Two Notes concerning Nero

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I

Two Neronian Inscriptions from Cyrene

ὑπὲρ τῆς Νέρωνος Κλαυδίου
Καίσαρος νίκης καὶ σωτηρίας
καὶ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτοῦ παντὸς
Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀποβατέριῳ
Μ. Αντώνιος Γέμελλος ἐκ τῶν τοῦ
Ἀπόλλωνος.

The use of the Apolline epithet Apobaterios in the text above suggested to its discoverers and first publishers that at the time of the dedication “the emperor was then engaged in some journey.”1 More precisely, the term implies the beginning or completion of a journey, as in a passage from Arrian (Anab. 1.11.7) where Alexander is said to have built temples to Zeus Apobaterios on leaving Europe and upon arrival in Asia.2 The appearance of the epithet in the present inscription, found close to the temple of Apollo at Cyrene, suggests careful, not random selection on the part of the dedicant.

M. Antonius Gemellus has been assigned an eponymous priesthood of Apollo at Cyrene for A.D. 56/7,3 but this inscription does not make

1 R. M. Smith, E. A. Porcher, History of the Recent Discoveries at Cyrene (London 1864) 113. The inscription appears as IGRR I 1034, and E. M. Smallwood, Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero (Cambridge 1967) no.161. The text was cut “on a block of blue marble, 2 feet 3½ inches by 2 feet 9⅓ inches by 12¼ inches”; Smith, Porcher loc.cit. For the possibility of topicality cf. P. Romanelli, La Cirenaica romana (1943) 211, “l’epiteto... suggerito probabilmente da qualche avvenimento contingente della vita dell’imperatore per cui la dedica fu posta...”

2 Other usages suggest a specific interpretation; Inschriften von Olympien no.57 line 36; L. Robert, Études anatoliennes (Paris 1937) 20; K. Lehmann-Hartleben, Klio Beiheft 14 (1923) 135 n.1; cf. L. Robert, Hellenica 5 (1948) 75f.

3 Smallwood, loc.cit. (supra n.1). Gemellus appears on a fragmentary list of (probably eponymous) priests of Apollo (G. Pugliese Carratelli, “Supplemento epigrafico Cirenaico,” ASAtene n.s. 23–24 [1961/62] 223); two succeeding names, Ti. Claudius Istros and Ti. Claudius
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clear his status at the time of the dedication. The text may thus not belong to an early date in Nero’s reign, when no journey is attested to provide any relevance to or explanation of the Apolline epithet. Nero, in fact, is known to have travelled outside Italy only once, for the Hellenic tour of A.D. 66/7. In mentioning the safe arrival of Nero after a near shipwreck in his description of the return voyage in the winter of 67, Dio (63.19.2) notes a circumstance which does provide a reason for an offering to Apollo of Safe Landing. A naufragium is recorded in certain terms in an anecdote at Suetonius, Nero 40.3, which may be a variation of the material in Dio.

A second dedication from Cyrene is identical to the one above in all respects save for a variation in spacing of the last two lines and for the use of Myrtoos instead of Apobaterios.

υπὲρ τῆς Νέρωνος Κλαυδίου
Καίσαρος νίκης καὶ εὐηρίας
καὶ τοῦ ὀίκου αὐτοῦ παντὸς
Ἀπόλλωνι Μυρτῶῳ Μ. Ἀντώνιος
Γέμελλος ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος.

It is not essential to look for topicality here. Myrtoos has been explained by association with the Hill of Myrtles at Cyrene (Callim. Ap. 91; Apoll.Rhod. 2.505), which is perfectly plausible. A dedication to Apollo Myrtates has been compared in this respect. But if the first inscription has some allusive quality, then so might the second. Also, it is worth noting the comment of the editor of CIG III 5138, that Myrtoos is derived from Myrtων πέλαγος, the stretch of sea between

Asclapos, can be assigned respectively to A.D. 59/60 and 60/1 from SEG 20 (1964) no.737. From the same list Gemellus’ predecessor, Ti. Claudius Pancles, may possibly be also assigned to A.D. 55/6 from his appearance on an unpublished inscription in the possession of Miss J. M. Reynolds, to whom I am grateful for supplying this information.

4 Cf. the formula ἐνι ιερως τοῦ δείνου with L. Robert, Hellenica 1 (1940) 9, for examples.
5 Smallwood, loc.cit. (supra n.1).
6 καὶ ἐγένετο μὲν τις ἐλπὶς ὑπὸ χειμῶνος αὐτοῦ φθαρῆσθαι, μάτην δὲ πολλοὶ ἥσθενεν ἐκώθη γάρ.
7 ... amissis naufragio pretiosissimus rebus non dubitaverit inter suas discere pisces eas sibi relaturas.
8 No dimensions of the stone, “a block of blue limestone,” are provided by Smith and Porcher. The inscription appears also as IGRR I 1035 and CIG III 5138.
9 L. Vitali, Fonti per la storia della religione Cyrenaica (Padua 1932) 127f; Romanelli, loc.cit. (supra n.1).
10 Kruse, RE 16 (1933) 1151 s.v. MYRTATIB; cf. Vitali, op.cit. (supra n.9) 128.
the Peloponnese and the Cyclades, so called ab insula parva, quae
cernitur Macedoniam a Geraesto petentibus haut procul Euboeae Carysto
(Pliny, NH 4.51; cf. Strabo 7.7.4).\(^1\) No details have survived of the
route taken by Nero on the return crossing, but it is at least possible
that this area was covered. Conceivably, therefore, this text contains
a hint of the location of the near shipwreck.

It thus seems possible that this pair of inscriptions should be
assigned tentatively to A.D. 68 after the news of the difficult crossing
had become well known. In that case they may be taken as signs of
continuing local loyalty to Nero at a difficult stage of his principate.
Further, the phrase common to both texts, ὄπερ τῆς . . . νίκης, other­
wise conventional, assumes some significance: not merely a reference
to the emperor's safety but also to his aesthetic triumphs in Greece,
or even to his iselastic entrances in Italy.\(^1\)

What then of the date of M. Antonius Gemellus' priesthood in
Cyrene? A.D. 56/7 must be allowed to stand for the eponymous tenure,
but there seems to be no reason why a second, non-eponymous
priesthood could not have been held at a subsequent date. If so, one
must imagine that the man had been empowered to make dedications
on behalf of the full college.

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\(^1\) V. Burr, RE 16 (1933) 1169–70 s.v. MYRTOISCHES Meer.
\(^1\) Suet. Nero 24–5; Dio 63.20. For Nero's victories at Olympia cf. L. Moretti, Olympionikai,
MemLinc ser. viii 8.2 (1957) 158. Both dedications, it is possible, were made to commemorate
military victories or escape from conspiracies; but A.D. 56/7 is not suited to either point of
view.
THE SUGGESTION was made in the original publication and discussion of the sepulchral inscription of Q. Veranius, cos. A.D. 49, that Veranius presided over Nero’s ludi maximi, which are known from Suetonius, Nero 11.2. The idea has been subsequently adopted by other scholars, but there is reason to believe that the view is incorrect. Suetonius provides no means of dating the games, but in the description he gives of them the item, notissimus eques R. elephanto supersidens per catadromum decucurrit, is comparable to a statement at Dio 61.17.2: δε δὴ καὶ ἐλέφας ἀνήχη ἐς τὴν άνωτάτω τοῦ θεάτρου ψιδα, καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἐπὶ εὐχωνίαν κατέδραμεν ἄναβατιν ψέρων. Dio says that the games to which he refers were given in honour of Agrippina and has his information under the year 59. The cited texts may have come from a common source, but at any rate the parallelism means that the two sets of games can be identified and the date of 59 be applied to the ludi maximi. By 59, however, Q. Veranius was dead. An alternative set of games is thus required for line 11 of the inscription. A clue is offered by the last clause of line 11, cuius liberalitas erat minister, which suggests the idea of a congiarium or donative. An occasion is needed when games and largesse were given together before Veranius’ death. The best solution comes from Tacitus, Annales 12.41.3–4: at Nero’s coming of age in 51 Claudius gave a congiarium in Nero’s name which was followed by circenses. This date is perfectly possible for Veranius to have assisted in the distribution of the largesse.

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1 A. E. Gordon, Quintus Veranius, Consul A.D. 49, CPCA 2 (1952) 262ff; 271. Lines 10f of the inscription were presented as, ludis | [maximis praefectus (or praesidens) factus est cum non p]etierit ab Augusto princepe cuius liberalitas erat minister.

2 J. H. Oliver, AJF 75 (1954) 206ff, revised Gordon’s restoration but retained the ludi maximi: ludis | [maximis praefectus est, ut ipse praeium p]etierit, etc. Cf. also E. M. Smallwood, Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius, and Nero (Cambridge 1967) no.231(c); A. Garzetti, From Tiberius to the Antonines (London 1974) 618.

3 Tac. Ann. 14.29.1, Agric. 14.2 (with Ogilvie ad loc.).

4 For the association cf. e.g. Suet. Aug. 41, Nero 10.1; Plin. Pan. 25; BMC Imp I p.224.

5 additum nomine eius donativum militi, congiarium plebei. et ludico circensium . . .

6 Cf. Dio 60.25.8.