ESTABLISHING ROMAN RULE IN EGYPT:
THE TRILINGUAL STELA OF C. CORNELIUS GALLUS
FROM PHILAE

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Introduction

When Octavian departed Egypt in 30 BC, he placed C. Cornelius Gallus, an *eques* by rank, in charge of the new Roman province *Aegyptus*. Gallus, who was responsible to Octavian himself, received the newly created title of *praefectus Alexandreae et Aegypti*, Prefect of Alexandria and Egypt.

Soon enough, not even three years after his appointment, Gallus incurred the emperor’s utter displeasure. The prefect was dismissed by Augustus, returned to Rome, was convicted by the Senate and forestalled the impending banishment by committing suicide in 26 BC, as we are informed by Cassius Dio.¹

Gallus’ alleged hubris and his assumed *damnatio memoriae* have much been discussed among ancient historians, papyrologists, and Egyptologists. In this respect, the most important and crucial Egyptian document is a trilingual inscription—hieroglyphic Egyptian, Latin, and Greek—dated to 16 April 29 BC (Fig. 1–5). It was carved on a stela re-discovered in 1896 in front of Augustus’ temple at Philae (Fig. 6),² which the prefect Rubius Barbarus had dedicated in Augustus’ year 18 (13/12 BC).³ Cut into two parts, the stela had been reused in the foundations, presumably of the temple’s altar.

The victory stela of pink Aswan granite, originally about 165 cm high, now 152 cm by 108 cm, is housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 9295). When cut for re-use, parts of the top and approximately 8 cm in the middle were removed, but the estimated width of the gap can be reconstructed by the missing Greek and Latin letters.

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² Porter and Moss 1939, 253; Erman 1896, 469–470; Lyons 1896, no. 51.
³ Bernard 1969, no. 140.
Fig. 1: The Gallus stela (drawing by U. Denis).

Fig. 2: The Gallus stela: Reconstruction (drawing by U. Denis).