five known attestations of the *leg. II Parthica* being called *Antoniniana*, none can be dated to the reign of Caracalla (or, as we have just seen, to a period *before* Caracalla became sole emperor).<sup>33</sup> According to Fitz, it is no surprise that the *II Parthica* did not appear as *Antoniniana* right after the accession of Caracalla, even though other Italic units, namely the Praetorian cohorts, received that epithet. The epithet was awarded as a sign of gratitude for support of Caracalla after the fratricide, but there are indications that the *II Parthica* had favoured Geta.<sup>34</sup> There is no evidence that the *II Parthica* would have received the epithet *Antoniniana* later under Caracalla, either.<sup>35</sup>

When Caracalla prepared for his Parthian campaign the Alban legion must surely have marched off as well. Even before the war against the Parthian enemy began, the legion will have accompanied Caracalla to Alexandria.<sup>36</sup> Caracalla somehow managed to resolve the grave crisis that

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<sup>32</sup> See Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 74-83 for this argument, 35-73 for the inscriptions. Lörincz 187f. argues forcefully that no particular political events can be connected to the bestowal of honorific epithets under Caracalla.

<sup>33</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 35. Four inscriptions are from Rome: CIL VI 2579, 3373, 3734 = 31058 (A.D. 220), and 3410. One has been found at Albano Laziale: AE 1969, 90.

<sup>34</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 76 and 81f.; cf. Ritterling 1317 and 1479. The negative attitude of the legion at Alba towards Caracalla is not given credence by G. Alföldy, *Die Krise des römischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 1989, 214-216 with comments on recent scholarship and additions to his own earlier treatment in *Der Sturz des Kaisers Geta und die antike Geschichtsschreibung* (1972), *ibid.*, 200-202. Cf. also Sünskes Thompson 60-64.

<sup>35</sup> See note 33.

<sup>36</sup> Ritterling 1321f. 1479.

he encountered there, but it is not probable that this event resulted in the awarding of any honorific epithets. The *legio II Traiana* which had its camp at Nicopolis outside Alexandria was presumably also involved in putting down the "revolt", and it appears without an epithet still in A.D. 217/218 (AE 1905, 54 = D 8919).<sup>37</sup>

Even if the *II Parthica* had become *Antoniniana* towards the end of the reign of Caracalla, the legion remained in the East until the entry of Elagabal in Rome in the summer of 219.<sup>38</sup> This fact is important, because it means that we can exclude the possibility that our inscription, which by all appearance did contain an imperial epithet, can belong to the reign of Caracalla.

It is certain that Elagabal gave the epithet *Antoniniana* to the Alban legion, as can be seen from CIL VI 3734 = VI 31058, a dedication erected in Rome to the *Victoria Aeterna* of Elagabal, which can be dated to A.D. 220. This epithet cannot refer back to Caracalla, because old imperial honorific epithets were abolished at the beginning of a new reign.<sup>39</sup> The reason for Elagabal's bestowing of the epithet *Antoniniana* on the *leg. II Parthica* are evident: the legion was instrumental in the seizure of power by the young priest from Emesa.<sup>40</sup>

It seems that Elagabal therefore bestowed also the epithets *pia fidelis felix aeterna* on the Alban legion,<sup>41</sup> and since those additional epithets appear in our inscription, we have a further reason for advocating a date under Elagabal. If the legion received the epithet *Antoniniana* from Elagabal, it moreover explains why the epithet was erased on our stone: it took place in connection with the *damnatio memoriae* of the emperor himself. There are several cases where the epithet *Antoniniana* has been

<sup>37</sup> For the *leg. II Traiana*, see Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 70; cf. the somewhat ambiguous statements by Ritterling 1318. 1321f.

<sup>38</sup> Ritterling 1479f. For the date of Elagabal's entry, see R. Turcan, *Héliogabale et le sacre du soleil*, Paris 1985, 95. 274.

<sup>39</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 83.

<sup>40</sup> Thus Ritterling 1479; see Dio 78,34,5 for the "Albanoi" revolting against Macrinus.

<sup>41</sup> These epithets appear in CIL VI 3734 = VI 31058 (= CIL XIV 2257) from A.D. 220 as *p. f. f. aet.* The connection is postulated by Ritterling 1371. 1479. CIL VI 3373 = XIV 2283 lists *ae(terna) pi(a) [f.] fi(delis)*, where *aeterna* is out of place. But it makes one wonder whether the right sequence might not be *pia felix fidelis aeterna*; cf. CIL VI 31001 *p(ia) fel(ix)*. No other source, to my knowledge, expands these abbreviations; cf. the list in Ritterling 1483 and the inscriptions recorded by Fitz, *Honorific Titles*.

erased on purpose.<sup>42</sup> Erasure has indeed occurred in one of the five inscriptions where we find *Antoniniana* in connection with the *II Parthica*. This inscription (AE 1968, 90) has been found at Albano Laziale, whence, interestingly enough, our inscription also comes.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, the period A.D. 219-222 (or better A.D. 221-222, taking into account Severus Alexander's adoption) constitutes one possible moment for the erection of the dedication at Alba. Before continuing, we nevertheless need to look briefly at other imperial epithets, in order to ascertain whether a case can be made for a different restitution of the erased epithet. The combined epithet *Severiana Alexandriana* does not really seem to fit the available space, *Maximiniana* would be impossible in the neighbourhood of Rome, and there is only one doubtful case of a combined epithet referring to Balbinus, Pupienus and Gordianus III.<sup>44</sup> *Philippiana* is a different matter. Three inscriptions mentioning the *leg. II Parthica* are dated to Philippus' reign.<sup>45</sup> CIL VI 793 (= CIL XIV 2258 = D 505) from Rome is a dedication to the *Victoria Redux* of the emperor and his wife by the soldiers of the *leg. II Parth(ica) [[Philippiana]] p. f. f. aet.* As can be seen, the epithet was later erased. The same epithet appears in D 9087 from ancient Aveia in the Central Appennines, while it is absent from an inscription from Alba itself dated in A.D. 249 (AE 1913, 219).

As both the erasure and the other epithets in our inscription conform to what we find under Philippus Arabs, his reign (A.D. 244-249) constitutes another period that would be possible for the erection of the Alban inscription.

## **7. *Agens centurio* and the duration of the career of a *primipilaris***

Returning finally to the *primipilaris* Cassius, we also need to consider

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<sup>42</sup> For erasure of *Antoniniana*, see Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, nos. 34 (Albanum), 43 (Rome), 71, 72, 73, 82, 93, 113, 178, 191, 197a, 205a (?), 216, 220 (?), 239a, 239b, and 278.

<sup>43</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 35 for the other inscriptions. In CIL VI 3734 = VI 31058 from Rome the epithet has been left untouched, but *Antoninus* in Elagabal's name has been erased.

<sup>44</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 148f. We need not consider whether the epithet could have been *Gordiana* alone, since more than one emperor is being honoured in our inscription.

<sup>45</sup> Fitz, *Honorific Titles*, 169. In addition there are five inscriptions set up by units of the Roman cohorts in Rome in which the epithet also appears; see *ibid.*, 169-171.

some aspects of his military experience. Unfortunately we know nothing about the first steps of his career.<sup>46</sup> Those stages that our inscription reveals are: the special task, not easily identifiable, of *praep(ositus) militum [-]*,<sup>47</sup> the post of *princeps* (second in rank among the centurions of the legion), and that of *primuspilus* or leading centurion.

Cassius' career up to this point is of interest also because he is one of the very few centurions for whom we know that they held both the rank of *princeps* and of *primuspilus* in the same legion.<sup>48</sup> Our inscription therefore adds a new piece of evidence to the ongoing discussion of promotion and advancement within the legionary centurionate.<sup>49</sup>

Further information might be hiding behind the noteworthy expression *cum 7 (centurio) ageret*. Such a use of the verb *agere*, *ago* is not very common in Latin epigraphy. One gets the impression that the expression is intended to indicate that the post Cassius held at Alexandria was not his regular station in the army. Other military inscriptions where one finds *agere*, mostly as the participle *agens*, reinforces this impression:<sup>50</sup>

Elpinus Festianus *frumentarius leg. I Adiutricis agens curam carceris* (CIL III 433 = D 2368)

<sup>46</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 40 assume that Cassius had been enrolled as a centurion of the *II Parthica*, because according to their chronology he appears in A.D. 199/200 at Alessandria as *centurio agens* and some five years later has already held the primipilate. They also point out (p. 38) that the end of l. 7 might have contained an abbreviated military title.

<sup>47</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 38 and 40 suggest that the expression might indicate the task of enrolling soldiers for the newly founded *leg. II Parthica*, perhaps as a *praepositus militum iuniorum*. On this difficult question I have nothing to say here.

<sup>48</sup> For two other cases, see B. Dobson, *Die Primipilares*, Köln - Bonn 1978, 318 no. 226 (D 2650) and 327 no. 247 (D 2645).

<sup>49</sup> Among more recent contributions see e.g. K. Strobel, "Bemerkungen zur Laufbahn des Ti. Claudius Vitalis", *Tyche* 2 (1987) 203-209; idem, Ein weiteres Zeugnis zur Rangordnung im römischen Legionszenturionat der Kaiserzeit, *EA* 12 (1988) 43-46; Chr. Bruun, "*Caligatus, tubicen, optio carceris*, and the Centurions Positions; Some Remarks on an Inscription in ZPE 71 (1988)", *Arctos* 22 (1988) 23-40, esp. 37f.; and now M. P. Speidel, *The Framework of an Imperial Legion (The Fifth Annual Caerleon Lecture)*, Cardiff 1992, 11.

<sup>50</sup> A different matter are of course the late-antique *agentes in rebus*, special imperial officials and messengers, whose title had developed into a standard expression, see conveniently RE I (1893) 776-779 s.v. *Agentes in rebus* (Seeck) and B. Palme, Flavius Sarapodorus, ein *agens in rebus* aus Hermupolis, *APF* 40 (1994) 43-68, esp. 44 with a survey of recent research.

Sabinus Ingenuus et Aurelius Sedatus *sig(niferi) leg(ionis) III Aug(ustae) agentes cura(m) macelli* (D 2415)

*vexillatio leg(ionis) XXII Pr(imigeniae) p. f. agentium in lignaris sub principe* (CIL XIII 6623 = D 9119: A.D. 207)<sup>51</sup>

M. Ulp. Emeritus et Tib. Cl. Exuperatus *b(eneficiarii) co(n)s(ularis) leg(ionis) II Adi(utricis) agentes curam leg(ionis)* (CIL III 10429 = D 2410: A.D. 210)

[...]pilius Restio *m[il. l]eg. XXII Antoni[ni]anae P(rimigeniae) p. f. immu[ni]s co(n)s(ularis) curas a[ge]ns vico Salod(orum)* (D 2411: A.D. 219)

Aur. Artemidorus *b(ene)f(iciarius) leg(ati) leg(ionis) II Ad(iutricis) p. f. S(everianae) agens c(uram) c(arceris)* (CIL III 3412 = D 2409: A.D. 228)

Domitius Bassus (*centurio fr(umentariorum) agens vice principis peregrinorum*) (CIL VI 428 = D 2219)

Cocceius Iulianus (*centurio frum(entariorum) v(ice) a(gens) princ(ipis) pereg(rinorum)*) (CIL VI 3326 = D 2221)

Aurelius Munatianus *evocatus ex cohorte VI praetoria p. v. [[Philippiana]] agens at latrunculum* (D 509: A.D. 246)

Aurelius Aelianus *optio age(n)s sacru comitatu* (B. Gerov, Inscr. Latinae in Bulg. rep. 36: late III / early IV century)<sup>52</sup>

This survey (which makes no claim to completeness) indicates that the formula "*agens* + mention of a certain task" denotes an extraordinary duty or responsibility for a soldier. In each of the ten cases above we first find a regular position registered for the soldier(s), after which their special task is mentioned. It does not matter that in some cases we find the very general formula "*curam agens...*", known from every sector of Roman administration. In the army, the formula nevertheless indicates a special task (*cura macelli, cura legionis, cura carceris*). But there are also individual expressions, like *agens in lignariis*,<sup>53</sup> *at latrunculum*, and *sacru comitatu* (late-antique).

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<sup>51</sup> See M. P. Speidel, "Legionsabteilungen aus Mainz beim Holzschlag im Odenwald", in his *Roman Army Studies II*, Stuttgart 1992, 149-152 for three other inscriptions with similar wordings (including a revised reading of CIL XIII 11781).

<sup>52</sup> See also M. P. Speidel, "*Agens sacru comitatu*", ZPE 33 (1979) 183-184 (= RAS I, 397-399).

<sup>53</sup> Speidel, *Legionsabteilungen*, 150 calls *agens in lignariis* "ein Fachausdruck der römischen Heeressprache bei der Mainzer Legion", but we are nevertheless dealing with a special task.

Our expression *cum centurio ageret* seems to fit in well with this pattern of special tasks. As a further parallel, there is Eric Birley's extensive list of interim commanders of auxiliary units for comparison. When officers from other units were put temporarily in charge of auxiliary units, they often used expressions such as *agens curam*.<sup>54</sup> Temporary commands over legionary centuries must have existed too.<sup>55</sup>

It thus seems highly likely that only after the Alexandrian events was Cassius promoted to regular centurion, after which, having held (at least) the rank of *princeps* in between, he at last was made *primuspilus*. If he already was a centurion at Alexandria, he was presumably not yet a *princeps*, since in that case it would have been odd to have used the vague expression *agens centurio*.<sup>56</sup>

These observations intend to show that quite likely some time passed between the "Alexandrian dangers" and the dedication at Alba. The editors of the inscription assume that only a couple of years passed between "dangers" and dedication (from 199/200 to ca. 202/203).<sup>57</sup> But there is nothing to prevent us from assuming, on the contrary, a longer interval. A career in the centurionate (counted from when a person was first promoted to centurion to the moment when he reached the primipilate, if he did not retire before that) normally evolved over 15 to 30 years.<sup>58</sup> It is surely more likely that some amount of time, rather than just a couple of years, transpired between the Alexandrian episode and the promotion to

<sup>54</sup> See E. Birley, "A Roman Altar from Old Kilpatrick and Interim Commanders of Auxiliary Units", *Latomus* 42 (1983) 73-83 = *The Roman Army*, 221-231, esp. 227-231.

<sup>55</sup> No overall survey is known to me, but one can point to e.g. CIL IX 4122 = D 2644 where we find a *princeps* of the *leg. VI* to whom the primipilate of the *leg. X* was given without his actually having attained that rank: *ita ut in [leg.] X primum pil. duceret eodem[que te]mpore princeps esset leg. VI*.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps while in Alexandria Cassius held the official rank of *optio spei* or *ad spem ordinis* (e.g. D 2441-42. 2666b), i.e. an *optio* who was marked down for promotion to centurion. On this rank, see A. v. Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*, 2. ed. by B. Dobson, Köln 1967, xiv. 41f. "Bei der grossen Zahl der zu anderen Dienstleistungen abkommandierten Centurionen musste in Friedenszeiten vielfach eine Centuria führerlos sein, und der *optio*, nach einer uralten Bestimmung zur Vertretung des Centurio berufen, tritt an Stelle des Centurio mit der Anwartschaft der Beförderung zum Centurionate." (p. 42).

<sup>57</sup> Modugno Tofini & Chiarucci 41f.

<sup>58</sup> Dobson, *Primipilares*, 62. See also E. Birley, *Promotions and Transfers*, 206-220, esp. 219f. for a list of long-serving centurions.

*primuspilus* (followed by the dedication at Albano).

## 8. Conclusion: Elagabal, Philippus, and Cassius' vow

Four aspects of the recently discovered inscription from Albano have been analyzed: a) the travels of the *leg. II Parthica* and unrest at Alexandria in connection with imperial visits; b) the partly erased imperial titulature in our inscription; c) the erased honorific epithet of the *leg. II Parthica*; d) the normal career of a *primuspilus*. We can now proceed to the suggestion of a new interpretation.

The "dangers" at Alexandria must date to A.D. 215. Therefore the inscription was set up at some time after that. Judging from the remaining portions of the imperial titulature, the space available and the erasure that took place, the emperors whose names appear on lines 3-6 could be Elagabal and Severus Alexander or Philippus Arabs and his son. Slightly awkward is the fact that part of Severus Alexander's name also seems to have been erased, if the first pair appeared in the inscription.

No trace can be seen of the honorific epithet that the *legio II Parthica* had received from the emperor. This epithet was most likely erased, but even if it was not, there are only two restitutions that are seriously worth considering: *Antoniniana* or *Philippiana*.

Can we decide the issue between Elagabal and Philippus on the basis of the military career of the dedicant? Cassius Sever(ianus) had been *centurio agens* in A.D. 215 but at the moment of the erection of the dedication he had advanced to *primuspilus*. If the inscription belongs to the reign of Elagabal, it leaves Cassius some seven years during which to advance through the ranks of the centurionate to make *primuspilus*. Since a *primuspilus* presumably held his commission for only one year,<sup>59</sup> that would give Cassius a certain number of opportunities to attain the leading position in his legion. If, on the other hand, the dedication belongs under Philippus, Cassius served for almost thirty years, perhaps all or at least most of them in the centurionate. This again seems like a very long period, but, as we have seen, it is not impossible nor even unusual for a centurion.

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<sup>59</sup> Dobson, *Primipilares*, 60 advocates a one-year term for the *primuspilus*, although it cannot be proven beyond doubt.

There is one further aspect, though, that speaks in favour of a date under Elagabal: the fulfillment of the vow. The reason for the dedication is the vow that Cassius made because he had escaped from the "Alexandrian dangers". If this event took place in 215, as it surely did, why did he wait six or seven years (or almost 30?) before fulfilling that vow? If we believe in a date of A.D. 221/222 the answer is simple: the *legio II Parthica* did not return to Albanum until, at the earliest, the summer of 219, when Elagabal arrived in Rome. Ritterling even suggested that the imperial guard, to which the *leg. II Parthica* at this point belonged, did not reach Rome until 221 or shortly before. He pointed to a dedication of members of the *coh. X praetoria*, dated to 220 or 221, erected *pro salute* of the emperors Elagabal and Severus Alexander, *quod profisciscentes expeditionibus sacris voverant regressi ... libenter votum solverunt* (CIL VI 323 = D 474). These soldiers had left Rome in 214, and fulfilled their vow as soon as possible on their return.<sup>60</sup> Their case seems to be a good parallel to Cassius', except for the latter's adventures at Alexandria. On this scenario, Cassius probably fulfilled his vow as soon as was feasible.

This, then, would seem to be the most likely interpretation of the inscription:

[Iovi] O[ptimo Maximo] (vel sim.)  
 [Pr]o s[alute et reditu]  
 Imp. Cae[s. [[M. Aureli Anto-]] ]  
 [ [[nini Pii Felicis Aug.]] ]  
 5 [ [[et M. Aureli Alexandri]] ]  
     nobilis[si]mi [Caesar.]  
     C. Cassiu[s S]ever[us/ianus vel sim.]  
     praep. militum [--]  
     leg. II Parth. [[Antonin.]]  
 10 p(iae) f(elicis) f(idelis) aet(ernae), eiusdemq. [leg.]<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ritterling 1323.

<sup>61</sup> The editors presented the end of this line as "*eiusdemqu[e]*". I find it difficult to see any trace of the letter V, and since the reading *eiusdemque* would leave the line clearly shorter than the following ones (the text on the preceding line has been erased), I think it more likely that the word *leg(ionis)* followed upon the abbreviated word *eiusdemq*. This would give us a line length of 17 letters, for which there is clearly space on the stone, and it would also make better sense from a syntactical point of view.

*princeps et primuspil.*  
*et quod Alexandriae*  
*cum 7 (centurio) ageret in pericu-*  
*lis constitutus numi-*  
15 *ne eius adiuvante libera-*  
*tus sit ex voto posuit.*

Restored in this way, the autobiographical part of the inscription might also shed some light on the events at Alexandria. In her recent detailed treatment of the evidence for the "revolt", Julia Sünskes Thompson reached the conclusion that the whole event may have been exaggerated by Herodian and Cassius Dio: "Vielleicht war das Ausmaß der Greuelthaten, denen vielleicht doch nur Protestaktionen in Form von Verspottung des Kaisers und Entehrungen seiner Statuen vorausgegangen war, tatsächlich geringer als Dio und Herodian nahelegen".<sup>62</sup> Now it seems that we have found an eyewitness-account of these events, which perhaps did after all include more serious actions of the Alexandrian people than mere insults to the emperor and the removal of statues, since the commanding officer of a Roman *centuria* chose to speak of *pericula* and made a vow to his protective god for salvation.

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<sup>62</sup> Sünskes Thompson 166. Cf. Herodian. 4,9,8 who speaks of soldiers losing their lives.