



A Note on the Text and Interpretation of Cornelius Nepos Alcibiades 10.2

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT AND INTERPRETATION OF
CORNELIUS NEPOS *ALCIBIADES* 10.2

Cornelius Nepos *Alcibiades* 10.2, in the Teubner edition by Peter Marshall reads¹

his Laco rebus commotus statuit accuratius sibi agendum cum Pharnabazo. huic ergo renuntiat quae regi cum Lacedaemoniis essent, nisi Alcibiadem vivum aut mortuum sibi tradidisset.

Our *Laco* is Lysander, who thus sets in motion the series of events that lead to Alcibiades' death. The translation of this passage by John Carew Rolfe for the Loeb edition is typical of almost all others:²

These threats disturbed the Laconian, who made up his mind that he must deal more decidedly with Pharnabazus; he therefore threatened to renounce the agreement between the king and the Lacedaemonians, unless Pharnabazus would deliver Alcibiades into his hands alive or dead.

The only note on this passage in the critical apparatus of the Teubner text reveals that Marshall has accepted the proposal of the sixteenth-century scholar Andreas Schottus for emending the reading of manuscripts L, P, and A, *Pharnabazo societatem*. Schottus reads merely *Pharnabazo*.

What is not apparent from Marshall's apparatus is that Schottus did not so much delete *societatem* as retain the manuscript reading of the following sentence, to which his predecessor Dionysius Lambinus had transferred *societatem*. Lambinus emended the passage as follows:³

His Lacon rebus commotus statuit accuratius sibi agendum cum Pharnabazo. huic ergo renuntiat societatem, quae regi cum Lacedaemoniis esset, stare non posse, foederaque irrita futura, nisi Alcibiadem vivum, aut mortuum tradidisset.

To adapt Rolfe's translation, we might render Lambinus' text:

These threats disturbed the Laconian, who made up his mind that he must deal more decidedly with Pharnabazus; he therefore announced that the alliance between the

1. P. K. Marshall, ed., *Cornelii Nepotis "Vitae" cum fragmentis* (Leipzig, 1977).

2. J. C. Rolfe, *Lucius Annaeus Florus, Epitome of Roman History: Cornelius Nepos* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 455. See also his earlier, school edition, *Cornelii Nepotis Vitae: The "Lives" of Cornelius Nepos* (Boston, 1894), 173. Other translators and commentators who follow this interpretation include E. S. Shuckburgh (*Cornelius Nepos: Lysander, Alcibiades, Thrasybulus, Conon, Dion, Iphicrates, Chabrias* [Cambridge, 1914], 56); R. Roebuck (*Cornelius Nepos: Three Lives* [London, 1969], 67); P. Krafft and F. Olef-Krafft (*Cornelius Nepos: "De viris illustribus" / "Biographien berühmter Männer"* [Stuttgart, 1993], 83); and most recently, M. Pfeiffer (*Berühmte Männer = De viris illustribus: Lateinisch-Deutsch* [Düsseldorf, 2006], 103). Among critical editions, the only exception I have found is that by G. Wirth (*Cornelius Nepos: Lateinisch-Deutsch* [Amsterdam, 1994], 123), to whose translation I shall return below. Wirth's translation appeared in its first edition, in 1962; I have seen the fifth (*Cornelius Nepos: "Berühmte Männer"*⁵ [Munich, 1982], 58).

3. I have used an early printed book that contains both Lambinus' text and commentary and Schottus' commentary. The two titles of the book are *Cor. Nepotis vulgo Aemilii Probi De vita excellentium imperatorum Graecorum ac Romanorum, cum commentariis Dionysii Lambini Monstroliensis auctis nuper atque emendatis, accesserunt commentarii, adnotationes, & notae, Gyberti Longolii, Hieronymi Magii, & Joannis Savaronis, cum excerptis e vetusto codice ms. P. Danielis* and *Cornelii Nepotis Opera quae quidem exstant Historica virorum domi militiaeque illustrium Graecorum Romanorumque explicata pridem studio And. Schotti . . . Nunc denuo doctorum hominum accessionibus locupletata* (Frankfurt, 1609), now found as BEIN 1974 +18 in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The quotation above is on p. 53 of Lambinus' text.

king and the Lacedaemonians could not stand and their treaties would be void, unless Pharnabazus delivered Alcibiades into his hands alive or dead.

Lambinus thought that *societatem* had been displaced. He did not, however, merely make it the object of *renuntiat*. Had he done so, *renuntiat* could be translated as “he renounced,” the sense reflected in Rolfe’s Loeb translation. Lambinus understood *renuntiat* as “he announced” and made *societatem* the accusative subject of an indirect statement, which his conjecture *stare non posse* provides with a verb.

The insertion of the phrase *stare non posse* is not as arbitrary as one might first think: it serves to justify the mood of *esset*, which Lambinus emended by one letter from *essent*. The bare emendation *renuntiat societatem, quae . . . esset*, without *stare non posse*, would have implied that the alliance between the king and the Lacedaemonians did not yet exist, which logically is impossible if Lysander is threatening to break it. The addition of the words *irrita futura* is a reading found in the manuscript M. This reading receives honorable mention as late as the 1913 edition of Karl Nipperdey, now enshrined in a 2002 reprint,⁴ but Marshall has demonstrated in his study of the manuscript tradition of Nepos that M has no independent authority.⁵

Lambinus says of his emendations,⁶ *hunc locum autem mire contaminatum in libris omnibus vulgatis ordinis verborum perturbatione, partim coniectura ductus, partim ex vestigiis antiquae scripturae, perpurgavi*. I do not know what “traces of ancient text” Lambinus had before him. Schottus, for his part, rejects Lambinus’ emendations, commenting,⁷ *Lambinus locum se perpurgasse ratus his de suo ac Magii⁸ coniectura addit, stare non posse, foederaque irrita futura. Probo tamen scriptam nostram lectionem & Ultraiect[ensis]⁹ ut concisam: Huic ergo renuntiat, quae Regi cum Lacedaemoniis essent, nisi Alcibiadem vivum etc.* Schottus elaborates no further on the meaning of his reading other than to approve of its concision.

If we delete *societatem* as an intrusion and do not treat it as a displacement, we are left with Marshall’s reading. But what does the text mean? I have given the standard translation above. Can this interpretation be justified?

In my opinion, it cannot. It is not apparent that *quae . . . essent* should refer to an agreement or alliance between the king and the Lacedaemonians or that such an agreement is being “renounced,” as in Rolfe’s translation. The subjunctive *essent* makes this interpretation unlikely, as we have seen from Lambinus’ attempt to make it intelligible by supplying an indirect statement as a framework. The meaning of the verb *renuntiare* in our passage is also not self-evident. In republican authors, *renuntiare* usually means “to announce” or “to report,” generally in an official capacity. So it is, for instance, in eleven out of twelve passages in Caesar¹⁰—and even in the twelfth passage (*B Gall.* 7.33.3) it means “to declare the winner of an election”

4. K. Nipperdey and K. Witte, eds., *Cornelius Nepos*¹⁴ (Hildesheim, 2002), ad loc.

5. P. K. Marshall, *The Manuscript Tradition of Cornelius Nepos* (London, 1977), 23.

6. *Cor. Nepotis vulgo* (n. 3 above), 68 n. 154.

7. *Cor. Nepotis vulgo*, ad loc. in Schottus’ commentary, which appears at the end of the book after several others.

8. Magius edited Nepos in 1563, six years before Lambinus; see also the preface to Marshall’s edition (*Cornelii Nepotis vitae* [n. 1 above]), x.

9. Sc. *codicis*; Schottus seems to be referring here to a manuscript found at Utrecht, from which I presume the anonymous *editio Ultraiecti* of 1542, cited by Marshall (*Cornelii Nepotis vitae*, x) and generally given the siglum *u*, derives.

10. *B Gall.* 1.21.2, 1.22.5, 2.24.5, 3.25.2, 4.21.9, 7.5.5; *B Civ.* 1.10.2, 1.26.5, 1.35.3, 1.66.4, 3.67.1.

rather than “to renounce.” The verb *renuntiare* appears only twice more in Nepos, both times in the sense “announce” (*Epam.* 9.3; *Hannibal* 12.5).

The interpretation of *renuntiare* as “to renounce” creates several grammatical difficulties. First, we must broaden the meaning of the historical present *renuntiat* from “he renounced” to “he said he would renounce,” or, as Rolfe suggests, “he threatened to renounce.” Logically, the Persians must be given the opportunity to fulfill the condition of the renunciation before it is made. More important, besides being the less common alternative, the sense “to renounce” fails to account for the mood of the verb in the following clause.

The sense of *renuntiat* in fact depends closely on that of the relative clause that follows it. If *renuntiat* is to mean “he renounced,” then we must understand *quae . . . essent* as a periphrasis for what is being renounced, a word such as *amicitiam* (or even *societatem*), the antecedent of which (*ea*) has been suppressed. That there was an alliance between the king and the Lacedaemonians is a fact, and it was also so to Nepos. If then we understand *renuntiat* as “he renounced,” the clause *quae . . . essent* must also be factual in nature. In other words, we should expect *quae . . . essent* to be Nepos’ words, not Lysander’s: “He renounced (or threatened to renounce) the alliance that was between the king and the Lacedaemonians. . . .” Such an interpretation, though, does not account for the subjunctive mood of *essent*. It ought to be *erant*. Lambinus saw this problem and solved it by moving the reading *societatem* and introducing *stare non posse*. He understood the phrase *quae . . . essent* as a reference to the alliance, but took *renuntiat* in the common sense of “he announced.” Lambinus thus made what followed *renuntiat* an indirect statement reflecting Lysander’s words, not Nepos’.

As Lambinus’ emendation makes explicit, the mood of *essent* suggests an indirect statement, which one might expect after *renuntiat*. The form *tradidisset* also makes the translation of *renuntiat* as “he announced” the more plausible alternative. It would be unusual for an unfulfilled condition to be paired with an indicative verb denoting a concrete action: *renuntiat . . . nisi Alcibiadem vivum aut mortuum tradidisset*. If we interpret *renuntiat* as “he threatened to renounce,” we force it to play the role of the apodosis of a more vivid condition in indirect statement, which might be paraphrased as follows: *minatus est se renuntiaturum esse, quae regi cum Lacedaemoniis essent, nisi Alcibiadem vivum aut mortuum tradidisset*. If, on the other hand, *renuntiat* means “he announced,” then the pluperfect subjunctive *tradidisset* is regular according to the rules of indirect statement.

Nepos offers us at least one parallel passage (*Chabrias* 3.1, my translation):

Athenienses diem certam Chabriae praestituerunt, quam ante domum nisi redisset, capitis se illum damnaturos denuntiarunt.

The Athenians fixed a date for Chabrias; they declared that unless he had returned home before it, they would convict him of a capital offense.

In this passage the syncopated perfect *denuntiarunt* plays the part of the historical present *renuntiat*. The infinitive *damnaturos (esse)* takes the place of the subjunctive *essent*. As we shall see below, the latter verb likewise indicates futurity, but it must be subjunctive rather than infinitive because it is introduced in a subordinate clause. The clause *nisi redisset* neatly parallels *nisi . . . tradidisset*. In the passage from the *Life of Chabrias* there is no doubt that *quam . . . redisset* and *capitis . . . damnaturos*

are the two components of a future condition that has been made into an indirect statement in the secondary sequence, dependent on *denuntiarunt*.

It is my belief that everything after *renuntiat* is likewise an indirect statement, with which Nepos gives us the drift of Lysander's message to Pharnabazus. The one obstacle to this interpretation of the grammar is the obscurity of the phrase *quae regi cum Lacedaemoniis essent* ("what were between the king and the Lacedaemonians"). This phrase reveals nothing at first glance, nor does it properly seem to anticipate the condition Lysander imposes. Let us look for an idiomatic solution.

The elements of the clause, (1) an indefinite relative pronoun, (2) one party in the dative case (apparently a dative of reference), (3) a second party as the object of the preposition *cum*, and (4) a form of the verb *esse*, have a close parallel in a Latin colloquialism: *quid mihi tecum (negoti est)?*¹¹ The expression is unceremonious, even rude in certain contexts, perhaps approaching in tone our own "What's your problem (with me or with another)?" in expressing incomprehension of a person's reason for disturbing us or another. More literally, one might translate it, "What do you have to do with X?"; more blandly, "What's your business with X?" Perhaps the most famous occurrence of the expression is in the memorable passage of Cicero's *Pro Caelio*, in which Cicero chides Clodia in the person of her censorious ancestor, Appius Claudius Caecus (*Cael.* 33, my translation):¹²

qui profecto, si exstiterit, sic aget ac sic loquetur: "mulier, quid tibi cum Caelio, quid cum homine adulescentulo, quid cum alieno?"

Indeed, if he were here, he would act and speak as follows: "Woman, what do you have to do with Caelius, with such a young man, with a stranger?"

Cicero's warning to Hortensius in the first Verrine is strikingly reminiscent of Nepos' Lysander: *res omnis mihi tecum erit, Hortensi* (*Verr.* 1.33).

It is my contention that Nepos has made the expression *quid tibi cum X* into an indirect question in *oratio obliqua*, so that Lysander's message to Pharnabazus assumes the menacing tone of an oblique threat. I have found one translator who would agree. Gerhard Wirth renders the passage in question as follows:¹³

Durch diese Tatsache veranlaßt, beschloß der Lakedaimonier, sich eifriger um ein Einvernehmen mit Pharnabazos zu bemühen, und setzte diesen von allem in Kenntnis, was der Großkönig von den Lakedaimoniern zu erwarten habe, wenn man ihm Alkibiades nicht tot oder lebendig ausliefere.

Wirth, however, neither justifies his translation in the accompanying commentary nor notes the fact that it departs from the standard. I will attempt a justification below.

In *oratio recta*, Lysander's words to Pharnabazus would have appeared as a more vivid condition: *ea regi cum Lacedaemoniis erunt, nisi Alcibiadem vivum aut*

11. E.g., Plaut. *Men.* 826. The phrase is also often addressed to a second party about a third: *quid tibi cum X?*; see also Ter. *Eun.* 511.

12. R. G. Austin (ed., *M. Tulli Ciceronis "Pro M. Caelio Oratio"*)³ [Oxford, 1960], ad loc., 92) writes that it was "a form of expression from familiar speech, frequent in comedy as well as in Ovid and in Silver Prose (see *TLL*, s.v. *cum*, col. 1374)," and in the additional notes (p. 167), Austin also cites *In P. Clodium et C. Curionem* frag. 20: "*quid homini*" inquit "*Arpinati cum Baiis, agresti ac rustico?*" For another early example, see the quotation of C. Titius, a contemporary of Lucilius, in Macrob. *Sat.* 3.16.16: *quid mihi negotii est cum istis nugatoribus?*

13. See Wirth, *Berühmte Männer* (n. 2 above), 58.

mortuum tradideris. The verb introducing these words in *oratio obliqua* is *renuntiat*, a historical present, which requires the secondary sequence of tenses. The protasis of the condition becomes *nisi . . . tradidisset* in *oratio obliqua* and is completely regular. What of *essent* for *erunt*? One might object that *essent* fails to indicate the futurity of the consequences of failure to extradite Alcibiades; we should expect *futura essent* or *forent*. The clause *quae . . . essent* becomes incomprehensible or appears to refer to the alliance of Lacedaemonians and Persians, if we assume *essent* refers to the same time as *renuntiat*. Once we have identified the idiom, however, the futurity of *essent* becomes clear. The primary use of the imperfect subjunctive was to indicate what was to be: “When the subjunctive came to replace the indicative in subordinate clauses as a mere grammatical sign of indirectness, it became necessary to employ the periphrasis *-urus sim (essem)*, when the context did not make it clear that the subordinate clause referred to the future.”¹⁴ The occurrence of *essent* in the apodosis of a future condition, in which the verb of the protasis, *tradidisset*, can only refer to future action, resolves the ambiguity.

If *quae regi cum Lacedaemoniis essent* is allegedly an indirect version of the expression *quid tibi cum X*? one might be tempted to emend it to read *quid regi cum Lacedaemoniis esset*. We should resist this temptation. The *quid* in this case would be *bellum* or at the least *renuntiatio amicitiae*. *Quid* would convey something specific, just as some specific answer is expected in the familiar interrogative form of the expression. The plural *quae* has the virtue of vagueness; it is a much more suggestive periphrasis of whatever words were exchanged between Lysander and Pharnabazus. As Nepos writes in the following line (*Alc.* 10.3), Pharnabazus was shaken by the confrontation: *non tulit hunc satrapes et violare clementiam quam regis opes minui maluit* (“The satrap could not resist him and preferred to break with [their relationship of] clemency than to see the power of the king diminished”). The plural *quae* gives us the impression that Lysander described the consequences to Pharnabazus in several choice words, not one.

To return briefly to *societatem*, the troublesome word with which we began this note: *societatem* has no place in either the first or the second sentence of *Alcibiades* 10.2. Its position suggests that it is an interpolation. Lambinus considered it displaced from the following sentence; Schottus thought it was at any rate dispensable. I would conjecture that *societatem* is in fact a gloss on *renuntiat quae . . . essent*, which was misunderstood, much as it has been to the present, by a medieval copyist or scholar. As a marginal or interlinear gloss before it was absorbed into the text itself, it would have explained to the reader (incorrectly, as it were) to what *quae . . . essent* supposedly referred. It is my hope to have clarified this passage through other means. We should follow Wirth’s lead in translating the second sentence of *Alcibiades* 10.2 as follows:

Therefore Lysander informed Pharnabazus of what the king might expect from the Lacedaemonians, unless he delivered Alcibiades to him, dead or alive.

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14. E. C. Woodcock, *A New Latin Syntax* (1959; repr., London, 2002), 228.