

P.Oxy. 2820: Whose Preparations?

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IN *Chiron* 3 (1973) M. Treu offers an ingenious reconstruction of P.Oxy. XXXVII 2820 which would make it an account of autocratic measures, one of them verging on the treasonable, taken by Cornelius Gallus as Prefect of the newly annexed province of Egypt. One reads Treu's paper with growing excitement, for it appears to throw light on the reasons for Gallus' subsequent fall from imperial favor, reasons heretofore shrouded in our sources—as with Ovid a generation later—in allusive language conformable with Augustus' puritanism.¹ It is hardly necessary to emphasize the self-evident historic importance of such information; what must be emphasized, unfortunately, is that no such information is at hand. Treu's interpretation collapses under the weight of two objections. The first is merely logical: Gallus' disgrace and suicide occurred in 26 B.C., after his return to Rome. If treasonable or arrogant actions committed in 30–29 B.C. were the cause of his downfall, why was he kept in office for another three years? The second objection is utterly fatal: the key point in Treu's interpretation is highly dubious, and the textual reconstruction on which it rests is simply wrong, as will shortly appear.

The following is the transcription of the text as it appears in the edition (P.Oxy. 2820 col. i):

]	μεταπεμποιτο[	]	ηει.εφρουρα[[ε]]σε [
]	αφισταςθαικαιδια		ταις	
]	τουτο[. . .].επλει	]	πιτηχωρασεμ [
]	ωτων.[. .]νων	]	βολαις[.]στηκα[
5	]	[.]χαλκευεξ[. . .].η[	]	πανταοσαπρο[
]	[.]πατραςνα.[	15	]	πολεμονημε[
]	μετατονεκε[	]	]	τρεπιζενωστ.[
]	θανατονως.[.]		]	. . α[.]ο.εντειλ[
]	εικοσεξημε.[ ]			]ολαβω.[
10	]	μενονπαλινεξ		] . [ . . . ]περι[

¹ Ov. *Trist.* 2.445, *linguam . . . non tenuisse*; Suet. *Aug.* 66, *ob ingratum et malevolum animum . . . accusatorum denuntiationibus*; Cass.Dio 53.5, *ἐξέβρισεν ὑπὸ τῆς τιμῆς. πολλὰ . . . μάταια ἐς τὸν Αὔγουστον ἀπελήρει, πολλὰ . . . ἐπαίτια παρέπραττε*. I omit Amm.Marc. 17.4.5, which Treu agrees (p.227) is a garbled version of earlier sources.

20	]	βασαιγυ[...]	ουστων	]	...ανωσδουκ.[
	]	αλλωνειραιμα[		]	νειχοντοπροσ[
	]	χιμωτατουςπρω[		]	..[νατ...ε....].[
	]	τονμενπρουτρε[		]	λε.ετο[
	]	πεναντουςεκ[	30	]	σο..[
25	]	σιωσεπιτηγστ.[

1. Lines 3–5

This is the heart of Treu's thesis. He proposes the restoration

τά] τε πλεί-
ω τῶν κ[οι]νῶν
[ἐ]χάλκευε,

which he interprets (pp.229–30) as stating that Gallus struck copper coinage, using up the greater part of the Egyptian treasury. This is a most intriguing result, but the more closely one examines its details, the more impossible it becomes.

A first objection, though not perhaps an insurmountable one, is the restoration τά], which ignores Lobel's correct indication that the lacuna requires a longer restoration.

More important are the doubts stirred by the meaning here ascribed to χαλκεύω. Is the fact—adduced by Treu—that only copper coinage was issued in Egypt under Augustus really sufficient warrant for ascribing such an unprecedented acceptance to this verb? That would involve not a mere "Bedeutungsnuance" but a clear-cut distinction between two entirely different and differently expressed processes: between forging, fabricating—*i.e. working*—metal, which is the image conveyed by χαλκεύω in its many occurrences, and producing coins by die-stamping—*i.e. striking* the metal with a die—which was normally expressed in Greek by the appropriately descriptive κόπτω.

Doubt increases when we look at the meaning ascribed to τῶν κ[οι]νῶν. Are citations from Aristophanes, Demosthenes and Polybius really sufficient warrant for accepting this rare and unusual term in place of the well and widely known official designation of the treasury of the Ptolemaic state, τὸ βασιλικόν?

The *coup de grâce* is provided by the papyrus itself: the reading κ[οι]νῶν is impossible. Treu states (p.230), "Vom ersten Buchstaben nach τῶν ist noch das untere Ende einer Senkrechten sichtbar. Das ergibt nicht unbedingt ein K, scheint mir jedoch nicht unvereinbar

mit diesem Buchstaben.” Not so: the published photograph (Plate ix) clearly shows the bottom of not one but two “Senkrechten,” positioned so close together as to rule out any possibility of reading *kappa*. Drs John Rea and Revel Coles have kindly confirmed this on the original, and the latter offers the reading *ἱκανῶν*, which seems excellent in every way.

The word *ὄπλα*, rejected by Treu (p.229), now seems the likely restoration in 3, giving the following text for lines 2–5: *καὶ διὰ | τοῦτο [ὄπλα] τε πλείω τῶν ἱκανῶν | [ἐ]χάλκευε*, “and for this reason he forged a more than adequate quantity of weapons.”

II. Lines 5–11

Lobel’s note suggests the following restoration:

5	<i>κ[αὶ τὸ] τῆ[²κ]λε-</i>
	<i>ο]πάτρας ναυ[τικὸν</i>
	<i>μετὰ τὸν ἐκε[ίνης</i>
	<i>θάνατον ὥσπ[ε]ρ</i>
	<i>εἰκὸς ἐξημελ[η-</i>
10	<i>μένον πάλιν ἐξ-</i>
	<i>ῆει κ<αὶ> φρουρὰς κτλ.</i>

To cope with Lobel’s *caveat* that this makes line 5 too long, Treu suggests reading *κ<αὶ>*, as in line 11. Two objections oppose this solution: (1) The spacing is wrong. There is room for four letters between *κ[* and *]τῆ[²κ]*, thus no cause to postulate an omission through oversight. The difficulty comes at the end of the line, where there is no room for *κλε*. (2) The presumed justification in line 11 is non-existent. There *κ<αὶ>* is Lobel’s counsel of despair to avoid the harsh asyndeton. The papyrus has not *kappa* but *epsilon*.

Returning to *κλε*: As there seems to be little doubt that a name ending in *-πάτρας* in this context must be the genitive of Cleopatra, and as blank papyrus after *]τῆ[²κ]* reveals that *κλε* was not written at the end of line 5, all of *Κλεοπάτρας* must have been written where there is now a hole in the papyrus at the beginning of line 6. The name may have projected into the left margin, or a few letters may have been added interlinearly.

Next there is the matter of the verb in lines 10–11. Lobel and Treu were both troubled by *ἐξῆει*, recognizing that what is wanted is a

² τῆ[²κ] Lobel, but the plate shows τῆ[²κ].

transitive verb, preferably in the imperfect tense, in sequence with ἐχάλκευε (line 5), ἴστη (13) and εὐτρέπιζεν (15–16). Here again Drs Rea and Coles have found the answer on the original: ἐξήρτυε.

This in turn leaves us face to face with the problem of the following asyndeton: the copula must be found or supplied. Lobel's apparatus notes that there are "above υρα traces of which the middle one resembles ι but perhaps all offsets." If these interlinear traces or smudges could be found to represent και, or even τε, the problem would be solved. Otherwise we must attempt to explain the omission of the copula, no doubt through oversight. The explanation may lie in the trouble that the scribe obviously had with the words immediately following: he initially wrote φρουραις in the dative before deleting the *iota*, and he had to add ταις interlinearly, which suggests that he may have started to write a non-coordinate continuation after ἐξήρτυε and neglected to insert the desiderate καί when changing back to coordination.

Thus, lines 5–11 now read: κ[αὶ τὸ] τῆ[ς | ³Κλεο]πάτρας ναυ[τικὸν] | μετὰ τὸν ἐκε[ίνης] | θάνατον ὥσπ[ε]ρ | εἰκὸς ἐξημελ[η] | μένον πάλιν ἐξ | ἦρτυε <καὶ> φρουρὰς κτλ., "and he refitted Cleopatra's fleet, which had—understandably—been neglected after her death, and (he stationed) garrisons," etc.

III. The whole text: Who is the subject of these verbs?

To the extent that we can decipher and reconstruct it our text now reads as follows.

	μεταπέμποιτο [
	ἀφίστασθαι καὶ διὰ
	τοῦτο [ὄπλα] τε πλεί-
	ω τῶν ἰκανῶν
5	ἐ]χάλκευε κ[αὶ τὸ] τῆ[ς
	ἘΚΛΕ/ο]πάτρας ναυ[τικὸν
	μετὰ τὸν ἐκε[ίνης
	θάνατον ὥσπ[ε]ρ
	εἰκὸς ἐξημελ[η-
10	μένον πάλιν ἐξ-
	ἦρτυε <καὶ> φρουρὰς ἐ-
	πὶ ἄταις/ τῆς χώρας ἐμ-
	βολαῖς [ἴ]στη κα[ὶ

³ Or ἘΚΛΕ/ο-.

15 πάντα ὅσα πρό[ε
 πόλεμον ἦν ἐ[ύ-
 τρέπιζεν ὡς τε[
] . . α[.] ο . εντειλ[
] ολαβών[
] . [] περι [Θή-
 20 βας Αἰγυ[πτί]ους τῶν
 ἄλλων εἶναι μα-
 χιμωτάτους πρῶ-
 τον μὲν προὔτρε-
 πεν αὐτοὺς ἐκ[ου-
 25 κύως ἐπὶ τὴν στρ[α-
 τείαν ὡς δ' οὐκ ἦ[-
 νείχοντο προς[
 . . [] νατ . . ε [] . []
 λξ . ετο[
 30] σο . . []

 18, ὑπ]ολαβών Treu.

Reviewing *seriatim* the actions taken by the subject of the verbs, we find:

1. LINES 1-2. The verbs of summoning and defection, however suggestive of intrigue, can hardly be particularized to a specific person or situation in the absence of further clues.

2. LINES 2-5. "For this reason he forged a more than adequate quantity of weapons." During his brief prefecture of Egypt (29-26? B.C.) Cornelius Gallus put down local revolts against the new Roman rule at Heroonpolis and Thebes. Neither of these seems to be a likely occasion for massive production of new armaments: the first city δι' ὀλίγων εἶλε, the second ἐν βραχεῖ κατέλυσε.⁴ Gallus then proceeded to the Egyptian-Ethiopian frontier, where he apparently put on a military display to 'show the flag', but for the rest his activities there were diplomatic rather than military.

In 26 B.C. Augustus assigned Aelius Gallus, his new prefect of Egypt, to lead an expedition into Arabia Felix.⁵ Most of what we know about that expedition comes from Book 16 (ch. 4.22-24, C 780-82) of Strabo,

⁴ Strabo 17.1.53 (C 819). In his commemorative inscription Gallus boasts that he subdued the Thebaid in fifteen days (OGIS 654 = Dessau, ILS 8995 = IGRR I 1293).

⁵ Cassius Dio has already reached the year 24 B.C. before he tells of Aelius Gallus' expedition (53.29.3-8). But according to the plausible argument of S. Jameson, *JRS* 58 (1968) 78, the opening words of Dio's account, ἐν ᾧ δὲ τοῦτ' ἐγίγνετο, covers a period beginning in

who was with Aelius in Egypt (17.1.46, C 816), the base in which he prepared and from which he launched the expedition. A massive production of armaments is quite appropriate to an account of those preparations. In fact, Strabo (16.4.23, C 780) states that Aelius' first mistake (*ἀμάρτημα*) was to create a huge, unneeded war fleet. Our writer's dry *πλείω τῶν ἱκανῶν* reflects a similar overproduction of weaponry.

3. LINES 5–11. "He refitted Cleopatra's fleet, which had—understandably—been neglected after her death." This reference to the refurbishment of Cleopatra's fleet places the action of *P.Oxy.* 2820 in the first few years after her death, before the neglected hulls had deteriorated beyond salvage. The timing is thus right for Cornelius Gallus, but what would the occasion have been? Surely not his capture of Heroonpolis *δι' ὀλίγων*. As for his march on Thebes, it is true that the Ptolemies maintained a Nile river patrol (*ποταμοφυλακία*), but can the light vessels of that service by any stretch of the imagination be called the country's naval force, *τὸ ναυτικόν*? Perhaps in a wild burst of hyperbole, or even in vainglorious language such as that of Cornelius Gallus' own inscription,⁶ but not in the flat matter-of-fact language of *P.Oxy.* 2820. Professor Lionel Casson calls my attention to Arrian 5.8.5, where *τὸ ναυτικόν* denotes the collectivity of vessels constructed on the spot to ferry Alexander's army across the Indus river and later reassembled for crossing the Hydaspes. But the situations are not the same. Alexander the Great marched across Persia to India with a land army, which created this *ad hoc* 'naval arm' when it was needed. In the Hellenistic kingdoms of Alexander's successors the naval arm of the military establishment operated on the sea, and the fleet of the Ptolemies was no exception.⁷

But if Cornelius Gallus had, so far as we can tell, no need of Cleopatra's fleet, his successor Aelius Gallus may well have had a use for it for his expedition to Arabia Felix. At the northwestern extremity of the Red Sea (present-day Suez), with a connection to the Nile, lay the

26 B.C. That, as further suggested (*ibid.* p.79), Aelius Gallus was already in Egypt as prefect "not later than the year 27 and conceivably earlier" is indeed possible but unprovable in the present state of the evidence.

⁶ See n.4 *supra*.

⁷ In a recent study by H. Hauben, *Callicrates of Samos: A Contribution to the Study of the Ptolemaic Admiralty* (*Studia Hellenistica* 18, Leuven 1970), and in the substantial body of earlier work there reviewed, the Ptolemaic and other Hellenistic navies are uniformly treated as maritime forces.

city of Cleopatra; here Aelius began his preparations with the construction and equipping of no fewer than eighty warships: τὸ μακρὰ κατασκευάσασθαι πλοῖα . . . οὐκ ἔλαττον ὀγδοήκοντα ἐναυπηγήσατο δίκροτα καὶ τριήρεις καὶ φαρήλους κατὰ Κλεοπατρίδα τὴν πρὸς τῇ παλαιᾷ διώρυγι τῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ Νείλου (Strabo 16.4.23, C 780). Now, while ἐναυπηγήσατο describes the action of building ships (presumably from scratch), κατασκευάσασθαι refers, more properly, to equipping or outfitting existing ships.⁸ The Ptolemaic fleet left at Alexandria at Cleopatra's death was not insubstantial, consisting of the sixty ships with which she returned from Actium (Plut. *Ant.* 64.1), plus whatever number she had left behind for the defense of Egypt in her absence, minus the small number lost in her vain last effort to flee.⁹ It would have been elementary good sense for Aelius to move the most usable of those abandoned hulls from Alexandria, where they would in fact have been taking up berths needed for the new *classis Alexandriae*, to Cleopatra and refit them there.¹⁰ In that case, Strabo's κατασκευάσασθαι and the synonymous ἐξήρτυε of *P.Oxy.* 2820 could refer to the same activity. In the present state of the evidence this interpretation must be regarded as no more than a possibility, but it does seem to be a very tempting one.

Another case—though a much more tenuous one, in my opinion—might be built on the possibility that the fleet in *P.Oxy.* 2820 is called Cleopatra's through confusion with κατὰ Κλεοπατρίδα. But in such a hypothesis, too, *P.Oxy.* 2820 would be a description of the preparations of Aelius Gallus for the Arabian expedition.

4. LINES 11–13: “He stationed garrisons at the entrances to the country.” Such preparation hardly seems appropriate for Cornelius Gallus, since he dealt with the uprisings as purely local, limited affairs. No doubt he left a frontier garrison behind after his negotiations with the Ethiopians, but did he similarly garrison the other entrances to Egypt? For Aelius Gallus, who was preparing to lead his military force out of Egypt, such garrisoning would be an elementary precaution to safeguard both the province and his rear. Strabo's language is strikingly

⁸ Cf. e.g. LSJ s.v.

⁹ See n.10 *infra*.

¹⁰ If the big vessels could not use the canal, they could be hauled across the narrow isthmus between the seas. By that method Cleopatra moved some of her ships to the Red Sea in a futile last effort to escape Octavian's pursuit (Plut. *Ant.* 69.2–3)—just as Octavian hastened that pursuit by having his fleet hauled across the isthmus of Corinth (Cass.Dio 51.5.2).

close: Aelius invaded Arabia using *μέρει τῆς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ φρουρᾶς* (17.1.53, C 819) and the Ethiopians took advantage of his absence to attack *τῇ φρουρᾷ . . . κατὰ Συήνην* (17.1.54, C 820).

5. LINES 13–16: “He prepared everything needed for war.” What war? Even the vainglorious language of Cornelius Gallus’ own inscription is not so hyperbolic as to tout his local military actions as a ‘war’. It speaks of *τὴν Θηβαίδα [ἀ]ποστᾶσαν*, *defection[is] Thebaidis*, and Strabo’s language is similar, *τὴν τε Ἑρώων πόλιν ἀποστᾶσαν . . . στάειν τε γενηθεῖσαν ἐν τῇ Θηβαίδι*.¹¹ Aelius Gallus, on the other hand, was preparing to carry war to a potential enemy, a fact which is reflected in the vocabulary of Strabo’s account: *καταστρέφεσθαι*, *ἐχθρῶν κρατήρειν*, *μακρὰ πλοῖα*, *πολέμου*, *πεζούς*, *τῶν συμμάχων*, *πολεμίου οὐδενός*, *συναψάντων . . . εἰς μάχην*, *πολεμίων*, and later, *Γάλλου Αἰλίου πολεμουῦντος πρὸς τοὺς Ἀραβας*.¹²

6. LINES 18–27: “Esteeming the Egyptians of the Thebaid to be better fighters than the others, he first encouraged them to volunteer for the expedition, but when they did not come forward [he resorted to a draft(?)].”

How does this statement fit Cornelius Gallus? He may well have considered that the Thebaid, which engaged him in two pitched battles and for a total of fifteen days, was peopled by tougher fighters than the rest of Egypt; and he was informed (as his inscription shows, *ILS 8995.6–7*) that Thebes, the seat of the priests of Amun, was the age-old center of opposition to the crown: *Thebaide, communi omn[i]um regum formidine, subacta*. It is conceivable that after defeating them he invited them, out of respect for their fighting qualities, to enlist with his forces. Their refusal would indicate, presumably, that defeat did not abate their hostility. But to what expedition of Cornelius Gallus would this text make reference? The only possibility that we know of would be his march from Thebes to the border with Ethiopia, which no extant source, not even his own lordly inscription, elevates to the status of an expedition. Since in the inscription he does speak of his *στρατιά*, one may consider whether that is the word intended in *P.Oxy. 2820.25–26*, but this possibility is effectively excluded by the fact that the careful writer of *P.Oxy. 2820* nowhere confuses or interchanges *ει* and *ι*.

¹¹ OGIS 654 etc. (*supra* n.4) 2–3; Strabo 17.1.53 (C 819).

¹² Strabo 16.4.22–24 (C 780–82) *passim*, and 17.1.54 (C 820).

In sum, lines 18–27 taken alone can if necessary be accommodated to Cornelius Gallus and his march to the Ethiopian frontier. The ineluctable objection arises from trying to fit this interpretation with the preceding lines of *P.Oxy.* 2820. For if lines 18–27 refer to Cornelius Gallus, then he is also the subject of the parallel preceding verbs; that in turn means that all these preparations for his ‘expedition’ (forging arms, refitting a fleet, stationing garrisons, etc.) took place between the capture of Thebes and the march to the Ethiopian frontier—which is, of course, a patent absurdity.

How stands the case of lines 18–27 for Aelius Gallus? First and most obvious: an expedition is precisely what he was preparing, and Strabo twice designates it by the term *στρατεία*: *ἔστειλε τὴν στρατείαν ὁ Γάλλος . . . ἣ στρατεία αὐτή*.¹³ Less obvious but possibly also apposite is Strabo’s intervening remark that Aelius’ infantry consisted of some 10,000 *τῶν ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῶν συμμάχων*. Among the allies, he adds (implying that there were also others?), were Jews and Nabataeans. If there was also a contingent of Egyptians, the Thebans, with their reputation as being *μαχιμώτατοι*, would be the prime recruits in any commander’s eyes.

7. A FINAL POINT which should not be overlooked is the fact that the sequence of indicative verbs in *P.Oxy.* 2820 is not in the narrative aorist or even in the historical present but in the imperfect tense. In other words, these were actions that were carried on over a period of time—which, again, is more appropriate to the preparations of Aelius Gallus than to the actions of Cornelius Gallus.

SUMMARY. Gaius Cornelius Gallus, poet, friend of Vergil, soldier and statesman, was one of several ‘Renaissance men’, as they might be called today, those men of striking ability and versatility who assisted Octavian’s rise to power. Information that would help solve the enigma of Gallus’ downfall would be most welcome, but such information is not to be found in *P.Oxy.* 2820. Treu’s attempt to relate that text to Cornelius Gallus rests on a combination of false reading and false idiom, and must be rejected. In contrast, a fairly strong case can be made out for interpreting *P.Oxy.* 2820 as an account of preparations for Aelius Gallus’ expedition to Arabia Felix.

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May, 1975

¹³ Strabo 16.4.23, 24 (C 780, 782). Dio’s account of Aelius Gallus’ expedition also uses *στρατεία* and *ἐπεστράτευσε* (53.29.3).