WHEN DID NERO LIBERATE ACHAEA – AND WHY?

Ἐς δὲ δὴ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐπεραιώθη, οὔτι γε ὡς Φλαμινῖνος οὐδ' ὡς Μόμμιος ἢ καὶ Ἀγρίππας καὶ Αὔγουστος οἱ πρόγονοι αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐπί τε ἡνιοχήσει καὶ κιθαρῳδήσει κηρύξει τε καὶ τραγῳδίας ὑποκρίσει.

Dio, 63.8.2

Ce beau voyage funambulesque d'Achaïe, où la gloire du César décadent rayonne dans une apothéose de féerie...

Holleaux, Etudes I, 172

The version of Nero's visit to Achaea which a hostile ancient tradition has imposed on posterity seems impossible to dislodge. We have lost the writings of Cluvius Rufus, who not only composed a history favorable to Nero but actually went with him to Achaea. Nor do we have for this episode the text of Tacitus, who might have provided a reasonable if not a favorable account. In effect we are left with Suetonius and Dio, both of whom are at their worst here — Suetonius at his most confused and gossipy, Dio at his most rhetorical. These writers insist that Nero visited Greece primarily to demonstrate his talent in its artistic and athletic contests. But fragments of evidence survive for a different scenario, one which credits Nero with more serious intentions. My hope here is to validate some of these, though I shall not of course claim that Nero should be seen as saint instead of sinner.

I should like particularly to review the literary, epigraphic, and numismatic evidence for an episode of Nero's visit to which modern scholars have paid rather little attention, perhaps because of the casual treatment given it in the ancient sources: his liberation of the province. Dio, comparing him to previous "liberators" like Flamininus and Augustus, observes that Nero "ravaged Greece, though he had liberated it" (καίπερ ἐλευθέραν ἀφείς: Dio 63.11.1). His use of the aorist participle implies an early liberation, perhaps soon after Nero's arrival in the autumn of A.D. 66. Scholars have mostly preferred the version of Suetonius, who reports that the event took place just before the emperor's departure from Greece in late 67 (*Nero* 24.2)[1]. Suetonius' narrative certainly contains petty errors, but it is fuller than Dio's, and it fits better with the general picture all ancient sources have given us of the mature Nero as a tyrant, governed only by whim and the drive for personal gratification[2]. In that context, Suetonius' version of the liberation can be seen as a final impulsive gesture of gratitude for the good treatment Nero had received from his Greek hosts — an unpremeditated act without practical consequences[3].

Publication in 1888 of the well-known decree from Boeotian Acraephiae seemed at first to provide more solid evidence for dating[4]. A full account of its contents is not necessary here; we need only recall that in addition to Nero's liberation address, the inscription records at its beginning the month and day of that event, November 28th, and that later on, in reporting the Acraephians' honorific decree for Nero, it gives an imperial titulature which includes a year-

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1. Recent discussions of the ancient evidence include: P. Gallivan, Nero's Liberation of Greece, *Hermes* 101, 1973, 233; K. R. Bradley, *Suetonius' Life of Nero* (1978) 144-148; *idem*, The Chronology of Nero's Visit to Greece in A.D. 66/67, *Latomus* 37, 1978, 66-71; C. Clay, Die Münzprägung des Kaisers Nero in Rom und Lugdunum I, *NumZ* 96, 1982, 11-16.

2. For another example of this attitude see Ps.-Lucian *Nero* 2, where it is said that Nero only conceived the idea of cutting the Corinth canal when he arrived on the spot. Yet the author knows the good reasons behind this project. It had already been considered by Julius Caesar and Caligula, but this is not pointed out in the *Nero*, which cites Agamemnon, Darius, and Xerxes as Nero's predecessors.

3. The view that the liberation was frivolously undertaken is at least as old as Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii Tyan.* 5.41. But Plutarch, who was a young man when Nero visited Greece (and is our only contemporary witness), seems to take it quite seriously: *De sera numinis vindicta* 32. So does Pausanias, VII.17.13.

4. M. Holleaux, *BCH* 12, 1888, 510-528; *IG* VII 2713; *ILS* 8794; *SIG*^{3} 814.

dating formula: ὁ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου κύριος Νέρων, αὐτοκράτωρ μέγιστος, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὸ τρισκαιδέκατον ἀποδεδειγμένος, πατὴρ πατρίδος. This is a curious mix of official terminology with the language of panegyric. Even the official portion is unusual, for in normal Roman usage only consulships, not tribuneships, were "designated". Holleaux, its first editor, therefore concluded that the word ἀποδεδειγμένος (*designatus*, "chosen though not yet in office"), had been misapplied by the redactor or stonecutter, and should be ignored in translation: Nero's grant of freedom must really have taken place *during* his thirteenth tribunician power, rather than shortly before it[5]. If, in addition, we dismiss a problem of possible intercalation in the numbering of Nero's tribuneships (as it now seems generally agreed that we may)[6], this will leave us with a liberation date of 28 November 67 A.D., which accords with Suetonius' account.

Some scholars have been content with Holleaux' interpretation of the titulary formula. For those uncomfortable with the idea of ἀποδεδειγμένος as a redactor's error, a way of escape has been suggested: that the word was not intended here to have its official Roman meaning, "chosen though not yet in office", but a more general one, "chosen", closer to the original force of the Greek verb ἀποδεικνύναι[7]. (The effect on the total meaning of the formula is the same in either case: the word ἀποδεδειγμένος adds virtually nothing to the sense and might as well be omitted.) But the linguistic evidence does not really support this second thesis[8]. In the most closely comparable epigraphic context, Julio-Claudian inscriptions from the Greek mainland, the word ἀποδεδειγμένος *does* have its "official" meaning[9]. The variant meaning suggested for the Acraephiae decree would thus appear to posit an unlikely linguistic ambiguity — either that, or great ignorance on the part of the individual responsible for the decree's redaction. It is hard to believe that Epaminondas of Acraephiae, priest of the imperial cult and a veteran negotiator with Roman emperors, was unaware of Roman dating terms and methods. He must certainly have known the correctly formulated superscription in Caligula's letter to the Panhellenes, the response to an embassy in which he himself had taken part some thirty years earlier[10]. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly apparent that unusual forms of titulature might be used in the provinces. For example, another formula employed for Nero in the Acraephiae decree is αὐτοκράτωρ μέγιστος. That (or rather its Latin equivalent *imperator maximus*) was not officially used by Nero in Rome, but we now know that it appeared in the inscription honoring Nero on the East architrave of the Parthenon[11]. And although a "designated tribuneship" still remains epigraphically unique, an almost equally unusual formula, δικτάτωρ ἀποδεδειγμένος, is used of Julius Caesar in the reconstructed version of another Boeotian inscription, *IG* VII 1835, from Thespiae[12]. In short, while we may not know the reason the Acraephians chose for Nero the titulary formula they did, we should, I think, accept their decree at face value. Even this will not provide a solution entirely free from difficulties, for there has been controversy

5. *Discours prononcé par Néron à Corinthe en rendant aux Grecs la liberté* (1889) = *Etudes d'épigraphie et d'histoire grecques* I (1938) 165-185.

6. Th. Mommsen, *Hermes* 2, 1867, 56-63; *Röm. Staatsrecht* II^3 (1887) 798 note 1. Cf. the recent discussion by C. Clay, *NumZ* 1982, 9.

7. See M. Hammond, The Tribunician Day under the Early Empire, *MAAR* 15, 1938, 28 note 50, and most recently H. Halfmann, *Itinera principum* (1986) 175. Some have considered the phrase a *locus desperatus*, e.g. A. Stein, *Gnomon* 1, 1925, 342.

8. It is true that the verb ἀποδεικνύναι means, in general, "to choose, make known". But by the end of the Roman Republic the form ἀποδεδειγμένος was used, in the titulary formulas of documents intended for the Greek East, as a translation for the specialized term *designatus* ("chosen though not yet in office": see R. K. Sherk, *RDGE* (1969) 16; 164 no. 28; 342 no. 67 (and cf. 148 no. 26 for an alternative translation, καθεσταμένος). Under the Empire ἀποδεδειγμένος continued to be a documentary equivalent for *designatus*; examples are collected in H. J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions* (1974) 24. Support for Hammond's conjecture has been sought from a papyrus dated to the beginning of Nero's reign, P. Oxy. 1021 (cited by Mason): ὁ δὲ τῆς οἰκουμένης καὶ προσδοκηθεὶς καὶ ἐλπισθεὶς αὐτοκράτωρ ἀποδέδεικται, "the emperor, expected and hoped for by the whole world, has been proclaimed". But that passage is a piece of pure encomium, not a titulary formula; it falls in a different category from the one under discussion here, which is intended as a titulary formula, though it includes encomiastic elements not yet admitted to the "official" canon (κύριος, μέγιστος = *dominus, maximus*).

9. E.g., a pair of Claudian statue-bases in Delphi: *SIG*^{3} 801 BC (42, 46 A.D.).

10. *IG* VII 2711, lines 21-22. See J. H. Oliver, Epaminondas of Acraephiae, *GrRomByzSt* 12, 1971, 221-237.

11. K. Carroll, *The Parthenon Inscription* (1982) 30-43. Such locutions surely appeared in the language of flattery before they entered the official phraseology of the imperial chancellery at Rome; Caligula's cognomina *optimus maximus*, attested only by Suetonius (*Gaius* 22.1) might belong in this category. The Sardinian decree *CIL* X 7852, quoting Nero's procurator Juventius Rixa, refers to *clementia optumi maximique principis*.

12 *BCH* 50, 1926, 439 no. 75; with A. Raubitschek, Epigraphical Notes on Julius Caesar, *JRS* 44, 1954, 70-71.

not only about the numbering of Nero's tribuneships but about the point in the year from which they were reckoned: October 13 (his *dies imperii*) or early December. But if we accept the latter, as the most recent literature does[13], the Acraephiae decree as it stands will give us the early liberation date, 28 November 66.

Brief notice must be given to two other pieces of evidence, one epigraphic and one literary, which have sometimes been adduced in favor of the early date. The first is a Sardinian inscription, *CIL* X 7852, which has served since Mommsen's day as support for both sides of the question. Though Meloni's work on the administration of Roman Sardinia sees in it an argument for the early date, we are probably safer in assuming that it is too ambiguous to be used at all[14]. The other piece of evidence is a well-known passage in the pseudo-Lucianic dialogue *Nero*, in which the political exile Musonius Rufus is quoted as saying that a "former procurator of Achaea" handed Nero the golden pickaxe with which, in the late summer of 67, the emperor initiated his short-lived Corinthian canal project. In this unnamed person's status as an *ex*-official of the province an argument has been seen for the early liberation date[15]. But surely the man was not an ex-official when the ground-breaking ceremony took place — only at the time, early in 68, when Musonius was telling his story.

What remains to support the early date (besides, in my opinion, the Acraephiae decree) is numismatic evidence. Dating indications of varying cogency can be found in the coin issues of four Achaean political bodies: Corinth, Patrae, Sicyon, and an anonymous mint which has been wrongly identified in the past as Apollonia in Epirus. I shall briefly review the arguments provided by all four[16]. The best comes from Corinth. It was already pointed out by Berend Pick, who in 1890 was the first scholar to propose an early liberation. He observed that the Corinthian duumviral coinage of Piso and Cleander used reverse types referring both to Nero's debarcation in Greece and to his liberation address. These two types must, then, have been struck within a single year, the *terminus post quem* being the emperor's arrival. Of the two possible duumviral terms, July 66 to 67 or July 67 to 68, Pick argued that the earlier was more likely, since by July first of 67 Nero's arrival would have been rather old news[17]. Michel Amandry has reiterated and reinforced this argument for the early date in his recently published corpus of Corinth's duumviral coinage[18].

The second mint is Patrae, whose Neronian issues I briefly discussed in the archaeological congress held in Athens in 1983. I observed then that all the examples known to me must be dated by the style of Nero's portrait to the last quadrennium of his reign, and I suggested that all might in fact have been struck in conjunction with the visit to Achaea[19]. Now, only two of the eight or more reverse types associated with these obverse portraits at Patrae are at all common: *Adventus Augusti* and *Iuppiter Liberator*. This is the pair of themes used together at Corinth in the single duumviral year 66/67. Unfortunately we cannot conclude that the same pair was used together within a single year by Patrae's mint, for there we have no magistrate's names on the coinage to serve as dating elements. Furthermore, I have as yet found no obverse dies to link these two reverses at Patrae. There are nonetheless arguments, perhaps not very strong ones, for supposing that the Iuppiter Liberator type was produced early in the imperial visit. It is die-linked with a reverse I have rather arbitrarily considered to be Nero's earliest at Patrae, because it had already been used there under Claudius: the common colonial type of legionary eagle with standards (see figs. 1-2)[20]. And conversely, among the four forms of

13. M. Griffin, *Nero* (1984) 238, following D. MacDowall, *The Western Coinages of Nero*, ANS NNM 161 (1979), 1; but cf. Clay, *NumZ* 1982, 16.

14. P. Meloni, *L'amministrazione della Sardegna...* (1958) 22; cf. Clay, *NumZ* 1982, 39.

15. Ps.-Lucian, *Nero* 3; Clay, *NumZ* 1982, 13; followed by M. Amandry, *Le monnayage des duovirs corinthiens*, *BCH* Suppl. 15 (1988) 18.

16. For a full account of the anonymous series and a restatement of the arguments presented here, see: Nero's "Apollonia" Series: the Achaean Context, *NumChron* 149 (1989) 59-68.

17. B. Pick, Über einige Münzen der römischen Kaiserzeit, *ZfNum* 17, 1890, 189-190. In other ways Pick's arguments for the early date are flawed. He believed with Holleaux that the Acraephiae decree's ἀποδεδειγμένος must be ignored, but was able to arrive at the early date by assuming, with Mommsen, an intercalated tribunician year before A.D. 60: TR P XIII would thus have run from Dec. 65 to Dec. 66, with the liberation occurring on 28 November 66.

18. *Op. cit.* 19.

19. Jupiter Liberator at Patrae and the Boy Zeus of Aigion, *Πρακτικά του XII Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Κλασικής Αρχαιολογίας*, 1983, τόμος Β΄ (1988) 133.

20. Berlin 2879, with eagle-and-standards reverse (fig. 1) shares an obverse die with a Iuppiter Liberator piece in Paris (fig. 2); another pair, in Turin and in the British Museum (1913-6-4-95) is similarly linked.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

imperial titulature found on Patrae's Neronian coinage, that which is clearly the latest, IMP NERO CAESAR (fig. 3), is not so far found in combination with any Iuppiter Liberator reverse dies[21].

The third Achaean mint to produce coinage clearly related to Nero's visit is Sicyon. Examples of its single Neronian issue have always been considered rare, but that is partly due to the circumstance that none appear in the published catalogues of major collections[22]. In fact, at least forty-four are locatable today, and from them we can get a reasonable picture of the issue's structure. All come from six obverse dies, bearing a patently late portrait of Nero (figs. 4-9)[23]. The obverse inscription, which is rendered in a slightly different abbreviated form on each die, is Νέρων Καῖσαρ Ζεὺς Ἐλευθέριος — proof that the whole issue was struck after the liberation of Achaea.

Sicyon's obverse portrait is coupled with a pair of reverse types; each, like the portrait, can appear either to right or to left (figs. 10-13)[24]. These types are interesting in their own right, and the first of them has received a great deal of scholarly attention[25], but their meaning will not concern us here. More important to this discussion is the reverse legend. Like that of the obverse, it appears with a number of petty variants, which have been useful in distinguishing a dozen or so of the dies used for these generally rather worn reverses. It gives the name of a magistrate, the *damiorgos* Gaius Julius Polyaenus. He too is interesting, as a man who had signed coinage for Corinth while serving there as duumvir about a decade earlier; in fact, the coin-blanks for Polyaenus' issue at Sicyon could well have been produced at Corinth, for their weight and fabric, though not their style of engraving, correspond closely to those of contemporary Corinthian issues. Dependence on certain technical resources of a more active neighboring atelier would be quite consonant with the fact that Sicyon had struck no earlier Julio-Claudian coinage, and was to sponsor none again until the Severan period.

Most pertinent here is the fact that just one magistrate is named. That implies production within a single year — which must, in fact, be the year following the liberation. The pattern of die-links suggests an even more restricted period of issue, for every obverse die but one is linked to another, and half are linked to two or more, as if all or nearly all obverse dies were in use together. As is common with such compact and isolated coinages, we should probably assume games or a festival as the occasion. It seems very likely, even if our literary sources are silent on the subject, that Sicyon's games were put on for Nero and in his presence[26]. But if the liberation of Achaea, to which this coin issue refers, had taken place in late November of 67, there would hardly have been time for games between Nero's proclamation and his departure —which in Suetonius' version followed immediately after.

Finally, a brief word about the fourth coinage, an anonymous series traditionally ascribed to Apollonia in Epirus. Less than a decade ago it was known from only two published varieties, classed in the British Museum catalogue for Thessaly-Epirus as Apollonia 84 and 85. *BMC* 84 represents Nero as Apollo Kitharoidos, paired with a Victory crowning his name; *BMC* 85 pairs the same obverse type with Liberty personified (see figs. 14-15). That connects the series with the liberation of Achaea. A third variety shows the head of Nero paired with Victory (fig. 16), and a fourth represents him delivering the liberation address, again with the reverse type of Liberty (fig. 17). A total of twenty-two examples is currently known for the whole group. None, so far as I am aware, is associated with an archaeological context, which for this unlocated coinage would be most welcome. Since all twenty-two are illustrated and described else-

21. E.g. Paris 1245 (fig. 3) and 1246, mintmarkless pieces usually ascribed to Patrae because of their "Diana Laphria" reverse type; note the very late portrait of Nero. At the mints of both Patrae and Corinth, the shortest form of the imperial title seems to be the latest: see Amandry, *op. cit.* 20, for NERO CAESAR at Corinth.

22. For the bibliography of earlier speculations on this issue's provenance (Daldis, Magnesia ad Sipylum), see J. Fisher, *Hesperia* 49, 1980, 6-8, esp. 7 note 19.

23. Figs. 4-9: Corinth 76.376; London BM 1872-7-9-281; London BM 1912-12-2-1; Munich; Corinth, Blegen coll.; Rome Mus. Naz., De Sanctis 111238.

24. Figs. 10-13: London BM 1895-7-3-9; Munich; Corinth, Blegen coll.; Corinth 76.376.

25. L. Lacroix, Quelques aspects de la numismatique sicyonienne, *RBNum* 110, 1964, 19-29. The most recent discussion of the general type, with bibliography of earlier treatments, is by A. E. Kalpaxis in *Tainia... Roland Hampe... dargebracht* (1980) 291-305.

26. As the paucity of her imperial coinages indicates, Sicyon was no longer an important city. But her games were still being held under Claudius: *SIG*^{3} 802 (41-47 A.D.). Taking this indication together with Suetonius' report that Nero attended all the contests in Greece (*Nero* 22.3), we must surely assume they were held under that emperor as well.

where[27], I shall not discuss the series further here, except to observe that its apparent size and variety, together with the fact that it was clearly struck after the liberation, suggest — as the Sicyonian issue does — an early date for that event. For such laudatory types would have a great deal more point if the emperor were still in Greece at the time of their issue.

Here then we have a number of numismatic indications of varying cogency, but perhaps with some cumulative effect, that the early liberation date is the correct one. Added to the evidence of the Acraephiae decree, they should lead us to prefer Dio's version. Not he but Suetonius (or his source) will have transposed events, moving the liberation from the beginning to the end of the imperial visit with the intent of making Nero conform to the classic picture of the tyrant as a man ruled by impulse, incapable of serious planning.

This leads to my final point: that there are possible consequences of the early liberation date not even its proponents seem to have considered. One is that the games in which Nero participated in the year 67 will not just have been designed as showcases for his talent, though that element was surely present, but as honorific festivals, the normal response to benefactions such as liberation[28]. Another is that the year cannot have been made up of games alone. It must have included some hard work by Nero's staff, if not himself. For the sequel to previous Roman "liberations" had been the attempt by the liberators, Flamininus and Augustus, to improve the political institutions of Greece, particularly her leagues; Nero cannot have ignored precedents like these. Furthermore, in the case of the Neronian liberation an entire provincial administrative system was being swept away, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the emperor's staff in Greece, working with local notables, would have tried to adapt local administrative systems to take its place. There is in fact a good piece of epigraphic evidence for this, correctly assigned by its first editor, Cavvadias, to the year following Nero's liberation, but oddly reassigned to the time of Tiberius by Fraenkel, whom many scholars seem to have followed. It is an Epidaurian inscription recording the honors voted by the Panachaean League to its secretary, Titus Statilius Timocrates, for his year of effort in establishing the institutions of its independence[29]. Taken together with the early liberation date (a contingency which Cavvadias of course did not envisage) this inscription testifies to the serious work done in Roman Achaea in 67 A.D., and suggests that we should revise our opinion of Nero's intentions for the province.

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27. See note 16 above, and the preliminary account in *SchwMbll* 35, 1985, 37-41. Figs. 14-17: London *BMC* 84, 85; New York ANS; Munich.

28. The *Vita Apollonii* 5.7 reports that Nero had directed the Eleans to postpone the Olympic festival until his visit, "so that they might sacrifice to him rather than to Zeus". May this reflect a local association of Nero with Zeus the Liberator (as at Sicyon) in 67 A.D., which the historical tradition has deformed into another bit of imperial self-aggrandizement? It is worth noting that Flamininus' liberation had been proclaimed more than once, at the Nemea as well as the Isthmia. If Nero's was first proclaimed at Corinth in late 66 one can imagine successive announcements, with consequent laudations by the Greeks, at festivals held in 67.

29. *Fouilles d'Epidaure* I, 67 no. 203-204; *IG* IV, 934-935 = *IG* IV^2 80-81; *SIG*^{3} 796-797. W. Peek has emended the critical passage, *Abh. Leipzig* 60.2, 1969, 28-29 no. 34: "the still uncertain [circumstances] of our independence". On the Neronian date see A. Momigliano, *JRS* 34, 1944, 115-116, and A. J. Spawforth, *BSA* 80, 1985, 253; though Spawforth, with Cavvadias, sees Statilius Timocrates' term of office as 67/68 not 66/67.

SUMMARY

WHEN DID NERO LIBERATE ACHAEA – AND WHY?

This paper argues for a reevaluation of the aims behind Nero's trip to Greece in 66/67 A.D. Its main contention is that Nero announced the independence of Achaea soon after his arrival, as Dio implies (63.11.1) rather than just before his departure (Suetonius *Nero* 24. 2). The formula of the Acraephiae decree (*SIG*^{3} 814), which gives a liberation date of 28 November 66, should be accepted. There is also numismatic evidence for the early date from the mints of Corinth, Patrae, Sicyon, and "Apollonia", but it is less decisive. If the liberation came early, Nero's staff in Greece is likely to have spent part of the ensuing year in reorganizing local administration; there is epigraphic evidence for this (*IG* IV^2, 80-81).