

## CHAPTER XXIX

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIGHT ON THE ENROLMENT OF QUIRINIUS

**TRANSLATION OF A PAPYRUS SHOWING THAT IN THE SECOND CENTRY ENROLMENT WAS MADE EVERY FOURTEEN YEARS. COMMENTS. TRANSLATION REFERRING TO AN ENROLMENT IN THE REIGN OF NERO. FRAGMENT FROM THE REIGN OF TIBERIUS. ENROLMENTS PROBABLY INAUGURATED BY AUGUSTUS. DOCUMENT SHOWING THAT PEOPLE WENT TO THEIR OWN TOWNS FOR ENROLMENT. INSCRIPTION SUPPOSED TO REFER TO QUIRINIUS. INSCRIPTION FROM ASIA MINOR REFERRING TO QUIRINIUS. DISCUSSION. CONCLUSIONS.**

Archaeological research has recently thrown much light upon the census of Quirinius mentioned in Luke 2:1-5. The evidence has come in part from ancient records on papyri, which have been dug up in Egypt, some of which are herewith translated.

The following extract from a large papyrus establishes the fact that a census or an assessment list was made in the Roman Empire every fourteen years.

#### **1. Papyrus Showing Enrolment Every Fourteen Years.**

After the death of my wife Aphrodite, or, as she was called by some, Aphroditoute, having departed from the district of Herakles and Sabinos, I enrolled the other children who dwell with Mysthes who is called Ninnos, who was 33 years old, and after the others, the wife of my son Mysthes who is called Ninnos, viz.:---Zizime, freed-woman of Ptolemas Ammoniaros, daughter of Marion Geomytha, and was 22 years old, (who was living with her mistress, in the enrolment of the 9<sup>th</sup> year; at the time of the enrolment she [Zozime] was living in the Greek quarter, but has now moved into the neighboring quarter of Apolloneios Hierax) and the children of these two, Ammonios, aged 5, and Didymos, aged 4, and Aut....., were not otherwise enrolled in the enrolment in the first year of the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus and the Emperor Caesar Lucius Aurielius Verus governor of the Arsinoite district of Herakles, and Asclepiades, the royal census taker, and Agathos Daimon and Dioskoros, census-takers of the metropolis, who are enrolled from the quarter of Apollonios 1-12 part of the place called Nekpherotios, in which I enroll myself and my household enrolment, as also I enrolled myself according to the household enrolment in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of Antoninus

Viereck, *Philologus*, Vol. LII, 234

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(i.e., 160-161 A.D.); I am also Mysthes who is also called Ninnos; the one enrolled is 59 years old, and his wife, Zozime, the freed-woman of Ammoniaros, daughter of Marion, who was enrolled in the household enrolment of the 23<sup>rd</sup> year in the same quarter, is 38 years old, and the children of those two.....not enrolled in the enrolments, 11 years old, and likewise Dioskoros 10 (?) years old, and likewise....., 9 years old, and a daughter, Isidora, 8 years old: thus I make my deposition. 15<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor Marcus

Aurelius Antoninus Caesar, the lord. Intercalary Mesore: (i.e., the end of August, 175 A.D.)

This papyrus dated in the year 175 A.D., is very important as it proves that the census came every fourteen years. The enrolment mentioned at the end of it was made in connection with the census of 174-175 A.D., since the document is dated in August of the year 175. The enrolment mentioned about the middle of the document was the enrolment of 160-161 A.D. That was dated in the summer of 161. The one mentioned near the beginning of the quotation, as having been made in the 9<sup>th</sup> year must refer to the census of the year 146-147. The proof that the census was taken every fourteen years is of the greatest importance to our subject as will appear below.

[*These assessments then, occurred in the following years: 174-5; 160-1; 146-7; 132-3; 118-9; 104-5; 90-1; 76-7; 62-3; 48-9; 34-5; 20-1; 5-6 A.D.; 8-7 B.C.*]

## **2. Translation Referring to an Enrolment in the Reign of Nero.**

Copy of an enrolment of Ammonios and .....ios, the gymnasiarch and librarian of the public library in the city of Arsinoe, in the presence of Pa.....xineos.....Paesios, son of Myo, priest of those who are from Karanis of the xineos....Paesios, son of Myo, priest of those who are from Karanis of the district of Herakles. According to the commands through the most excellent governor, Lucius Julius Vestinus, I have enrolled today my goods which are free from debt and mortgage and lien; in the neighboring village, a third part of my father's house and courtyard, and places cleared of abodes, two lots of a half acre each, which were brought from Mesoereus, son of Nekpheros, in the fifth year of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Emperor, and a house in the village, which was bought from Omnopherus, son of Peteroaepeus, in the sixth year of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Emperor. Whatever I make from these or buy in addition I will first report as it shall occur.

*Hermes*, XXVIII 1893, p. 233

The date of this document, which is only a copy, is not given, but as it refers to two transactions in real estate, which were dated respectively in the fifth and 6<sup>th</sup> years of Nero, and as that monarch's reign began in October of the year 54 A.D., it is probably that this is a copy of an enrolment made in connection with the census of 62-63 A.D. This proves that the system of taking the census once in fourteen years was in operation as early as the time of Nero.

## **3. Fragment from the Reign of Tiberius.**

To Eutyichides and Theon, local census-takers and village census-takers, from Horion and Petosisris, priest of Isis, the most great goddess, of the temple called the Two Brothers in the city of Oxyrhyncus on the street Myrobalanos, near the Serapeum. Those who live in the house which belongs to me and my wife Tasis and to Taurius, son of Harbichis, and to Thaechemere, in the house which is near the aforesaid temple of the Two Brothers are as follows:

Grenfel and Hunt, *Oxyrhyncus Papyri II*, 1898

Kenyon, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum II*, 19, thinks that this cannot refer to a census because the term by which it is described is different, but, as Grenfell and Hunt remark, the simpler term in the papyri earlier than the year 61 A.D., indicates that we are nearer the beginning of the census.

The papyrus at this point becomes too mutilated for further translation.

The importance of this document is revealed by an examination of the names of the officers, Eutychides and Theon. Another papyrus from the same place, which contains a notice of a removal, is dated in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor Tiberius. As these officers were still in office when this census was taken, this must be the census of the year 20-21 A.D.

**4. Enrolments Probably Inaugurated by Augustus.**---Another papyrus contains a list of people who were exempt from poll-tax in the 41<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Augustus. As the poll-tax was intimately connected with the census, it is altogether probable that the census was inaugurated by Augustus. As he became emperor in 27 B.C., and at once proceeded to organize his empire, the census may have begun early in his reign. If there was one in 20 A.D. There would be one in 6 A.D., 9-8 B.C., and possibly in 23-22 B.C. If there was not one in 23-22, that in 9-8 B.C. would be the first. This is the one to which reference is made in Luke 2:2. If the birth of Jesus occurred at the time of this census, it must have been earlier than we usually suppose. Ramsay thinks that the taking of the census in Judah may have been delayed till 7 or 6 B.C., on account of Jewish prejudices.

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## 555

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**5. Document Showing that People Went to Their Own Towns for Enrolment.**---In connection with the census of Quirinius it is stated in Luke 2:3: "All went to enroll themselves, every one to his own city." This has been felt by many scholars to be an improbable statement, and has been cited as an evidence of the unhistorical character of the whole story of the census in Luke. In this connection part of a papyrus discovered in Egypt, which is dated in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor Trajan, 103-104 A.D., is of great interest. This document contains three letters. The third of the letters is the one, which relates to our subject. It is as follows:

Gaius Vibius, chief prefect of Egypt. Because of the approaching census it is necessary at once to prepare to return to their own governments, in order that they may complete the family administration of the enrollment, and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them. Knowing that your city has need of provisions from the country, I wish..... (too fragmentary for connected translation.)

It is perfectly clear that in Egypt the enrollment was down on the basis of kinship. the word rendered "family" above .....means "kindred" in the larger sense. The phrase rendered "belonging to" [them, i.e., the tilled lands] also means "kindred." It appears, then, that in Egypt the enrolment of each district, and that, lest those residing elsewhere should forget to return home for the census, proclamations were issued directing them to do so. It is well known that in many respects the customs of administration in Syria and Egypt were similar. Luke's statement, that Joseph went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to enroll himself with Mary (Luke 2:4,5), turns out to be in exact accord with the governmental regulations as we now know them from the papyri.

**6. Inscription Supposed to Refer to Quirinius.**---A fragmentary inscription found at Rome in 1828 is thought by Mommsen and others to prove that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice, and that the governorship to which Josephus refers (*Antiquities*, XVII, I, 1), which was coincident with the deposition of Archelaus in 6 A.D., was his second appointment. The inscription as filled out by Mommsen and others reads:

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[P. Sulpicus Quirinius, consul.....; as proconsul obtained Crete and Cyrene as a province.....; as legate of the divine Augustus, obtaining Syria and Phoenicia he waged war with the tribe of Homonadenses who had killed Amyntas the king; when he returned into the dominion of the Emperor Caesar Augustus and the Roman people, the senate [decreed] thanksgivings [to the immortal gods] on account of the two success [ful accomplishments] and triumphal ornaments to him; as proconsul he obtained] again Syria and Phoenicia.

If this inscription were intact its evidence would be decisive, but unfortunately it is only a fragment, and the name of Quirinius is just that which has to be supplied from other inscriptions. That so eminent a scholar as Mommsen thought that this name was the one which once began the inscriptions is of weight, but it does not compensate for the loss of the name.

**7. Inscription from Asia Minor Referring to Quirinius.**---The following inscription, discovered by Prof. Ramsay and Mr. J.G.C. Anderson of Oxford, is believed by Ramsay to prove that Quirinius was governor of Syria between 10 and 7 B.C.

To Gaius Caristianus  
 (son of Gaius of the Sergian tribe) Fronto  
 Caesianus Julius],  
 Chief of engineers, pontifex,  
 priest, prefect of P. Sculpicius Quirinius duumvir,  
 prefect of M. Servilius.  
 To him first of all men  
 at public expense by decree of the decuriones,  
 a statue was erected.

This inscription was found at Antioch, a fortified colony in southeastern Phrygia or southern Galatia, in the year 1912. The name Caristianus connects its erection with the time of the Hamonadian war, 10-7 B.C. That Quirinius received the honor of the office of honorary duumvir of the colony at this time, is held by Ramsay to prove that he had been sent to Syria as governor, and had been military commander in the war against the Hamonades. It was the benefits which accrued to the little colony of Antioch from his victories in this war, which led to the election and the erection of this statue. Ramsay, accordingly, holds that this inscription proves Quirinius to have been governor of Syria about 11-7 B.C., and this confirms the statement of Luke 2:2, that the census at the time when Jesus was born was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

Ramsay, *Expositor*, series 8, Vol. IV, 1912, p. 410

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One objection to this theory is that from other sources (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVI, x 8, xi, 3), it appears that Sentius Saturninus was governor of Syria at this time, i.e., from 9-7 B.C., just as the time when, according to the papyri, the census should occur. This is supported by a statement of Tertullian, that Jesus was born when Saturninus was governor of Syria. To meet this

objection, Ramsay supposes either that the authority of Quirinius and of Saturninus overlapped, the former being military commander and the latter civil governor, or that Quirinius ruled until about July 1<sup>st</sup> of the year 8, the census year, and Saturninus then took office. These are, however, mere possibilities. We have not yet clear information concerning these points.

Later in 6 A.D., Quirinius was sent out to Syria again (see Tacitus, *Annales*, III, 48), and took over as governor of Syria the kingdom of Judah on the deposition of Archelaus, and conducted the census there of 6-7 A.D. (See Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, i.) Many scholars have held that Luke confused this governorship with earlier events and was accordingly in error as to his chronology by at least ten years, but the archaeological facts here collected tend to corroborate Luke's accuracy on this point. It should be added that Luke knew that Quirinius had charge of the census in Palestine in 6 A.D., as Josephus states, for he says: "this was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria."

**8. Conclusions.**---It should in all candor be noted just what archaeology has proved concerning this matter, and what points are still, from the archaeological side, outstanding. It has proved that the census was a periodic occurrence once in fourteen years, that this system was in operation as early as 20 A.D., and that it was customary for people to go to their ancestral abodes for enrolment. It has made it probably that the census system was established by Augustus, and that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice, though these last two points are not yet fully established by archaeological evidence. So far as the new material goes, however, it confirms the narrative of Luke.

**NOTE:** One author after Barton published a theory that Luke might have been originally recorded, "This was the first registration taken before Quirinius was governor" instead of "...while Quirinius was governor." (DQH)