SB III 6012 = IBM IV 1076: Unrecognised evidence for a Mysterious Philosopher

In the following pages we intend to comment once more on a Greek inscription found near Antinoopolis and honouring a prominent Platonic philosopher whom we propose to connect with the well-known philosopher Severus «the Platonic».

I - The Text and its History:

1. During his excavations in the winterseason 1913/4 at Antinoopolis in Middle-Egypt J. de M. Johnson (1) acquired from a native a stele bearing a Greek inscription which he published at the end of his article «Antinoe and its Papyri», «JEA» 1 (1924) 168-81 (plate on p. 181; the scale is not specified). The text of the inscription runs:

1 Ἀγαθὴ Τύχη
2 Φλαύιον Μαίκιον Σε[.........]
3 Διονυσόδωρον τῶν [ἐν τῷ]
4 Μουσείου σιτουμέ[νων ἀτελῶν]
5 Πλατωνικόν φιλόσ[οφον καὶ]
6 βουλευτήν Ἀντ[ιούσων Νέων]
7 Ἐλλήνων ἥ [βουλή . . .]  

In a few notes Johnson recorded the opinion of M. N. Tod who was inclined to attribute the stele to the third rather than to the fourth

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(1) Cf. K. Preisendanz, Papyrufunde und Papyrologie, 149.
century A.D. on the ground of the retention of the i adscript, the absence of ligature, and the freedom of the engraver from the influence of cursive writing. Tod's suggestion of restoring line 2 by Σε[ξτου ὑν] is given in a footnote. Johnson adds: 'Apart from the position of Ἀγαθὴ τῷ Χη: which must have been more or less central, lines 3, 4, 7, where the supplements are certain, give the approximate length of lines. To read [τὸν καὶ] Διονυσίωφον leaves no room for the completion of Σε[ and a haplography, of course, is out of the question'.

2. A few years later the inscription was reedited by F. H. Marshall as IBM IV 1076 (2). Marshall added a drawing of the text and gave the exact dimensions of the stone: length 1 ft. 5 inches, height 1 ft. 3/4 inch (0.43 m. × 0.32 m.). His own drawing is thus reduced to a scale of 1/2, and the plate presented by Johnson to a scale of ca. 1/5. The letters are thus 4 cms high, and the stele apparently honours a very prominent man. Marshall proposed at the end of 1.2 a restoration of Σε[χόνδον] / Σε[χοῦνδον], thus giving up Tod's suggestion which had been, apparently, inspired by Latin inscriptions. In a note he referred to a similar inscription CIG 4679 (= OGIS 709 or SB V 8276) which mentions the honours given by the Greek cities of Egypt (among them Antinoopolis) and by other places to the famous rhetorician and sophist we know as Aelius Aristides, but whose name is given on the stone as 'Publius Aelius Aristides Theodoros'. He thus pointed out a very important parallel which enabled him to reject Tod's suggestion and see that our text honours a man bearing at the same time the Latin name system by the tria nomina and a Greek name, but he neither expressed these ideas nor commented on the dimensions of the stele.

In his bibliographical report on Greek inscription founds in Egypt (c JEA * 6 [1920] 218) M. N. Tod noticed that the Antinoopolitan inscription had been transferred to the British Museum and reedited as IBM IV 1076. He did not, however, comment on Marshall's restoration of the name as Σε[χοῦνδον].

3. The text of the ed. princeps was reprinted by F. Bilabel in 1926 as SB III 6012. Unfortunately, Bilabel was not aware that in the meantime the text had been reedited by Marshall, and consequently he did not take notice of Marshall's restoration of line 2. This information was also not recorded later on in the Berichtigungsliste der griechischen Papyrusurkunden (which has paid rather unsystematic and haphazard attention to work done on Greek inscriptions from Egypt). On the other hand, it should be noted that nowhere in the Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum any notice is taken of the reprint of Johnson's text as SB III 6012. The Sammelbuch text was used by P. V. Pistorius while compiling his Indices Antinoopolitani (Diss. Leiden, 1939), where he lists a Φλάιντος Μαίκιος Διο- νυσίωνος βουλευτής as No. 444 and his father Σε[ξτος?] as No. 622. Apparently Pistorius did not know about Marshall's reedition.

A. Calderini also referred to SB III 6012 in his article Di alcune arti liberali nei papiri dell'Egitto greco-romano, in Studi U.E. Paoli (Firenze 1955), 153 f., where he mentions a Flavio Mecio Σε[χούνδος?] Dionisodoro che è detto Πλατωνικός ϕιλόσοφος ed è βουλευτής 'Αντ[νεών Νέων] 'Ελλήνων ed appartiene pure agli ἀτελεῖς del Museo (3). Calderini referred in a note (p. 154, n. 1) to the article by Johnson in «JEA» and to A. Bataille, Les Memnonia, Le Caire 1952, 315. This last reference has no particular relevance, but Bataille — followed by Calderini — confused this Johnson with A. Ch. Johnson and gives the latter's initials. It seems likely that Calderini took over his restoration Σε[χούνδος] from F. H. Marshall, IBM IV 1076, but he does not mention him or the latter publication.

4. M. N. Tod referred to the Antinoopolitan inscription under review several times in his article «Sidelights on Greek Philosophers», in «JHS» 77 (1957) 132-41, esp. 134 n. 38, 138 n. 97, and 140. He cites the text as IBM IV 1076 = Sammelbuch 6012, but again does not comment on the restoration as proposed (against himself) 40 years before by Marshall. Tod's article is usefully supplemented by J. and L. Robert, Bulletin épigraphique 1958, No. 84 (= «REG»

(3) Calderini's Πλατωνικός is of course a misprint. He wrongly connects 'Αντινοών Νέων 'Ελλήνων with the preceding βουλευτής instead of with the following ἦ βουλή. Cf. infra, note 7.
71 [1958] 197-200), but they do not spend a word on this inscription in particular.

5. E. G. Turner lastly, in his «Greek Papyri. An Introduction» (Oxford 1968; repr. 1980), p. 86, refers to the inscription as SB III 6012 of which he gives a partial translation from which we quote the name of the philosopher concerned: «Flavius Marcius Se [(? Se-verianus)] Dionysodoros». There is no doubt that «Marcius» is only a misprint for «Maecius». Apparently Turner was unaware that the text had been edited as IBM IV 1076, and he does not give his reasons for his restoring the name of the philosopher as «Se[verianus]».

From this bibliographical survey it becomes clear that most scholars refer for this inscription to the Sammelbuch text, and that the reedition as IBM IV 1076 is not widely known. Any scholar unaware of this reedition may well ask on what basis Calderini's restoration rests, and he is left in the dark as regards the basis of Turner's proposal.

II - Is Severus to be restored?

As said above, F. H. Marshall does not state in his commentary to IBM IV 1076 why he suggested a restoration of \[\Sigma \varepsilon [\chi ουδον] / \Sigma \varepsilon [\chi ουδον] \] at the end of line 2 as the name of the philosopher concerned. There is no doubt that Johnson's argument about the place of \[\alpha θορμη\tauο\chiη\] in the very centre of the slab is correct. Studying the plate given by Johnson one can still discover the vertical line which has helped the stonecutter in establishing the middle of the stone. In line 2 this line goes between MAIK and IO, in line 4 through the O of ΣΙΤΟΥ, in line 5 after the Φ. Therefore, we can exclude a restoration of more than 6 letters at the end of line 2, and consequently there is no room for \[\Sigma \varepsilon [\chi ουδον] \] or for \[\Sigma \varepsilon [\omega ηιπαιον] \]. It should be noted that the stonecutter has formed his letters quite regularly throughout the inscription, and the possibility of smaller letters at the end of line 2 can be discarded. The restorations at the end of lines 3-6 fit into this pattern, as Johnson already noticed in the ed. princeps.

Now, in view of the remarkable angular shape of the letters and the way the stone has broken off at the right side one may rule out
the possibility that in line 2 the letter at the start of the lacuna started with a vertical stroke (e.g. E, H, I, K, M, N, P), because in such a case at least part of the top of a vertical stroke should have been preserved before the lacuna. Consequently, MARSHALL's restoration Σε[χώνδον] is in fact impossible from a palaeographical point of view. Furthermore, there is no Platonic philosopher bearing this name known from ancient sources (see the lists in J. G. FABRICIUS, Bibliotheca Graeca, III, Hamburg 1716, Chapt. IV).

We think that the letter following Σε[ must have started somewhere in the middle of the line height; one may think of an angularly shaped O, Θ, or Φ (A seems excluded on onomastical grounds). For the angular shape of the letters one may compare the Durham stele from Antinoopolis recently published by K. J. RIGSBY (GRBS 19 [1978] 239 ffff.; plate opposite p. 240), joined with another slab in the Musée Borély in Marseilles (previously known as SB I 1481 fr. 5). The Durham stele is dated exactly to the year 162/63. Two other slabs (SB I 1481 fr. 1 and 2) give the same shape of angular letters; the stonemaster apparently avoided all curved lines.

In fact, consulting an onomastical dictionary or a list of philosophers such as the FABRICIUS one we find only one likely name to fill the six letters in lacuna: SEVERUS, i.e. in Greek Σε[συνήρον]. The alternative Σε[βήρον] presented by later writers and known in Egypt by a single ostracoon bearing Σεβήρον (O. Tait A 104) seems excluded because of the spelling Φλάμιον, not Φλάβιον, at the start of line 2. F. TH. GIGNAC (Grammar, I 68-69) points out the different versions of Latin -u/-υ- to a Greek ear: -υ-, -ου-, -β-, as well for Flavius as for Severus. He cites the example of P.Mich. IX 551 in which the name Severus is rendered by the first hand as Σευήρος and by the second hand as Σευνήρος. From the inscriptions we may cite RT TENGBERGER, Sylloga³, 852 A+B (Thera, 149/50 A.D.) in which the name Verus is always given as Οδήρος, Lucius as Λούχιος, but Flavius Julianus as Φλάμιος Ἰουλιανός.

III - The Platonic philosopher Severus as a likely candidate.

In his recent work The Middle Platonists (London 1977) J. DILLON writes (p. 262): «Another rather mysterious figure may be fitted with some plausibility into the spectrum of the «Athenian school» and that is Severus. We have no details of his life and place of operation,
and his date is quite uncertain, but Proclus mentions him at one point (In Timaeum III 212.8) in conjunction with Plutarch and Atticus in what appears to be reverse chronological order, Severus-Atticus-Plutarch, which would place him near the end of the second century or the beginning of the third.

Modern historians of philosophy (4) quote the name of Severus often. They are acquainted with his thought — much more than with the man — through the help of ancient philosophers, that is to say: only fragments of his teaching are given, nothing about his own life. In fact, every modern scholar is indebted to the fundamental article of K. Praechter in PW-RE IIa (1923), 2007-2010, whose ideas are expressed again in Das Altertum (first part by Praechter of Überweg's Grundrisse der Geschichte der Philosophie, Berlin 1926, paragr. 70, p. 553. Severus' commentary on Plato's Timaeus is quoted or referred to twelve times by Proclus in his own Commentary (5), and Eusebius in his Praeparatio Evangelica has preserved a piece of his Περί Ψυχής (cf. ed. Dindorf, XIII 17), but Praechter thinks that this title is another title for the Commentary. Severus is also mentioned in Porphyrius' Vita Plotini, paragr. 14, as one of the authors used in Plotinus' diatribae philosophicae.

The works of Severus as a link in the history of ideas, and the man himself as a propagandist of Platonism (or Neo-Pythagorism), are referred to now by almost every historian of ancient philosophy, each of which attempts to give an account of the succession of scholars in the renascense of Platonism. But these names are mere names, and it is not the aim of this article to give once more the list. We want only to point out that the communis opinio locates Severus at the end of the IInd century A.D.

If we are right in restoring the name of the Platonic philosopher as Se[verus] in our inscription, and in identifying him with the Pla-


(5) See now A. J. Festugière, Proclus' Commentaire sur le Timée, I (Paris 1967) 264, n. 2, and the Index (by Al. Segonds) at the end of tome III.
tonist Severus, our inscription brings new light as regards the question in what place Severus operated: the town of Antinoopolis and the Museum of Alexandria. Egypt is well-known to have been the birthplace of many illustrious Greek philosophers, Plotinus (born A.D. 205 at Lycopolis) being of course reckoned as the first, and being so famous that many historians of Neo-Platonism keep almost all previous philosophers of the Neo-Platonic school in the dark; see R. Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists* 2, Cambridge 1918, or W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, London 1920, in whose works Severus is not mentioned at all.

We must emphasize here the name of Isidoros of Thmouis, a philosopher of the Platonic school who got citizenship at Delphi (*Fouilles de Delphes*, III. 2 No. 116, p. 118, and cf. G. Colin's commentary on the growth of the Alexandrian philosophical school «at the end of the second century (6)». By this time the Neo-Platonic school is flourishing everywhere in the Near East; see the names given by M. N. Tod and for Asia Minor the supplement by J. and L. Robert, *art. cit.* Alexandria itself is well-known to have been a hotbed of further development of Platonism (cf. E. Vacherot, *Histoire critique de l'école d'Alexandrie*, Paris 1846 = Amsterdam 1965, iv; R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the history of Middle Platonism*, Cambridge 1937, 114–5).

Furthermore, it is interesting that Severus, according to the scanty remains of his teaching, was very much interested in mathematics (like a good Platonist, indeed), and that Antinoopolis is known to have been prominent in mathematical studies (cf. P. Cauderlier, *Sciences pures et sciences appliquées en Egypte romaine: essai d'inventaire antinoïte*, in *Recherches sur les Artes à Rome*, Publ. de l'Université de Dijon, 1978, 52-57).

What more appropriate than that this town honoured one of its prominent fellow-citizens by such an inscription (7)? For parallel honorific inscriptions see, inter alia, Dittenberger, *Sylloge* 3, Nos. 844a, 868a+b (Delphi), and all the material cited by Tod and Calderini, *artt. cit.*


(7) At any rate we assume that Severus was a member of the town council of Antinoopolis, not a member of the town council of Alexandria (for the latter cf. A. K. Bowman, *The Towncouncils of Roman Egypt*, 18). One might even consider to restore ΣΤΜ instead of ΚΑΙ at the end of line 5 (for συμβουλευτής cf. LSJ*, s.v.).
The date of the inscription does not seem to be an obstacle against such an identification, as we have from Antinoopolis at least two inscriptions with similarly shaped letters, one being dated to A.D. 162/3. The date of SEVERUS may thus conveniently be placed ca. A.D. 175-200.

As to the question whether Flavius Maecius Se[verus] Dionysodoros was an Antinoopolitan by birth, or that he acquired Antinoopolitan citizenship by some honorary decree of the citycouncil, we can only speculate, as we lack further exact information on the date of the stone. If this inscription were to be dated considerably earlier than A.D. 200 (e.g. before or ca. A.D. 160) it does not seem likely that Se[verus] was born in Antinoopolis (founded A.D. 130 by Hadrian, cf. W. Grundz. 49 ff.; it took, of course, some time until a generation of real Antinoopolitans grew up) but the later we date the inscription, the more likely it becomes that Se[verus] had an Antinoopolitan origin. On the other hand it should be remarked that the name Flavius does not necessarily point towards a date after A.D. 324 for the inscription, as — we think — Johnson assumed at first. There are a number of Flavii attested in Egyptian papyri dated to the first and second century A.D. (cf. D. Foraboschi, Onomasticon alterum papyrologicum, s.v. Φλάουιος).

The full name of Flavius Maecius Se[verus] Dionysodoros makes it certain that the bearer of this name was a civis romanus. The commentary to Syllogos 868a already pointed out that omnes qui scholis philosophorum praeerant enjoyed the Roman citizenship (and were paid with imperial funds, in our opinion). The cognomen Dionysodoros, on the other hand, points towards an origo in the Eastern part of the Roman empire.

In sum: we see no obstacle whatsoever against an identification of the philosopher mentioned on the Antinoopolitan inscription with the SEVERUS mentioned by a few literary sources (*).

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(*) We should like to thank Dr. J.-J. Wunenburger (Dijon) for useful information on modern scholarship about Severus, and Prof. R. S. Bagnall (New York) who read an earlier version of this article and corrected our text on a number of points.