

# The Ancient History Bulletin

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## **Edited by:**

Monica D'Agostini ✦ Edward Anson ✦ Catalina Balmaceda  
Charlotte Dunn ✦ Andrea Gatzke ✦ Timothy Howe  
Alex McAuley ✦ Sabine Müller ✦ John Vanderspoel  
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## IG XII Suppl. 307: *Proxenia* and Second-Century Nabataea

Anna Accettola

**Abstract:** Inter-state cooperation was a staple of Mediterranean life in the second century BC. However, second-century Nabataea has been seen as underdeveloped in such relationships and relegated to a peripheral sphere of influence. The Tenean inscription IG XII Suppl. 307 belies this small role and rather integrates Nabataea into the institutional norms of the Hellenistic Aegean. A Nabataean, Salamenes, was awarded a highly coveted *proxenos* position by the Tenean council and *demos*, granting him access to rights normally reserved for citizens. In addition, this honor bridged the cultural and physical divide between the two states, guaranteeing a facilitation of social and economic movement. Such a public honor may be read as additional evidence for early Nabataean state formation and its growing influence in the Aegean.

**Keywords:** Nabataea; Hellenistic Aegean; *proxenos*; Tenos

The Aegean of the second century BC was awash in inter-state networks and actors, crossing land, ocean, and territorial boundaries, in pursuit of goods and new markets. While Greek *poleis*, Hellenistic kingdoms, and even the Phoenician cities are central to understanding socio-political and economic developments in this period, the Nabataean Kingdom, the capital of which is located in modern-day Jordan, is often excluded from our reconstruction of the hum and buzz.<sup>1</sup> Once portrayed in modern interpretations as nomadic with tribal divisions loosely unified under kingship or single actors working outside of state institutions, the development of Nabataean kingship in the early Hellenistic period has only recently been appreciated.<sup>2</sup> New discoveries, such as the third-century Posidippus fragment, and recent re-analyses of Nabataean coinage show an earlier coalescence of Nabataean kingship than normally assumed.<sup>3</sup> To these should be added a rare and understudied second-century *proxenia* inscription from Tenos (IG XII Suppl. 307), honoring Salamenes, son of Edemon, the Nabataean.<sup>4</sup> Together, such evidence shows that Nabataean kingship, identity formation, and movement into the Aegean should not be confined

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive explanation of the boundaries of the Nabataean Kingdom, see Graf (2021).

<sup>2</sup> This erroneous characterization by earlier modern scholars was based on non-Nabataean sources, such as Diodorus Siculus who describes them using stock motifs (19.94.2-95.2).

<sup>3</sup> Graf (2006) and Barkay (2019). To this can also be added the long-known Halutza/Elusa inscription of ca.168 BC and references in 2 Maccabees Chapter 5 verse 8 (discussed below) and the possible mid-third century inscription in the Damascus Museum (Milik 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The patronym “Edemon” (l. 4) is highly unusual. The name itself may be a corruption of EDMN for Edom, but this is currently speculation. PHI notes that the word is a problem, but its use twice in the text indicates that it was not a mistake or spelling error, rather this is the intended term. As David Graf described, the problem is “interesting” (personal correspondence, January 2023).

to the first century BC.<sup>5</sup> The following argument has three parts: first, an analysis of the inscription and its relationship to the epigraphic habits of Tenos; second, a discussion of the complex nature of Nabataean identity and Salamenes' identification as "the Nabataean"; and third, a hypothesis of an economic reason for the association of Tenos and Nabataea.

The Nabataean Kingdom was famous for facilitating the trade of frankincense and myrrh, spices, gold, bitumen, fine pottery, and a dizzying variety of other goods. The capital at Petra was one of the northern anchors of trans-Arabian trade routes and government interest in controlling and protecting trade extended throughout the kingdom. Collecting taxes on imported goods,<sup>6</sup> it was in the best interest of the government, as well as its merchants, to ensure that it maintained a network of connections to markets and consumers spread far and wide. A reciprocal interest in exchange came from the Aegean, as some of the greatest consumers of rare resins were Greeks, who believed that the odors of these aromatics would entice and summon divinities during their rituals and festivals.<sup>7</sup> As such, it was similarly in the interest of Greek *poleis* to ensure their access to ingredients critical to their religious worship. In the case of Nabataea and the island *polis* of Tenos, the proxeny decree for Salamenes the Nabataean may provide one method by which these interactions were preserved.

Inscribed on a marble block, 57cm tall and 37cm long,<sup>8</sup> the reconstructed text is as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- 1      ἐπ[ι] ἄρχ[ο]ντος Ἐλεϋθε[ρ]ί[ου(?)]  
       [ἔδοξεν τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ],  
       π[ρ]υτ[αν]ν[ε]ων γνώμη· ἐπειδὴ Σ[αλ]αμέν[ης]  
       [Ἐδήμωνος(?)] Ναβαταῖος ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς ὑπάρχ[ει]  
 5      [καὶ εὖνους τῷ ἡμετέρῳ δήμῳ καὶ δια-  
       τελεῖ χρεῖας παρεχόμενος καὶ κ[οι]νῇ τῇ [πό]-  
       [λει καὶ ἰδίαι] Τηνίων [τοῖς] [έντυ]γχάν[ου]-  
       σ[ιν, σπο]υδῆς καὶ φιλ[οτ]ιμ[ί]ας οὐ[δ]έν ἐλ[λεί]-  
       [πων· ὅπ]ως οὖν καὶ ὁ ἡμέ[τερος] δῆμος *lac.*  
 10     ε[ὐ]χ[α]ρ[ιστ]ῶν φαίνεται κ[α]ὶ τοῖς καλοῖς [καὶ]  
       ἀγ[α]θ[ο]ῖς ἀνδράσιν ἀποδιδούς τὰς κατα[ξί]-  
       ας τιμὰς καὶ χάριτας, [ἀ]γαθῇ τύχῃ δεδ[ό]-  
       χθαι τῇ[ι] βουλῇ καὶ [τ]ῷ δήμῳ· ἐπαινέσα[ι]

<sup>5</sup> Noted in only a few publications (Graindor (1910); Étienne (1990) 188; Roche (1996) 85; Cantineau (1930); Hackl et al. (2003) 122-24; Graf (2013a) 205; Terpstra (2015) 77-79), the inscription's implications have only been rarely examined for their greater socio-economic implications (Accettola (2021) 294-96).

<sup>6</sup> A 25% tax on imports is reported in the anonymous first-century CE text, *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 19; however, this may be a later tax by Roman officials and scholars argue that it should not be directly attributed to the Nabataeans. See Young (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Clements (2014).

<sup>8</sup> The only known photograph of this text, as far as I have been able to discover, is part of Graindor's original publication from 1910. Due to age and size, it is exceptionally difficult to read. This translation is my own. The current location of the inscription is unknown.

<sup>9</sup> The reconstruction comes from the *IG XII, Supplementum*.

15 Σαλαμ[έ]νη Ἐδήμωνος Ναβ[α]ταῖον καὶ  
 στεφα[νῶ]σαι [αὐ]τὸν θαλλοῦ στεφάνωι  
 τῷ ἱερ[ῶ]ι τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος καὶ τῆς Ἀμφιτρ[ί]-  
 της [ἀρ]ε[τ]ῆς ἔ[νεκ]εν καὶ εὐνοίας, ἥς ἔ-  
 χω[ν διατε]λε[ῖ]ς [τὸ]ν ἡμέτερον δῆμον,  
 [καὶ ἀναγορεῦ]σ[αι] αὐ[τ]ῷ τὸν στέφανον τὸν  
 20 ἄρ[χοντα τὴν στεφα]νηφόρον ἀρχὴν ἔν τε  
 τῷ ἱερῶι τοῦ Ποσειδῶ[ν]ος καὶ τῆς Ἀμ[φι]-  
 τρίτης, ὅτ[α]ν τὴν θυσίαν καὶ πα[ν]ήγυριν  
 [συντελεῖ ἡ πό]λις, καὶ ἐν τῷ θεά[τρῳ]ι  
 [Π]ο[σιδεῖων καὶ Διονυσί]ων τῷ ἀγῶν[ι] τῶν  
 25 [τρα]γωιδῶ[ν]· εἶναι δὲ [αὐ]τὸν [πρ]ό[ξενον] καὶ  
 εὐ[ε]ργέτη[ν το]ῦ ἡ[μ]ε[τε]ροῦ δή[μου]· δεδόσ-  
 [θαι] δὲ [αὐτῷ] κα[ὶ] πρ[ο]εδρίαν [ἐν τοῖς ἀ]γῶ-  
 σιν, οἷς [ἡ] πό[λις] σ[υν]τελεῖ, [κα]ὶ πρό[σο]δον  
 πρ[ὸς τὴ] μ[βο]υλ[ῆ]ν καὶ [τὸν δῆμον, ἐά]ν τ[ου]  
 30 δ[έ]η[ται], πρῶτ[ω]ι μ[ετ]ὰ [τὰ ἱερ]ᾶ ἀν[αγρ]άψ[αι]  
 δ[ὲ] καὶ τὸ ψήφ[ισμα] τ[ὸ]δε εἰς στ[ήλ]ην [λιθί]-  
 ν[ην καὶ στή]σαι εἰς [τὸ ἱε]ρ[ὸν τοῦ Πο]σειδῶ-  
 ν[ος καὶ τῆς] Ἀμφ[ιτρίτης].

1 In the archonship of Eleutherius  
 the council and the people decided  
 by the proposal of the Prytaneis: since Salamenes,  
 Son of Edemon, the Nabataean, shows himself a good man  
 5 and friendly to our people and continually  
 giving necessary things to the whole city  
 and to the private citizens of Tenos who entreat him,  
 lacking neither haste nor generosity -  
 So, then, that our demos also *lac.*  
 10 clearly be bestowing favors and giving to good  
 and fair men honors worthy  
 and acceptable, with good fortune  
 the council and the people decided - to commend  
 Salamenes, son of Eudemon, the Nabataean and  
 15 to wreath him with a crown of olive

holy to Poseidon and  
 Amphitrite, on account of his virtue and goodwill, which  
 he continuously brought forth for our demos,  
 and that the archon, who presides over the wearing of wreaths,  
 20 announce the wreath to him publicly, in  
 the temple of Poseidon and Amphitrite,  
 when the city celebrates the sacrifice and  
 the festival, and in the theater  
 at the competition of the tragedies  
 25 of Poseidon and Dionysus - and he be a *proxenos* and  
 benefactor of our people - and he  
 be given also *proedria* in the competitions,  
 which the city celebrates, and right to approach  
 the council and the demos, if ever he  
 30 needs, first after the sacrifices - and engrave  
 the decree on a stone stele  
 and place it in the temple of Poseidon  
 and Amphitrite.

Lines 3-4: The name Salamenes is clearly discernable; however, his father's name is somewhat obscured. Both names appear in regions surrounding Nabataea, though often with some variance (i.e. Σαλαμάνης). For further discussion see Graindor (1910); Vattioni (1987/88) 116 and 122; and Hackl et al (2003) 124.

Line 9: The lacuna at the end of the line obscures the meaning of the statement. Hackl, et al (2003) finish the line with “ωαψ,” but give no reason for the reconstruction. I cannot make out these letters, although I do agree with their general translation of the line.

Line 27: *πρ[ο]εδρί[αν]* or *proedria* is the right to sit with the city elite during festivals and is a less common benefit associated with *proxenia* (discussed in more detail below).

Line 30: *[πρώτῳ]ι μ[ετ]ὰ [τὰ ἱερ]ά* - if the reconstruction is correct - is oddly disconnected from the rest of the phrase. Perhaps it means that he could not have access to these rights until after the city celebrated the upcoming festival and he was formally announced as a *proxenos*.

In this decree, Salamenes, a Nabataean, was honored by the Tenean *boule* and *demos* and given the title *proxenos*, along with a handful of other benefits. William Mack's *Proxeny and Polis* (2015) shone a light on the prevalence and strength of Classical and Hellenistic *proxenia*, the formalized reciprocal relationship between states and “friendly foreigners.” Mack argues that proxenies elucidate the “indices of interaction” between states, both Greek and non-Greek.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Mack (2015) 149. In addition, his online database (<http://proxenies.csad.ox.ac.uk/places/home>) provides researchers with effective ways to visualize proxy lists and other epigraphic remains.



Through his outline of the societal expectations of the “*proxenos* paradigm,” Mack is able to show the role of the *proxenos* as an inter-state arbiter and contributes to the understanding of the Greek epigraphic practice more broadly.<sup>11</sup> Many *poleis* took part in this practice which peaked in the third century, but restrained their public inscriptions to a few choice individuals.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of the second century, inscribing honors for *proxenoi* abated significantly before it disappeared almost entirely in the early years of the first century.<sup>13</sup> However, this disappearance of public inscription should not be taken as an immediate marker of the decline of the institution of *proxenia*, but rather a changing attitude toward epigraphic practice and monumental priorities more generally in the Greek world during the increasing rise of Roman power in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup>

In Tenos, the epigraphic practice thrived in the third and second centuries BC. On the political front, Tenos remains the only *polis* to display inscriptions of the Koinon of the Nesiotes.<sup>15</sup> In addition, economically-connected honorees were well-represented epigraphically during this period, as evidenced by the honor for the Syracusan banker, Timon.<sup>16</sup> While, as in the Greek world more widely, the practice of public inscriptions tapered off in the first century BC, the second-century *proxenoi* continue to illuminate the connections between individuals and states.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Tenos inscribed a significantly larger number of *proxeny* inscriptions than most *poleis* – 51 surviving examples rather than a handful.<sup>18</sup> Given the changing political and social climate of the eastern Mediterranean, it seems possible that Tenos was particularly conscious of the public nature of these inscriptions and their own continuing epigraphic habit.

While Marek (1984) argued against strong economic implications for the granting of proxenies, Mack (2015) pushes back on this idea and, furthermore, demonstrates that proxeny lists can often illuminate economic activity.<sup>19</sup> Greek *oikonomia*, “embedded” as it was in the socio-political structures of their world, would rarely have been mentioned as a distinct reason for the awarding of honors.<sup>20</sup> However, the study of the geographical dispersion of Tenean proxenies may indicate a pattern of awarding that is closely associated with the economic opportunities in the home states of the honorees. An overview of the 51 recorded proxeny awards shows that *poleis* of economic strength make up the bulk of the honorees. Not only are the homelands of these men involved in economic endeavors, but were often famed for their inter-state activities.

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<sup>11</sup> Mack (2015) 24 describes the paradigm as follows, “social expectations rather than legal compulsion” and that “*proxenoi* are appointed on the basis that they behave as *proxenoi* should.”

<sup>12</sup> Mack (2015) 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Mack (2015) 235-37.

<sup>14</sup> Mack (2015) 239-43.

<sup>15</sup> Étienne (1990) 101 and 118-119.

<sup>16</sup> Étienne (2011) 18-20.

<sup>17</sup> *Contra* Aymard (1958) 119-39, especially 178 and Marek (1984) 333-85.

<sup>18</sup> Mack (2015) 13-14 singles out Athens, Oropos, and Delos as the largest producers of *proxenia* inscriptions, with around 100 each. As such, Tenos is more similar to these mass producers than other *poleis* with significantly fewer inscriptions.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Mack’s argument about the role of traders (Mack (2015) 62-3) and his illustration of the Tenedos-Histiaian connections (Mack (2015) 162-64). *Contra* Marek (1984) 359.

<sup>20</sup> While the term “embedded” has a distinct meaning in Greek economic history, I use it here only to emphasize the idea that economic motivations were not separate from the political sphere.



The geographical distance of these regions, as indicated by the groups of Italians (*IG XII Suppl.* 313) and Cretans (*IG XII Suppl.* 304) honored in the third century, seems to indicate the importance of far flung associations, especially with regions closely associated with increasing production and consumption. This pattern seems to continue in the in the second-century eastern Mediterranean, where two men from Andros were awarded proxenies, Aphobetos, son of Timokrates (*IG XII 5 825*) and Dionysios, son of Orthon (*IG XII 5 826*). Andros was not only well-situated to control the trade of the entire island and its interactions with the eastern Mediterranean, but was also famed for the quality of its wine, which was exported widely. Rhodes, Kos, Delos, Athens, and Syracuse were also represented in the third and second centuries.<sup>21</sup>

Mack adroitly points out that there was no requirement that inscriptions of *proxenia* be published. And while Tenos seems to have a robust history of publishing inscriptions of all kinds, it remains likely that most of grants of *proxenia* went unpublished, as they did in other Greek *poleis*. To this end, Mack argues that the publication of the inscription was an additional honor, above the standard rights given upon award of *proxenia* – an infrequent honor which Salamenes received.<sup>22</sup> Given this practice of inscribing honors to recipients from trade-rich cities, especially in light of the rarity with which proxenies were likely inscribed at all, the relative importance of Salamenes and his connection to Nabataea may be comparable to these other nodes of political and economic opportunity. If Mack is correct when he argues that awards of *proxenia* are “the products of self-conscious processes of selection...emphasizing their links with particular *poleis* and regions,” then Tenos may be making an explicit statement about its political and economic reach towards a variety of trade-rich regions.<sup>23</sup> Thus, when put into the a wider frame of epigraphic practice and interregional contact, this award of *proxenia*, which includes many of the benefits typical in Hellenistic proxenies, may show that Nabataea, as represented by Salamenes, was notable enough to be particularly honored alongside these well-known Aegean states of the second century BC.<sup>24</sup>

At first glance, one peculiarity of this proxyeny is Salamenes’ receipt a crown of olive (line 15 “θαλλοῦ στεφάνωι”) which was to be announced publicly. Mack characterizes this less common honor as “distinct, rewarding subsequent or exceptional services.”<sup>25</sup> However, in the case of Tenos, use of the crown seems to be fairly standard behavior. Of the 51 proxenies attributed to Tenos, 38 of them include the dedication of a crown.<sup>26</sup> In one instance, a proxyeny list from Tenos shows the granting of crowns to 12 individuals at one time, all from Cretan *poleis*.<sup>27</sup> It would seem that while crowns were often specialized gifts to exceptional *proxenoi*, Tenos was somewhat more generous with this attribute. While reasons for the inclusion of the

<sup>21</sup> For more on the relationship between Athens and Tenos, see Reger (1992).

<sup>22</sup> Mack (2015) 13-17 concisely describes the unequal distribution of inscriptional evidence, noting of course that certain cities were exceptional (Athens, Delos, etc.).

<sup>23</sup> Mack (2015) 149.

<sup>24</sup> In the following pages, I will delve into the complicated relationship between the individual and the state mentioned here and support the assertion that Salamenes was working for the benefit of the Nabataean Kingdom.

<sup>25</sup> Mack (2015) 123.

<sup>26</sup> Collection of inscriptions provided by William Mack’s online database “Proxeny Networks of the Ancient World,” divided by “Granting Authority.”

<sup>27</sup> Mack (2015) 333-35.

crown beyond standard practices for the rest of the Greek *poleis* remain unknown, it could be attributed to the naturally varying differences in honors between *poleis*. As an example, Delphi has also been noted for its preference for crowns, particularly “crowns of the god,” in certain circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

An important pattern to note is that, overwhelmingly, Tenean crowns are said to be announced publically before the temple of Poseidon and Amphitrite (lines 15-17 “στεφά[νῳ]σ[αι] [αὐ]τὸν θαλλοῦ στεφάνῳ/ τῷ ἱερ[ῶ]ι τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος καὶ τῆς Ἀμφιτρ[ί]-/ τῆς”). As such, the honor itself may also be closely connected to communal Poseidon worship and the inclusion of pseudo-community members in that worship.<sup>29</sup> While Poseidon was not a guide for merchants, his temples functioned as markers for maritime navigation. Possibly more importantly, on Tenos in particular, his consort, Amphitrite, held sway over protecting sailors and merchants from piracy and other seaborne dangers.<sup>30</sup> As such, the location of the awarding and the reputation of the crown as a reward for exceptional services may have been used to attract a greater number of wealthy and well-connected foreigners to the small island, especially given the long shadow of Rhodes’ political and economic domination at the time.

Apart from this particularity of Tenos’ epigraphic practice, by the late Hellenistic period much of the text of these inscriptions had become exceptionally formulaic and this inscription follows much of the same general pattern of Hellenistic *proxenia*.<sup>31</sup> Salamenes is honored with many, though not all, typical benefits. These include the title *euergetes* for his *euergesia*, general praise for his actions, and publication of the decree on a stele to be set in the temple of Poseidon and Amphitrite. Even though dealing with a Semitic *proxenos*, the inscription was written in Greek alone – likely due to its singular display in Tenos and intended Greek audience.<sup>32</sup> At this temple, it would have been seen by local and visiting Greeks alike, possibly acting as a reminder of the far-reaching network of associations available to the council and *demos* of Tenos.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Salamenes received *proedria*, the right to a seat during performances. As Mack explains, “*Proedria* was a privilege the *proxenos* shared with members of the civic elite and his seat, among the magistrates, important priests, and citizen-benefactors, emphasized the importance of the *proxenos* within the broader community looking on.”<sup>34</sup> Such rights show that Salamenes was not

<sup>28</sup> Schachter and Slater (2007) 90.

<sup>29</sup> Robertson (1984) 7.

<sup>30</sup> Étienne and Braun (1986) and Blakely (2017) 365-66.

<sup>31</sup> Previous to Mack’s more recent study, this standardization was equated with *proxenia*’s decline into meaninglessness during the Hellenistic Period: Aymard (1958) 119-39, especially 178; Marek (1984) 333-85; *contra* Wilhelm (1942) 30-35; Gauthier (1972) 18.

<sup>32</sup> There is no evidence of a reciprocal inscription on display in Nabataea.

<sup>33</sup> The Temple of Poseidon in Tenos was an important cultic center and drew crowds during the Poseidonia, as recorded by Strabo, *Geography* 10. 5. 11. As Paschalis Paschidis (2008) 501-2 concludes, Hellenistic *poleis* were heavily invested in the creations of networks of support and interaction, be they with the Hellenistic kings or “horizontal interconnections” among more equal polities. The display of inscriptions detailing different forms of these networks would have been one way in which to publicize them.

<sup>34</sup> Mack (2015) 125.

kept on the periphery of Tenean society due to his status as a non-Greek foreigner, but rather was included in a range of Hellenic institutions and customs.<sup>35</sup>

Salamenes' integration is codified in the grant of *prosodos*, in line 28, giving him the ability to address the council and *demos*. And, in fact, his *prosodos* may have mitigated those generally standard rights omitted from this inscription. Specifically, the *proxenia* of Salamenes does not include the honors of *politeia* (citizenship), *enktesis* (the right to hold land), nor an explicit statement of heredity. While not every proxeny was accompanied by the same honors, these do tend to be fairly common inclusions, as they work to reproduce standard citizenship rights.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Tenos, however, these seem to have only been awarded to individuals from Greek *poleis*, such as Andros (IG XII 5 825), Athens (IG XII 5 800), Delos (IG XII 5 799), Syracuse (IG XII 5 816/817), and Gortyn (IG XII 5 819). Italians generally did not receive these rights either (IG XII 5 917 and IG XII Suppl. 313).<sup>37</sup> In the case of Salamenes, the omission may have been due to the foreign (non-Greek) character of Nabataean citizenship<sup>38</sup> or the assumption that Salamenes would not be remaining in Tenos - therefore not requiring political or land ownership privileges.<sup>39</sup> The *prosodos*-given ability to address the council and *deme*, however, still allowed him the ability to address the political institutions of Tenos.

As for the inheritance of the proxeny, by the late Hellenistic period this was often assumed and not inscribed.<sup>40</sup> But in Tenos, explicit statements of hereditary grants last through the second century. While unable to prove given the current evidence, it seems possible that the omission may be due to Nabataean kingship. The usefulness of a *proxenos* from a kingdom would be heavily dependent on their ability to interact with the king or his representatives.<sup>41</sup> Rather than a multi-person institution or assembly which was somewhat less fickle, such as was common in Greek *poleis*, a non-Greek *proxenos* such as Salamenes could not guarantee that their position within a monarchical hierarchy would remain the same. While Greek *poleis* expected intermediaries of all sorts to act in their own self-interest while also pursuing the benefit of the

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the people of Tenos could simply be “going through the motions” in regards to the honoring of proxenies and Salamenes. However, the placement of the inscribed decree in such a prominent temple in Tenos and the very act of inscribing it when so many proxenies went uninscribed would argue against the idea that Salamenes was granted a handful of honors with no other thought put into how he could or would interact with the local populace. Tenos' own preference for certain unusual honors as well (i.e. the olive crown) may also indicate that more intentionality was given to the specifics of each honor.

<sup>36</sup> Mack (2015) 104-5.

<sup>37</sup> The proxeny grant for Kointos Kalpornios, son of Kointos, of Rome (IG XII 5 841) is an exception.

<sup>38</sup> Grants of *politeia* were exceptionally rare for *proxenoi* from non-Greek communities. In an overview of 7 non-Greek states (Babylon, Laodikeia by the Sea, Arados, Berytos, Sidon, Tyre, and Carthage) which had 26 *proxenoi*, only 2 were given *politeia* (7.7%). *Enktesis* was more common with 11 instances (42.3%). Data pulled from Mack's database “Proxeny Networks of the Ancient World,” <http://proxenies.csad.ox.ac.uk/places/home>.

<sup>39</sup> According to Mack's analysis of the use of *proxenos* and *euergetes* in combination or alone, Salamenes, having received both, seems to be intended to return to Nabataea and provide “future *euergesiai*” to visiting Teneans. For geographical considerations as they relate to titles and honors, see Mack (2015) 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> Mack (2015) 164; 205; 292 fn. 16.

<sup>41</sup> With the extant evidence, it is not possible to speculate on the relationship between the Nabataean king and Salamenes. While certain Nabataean royal advisors were called companion/*hetairos* and brother/*adelphos* (Strabo 16.4.21), we do not know of other positions in the political hierarchy.

state, strong connections with and access to courts underpinned their choices in honorees.<sup>42</sup> In view of this practice, Salamenes may have originally come to Tenos in pursuit of his own interests, but given the exceptional honor of a published inscription and Greek expectations for *proxenoi*, Salamenes' ability to retain connection to the Nabataean court may have been a factor not only in the lack of inheritance, but his award *in toto*.

Notwithstanding these particularities, this decree falls within the bounds of a standard proxeny. Even without citizenship rights, this combination of honors may show that while Salamenes was not fully brought into the political sphere of Tenos, he did not hold a lesser position among Tenean *proxenoi*. Through his *proedria*, *prosodos*, and other benefits, Salamenes was able to interact with the civic elite and make connections with the most prominent members of Tenean society.<sup>43</sup> These experiences made him valuable as a *proxenos* and a mediator for Tenean interests in Nabataea. Moreover, these honors, as mentioned above, integrated Salamenes into Hellenic inter-state institutions.

From Salamenes' integration and his generally standard package of honors, we may further be able to deduce Nabataean integration and status. For as Étienne described, honors for Romans in Tenos illuminated the second century relationship between the two states.<sup>44</sup> While the contexts are obviously different, non-Greek *proxenoi* could be seen as representatives of their states acting in a wider Mediterranean context (i.e. IG XII 1 32, date unknown; *I.Magnesia* 59.1, third century BC; *IGUR* 3, ca. 100 BC).<sup>45</sup> For the Nabataean Kingdom, this could be a sign of their legitimacy as a political and economic power in the second century BC – a useful state with which to have a formal relationship. Étienne further describes Tenos as the center of a network of contacts which stretched across the Mediterranean and touched nearly all major areas of import and export during this time.<sup>46</sup> Another inscription from the late second century honors Moschion of Priene for his role as intermediary between his local government, the Ptolemies at Alexandria, and the Arabians at Petra (*I.Priene* 108), indicating that the Nabataeans had gained a certain amount of recognition in certain regions by this time. If Étienne's analysis of Tenos'

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<sup>42</sup> For the variety of roles that intermediaries could play in their movements between cities, see Paschidis (2008), in particular 478 and 493. Paschidis' argument does, however, speak directly to individuals with clearly stated links to the courts and kings of their homelands, which is not extant in the case of Salamenes. It seems likely though that Greek *poleis* would hold to their general expectations for an intermediary from a foreign kingdom.

<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the extent to which Salamenes took these opportunities is unknown. While purely honorific awards have been argued in the Greek world (such as the award of *politeia* and *proxenia* by Athens to a citizen of Miletos, Osborne (2013) 136), no evidence suggests that this was Tenos' intention. Salamenes likely would have made certain advantageous social, political, and economic connections before returning to Nabataea, but this is generalization based on common expectations of those in Mack's "*proxenos-paradigm*" and understandings of social networks in the ancient Mediterranean. See for example Constantakopoulou (2015) on involvement of non-Greeks in Greek politics.

<sup>44</sup> Étienne (1990) 174.

<sup>45</sup> Mack makes clear that non-Greek communities and states intentionally and self-consciously adopt this method of inter-state interaction in order to integrate with Greek *poleis* to develop and communicate political identity and social parity ((2015) 229-232).

<sup>46</sup> Étienne (1990) 189.

ability to create connections with important centers is accurate, then it seems possible that Nabataea had developed an international reputation beyond that memorialized in literature.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, this reputation as a commercial hub overcame certain geographical boundaries. Petra, the center of Nabataean commerce, was landlocked and *proxenia* was largely a maritime institution.<sup>48</sup> Even when extending this honor to non-Greek peoples, honorands usually remained along the Mediterranean coastlines, such as at Tyre (IG II<sup>3</sup> 468, ca. 332 BC, and IG XI 4 777, ca. 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC). However, the award of a *proxenos* at Babylon in the third century BC (IG XII 5 715), demonstrates that geography was not the defining factor in creating such associations.<sup>49</sup> For the case of Nabataea specifically, the importance of the kingdom as a commercial crossroads likely overcame any hesitancy about extending a proxeny beyond the coastline. For both the people of Tenos and Nabataea, it seems that having such a connection could allow them to keep their finger on the pulse, so to speak, of long-distance trade and the stability of political situations in those markets. The Teneans could have access to information concerning the importation of goods, such as frankincense, while the Nabataeans expanded their connectivity with trade outlets in Tenos, and eventually further into the Mediterranean, such as at Puteoli. Nabataea, in particular, was dependent on the stability of the Mediterranean markets for the exportation of their main goods (for instance frankincense, myrrh, and bitumen). Institutionalized engagement with far-flung cities would demonstrate both political and economic prowess by the newly-coalesced kingdom.

### ***The Relationship between Proxenia and Nabataean Political Identity***

A *proxenos* may have retained a certain amount of mobility between home and granting state, but one of their main functions, regardless of their location, was to shepherd new arrivals through the process of coming to a new land and, oftentimes, establishing new economic connections with markets, merchants, and suppliers.<sup>50</sup> Thus, while a *proxenos* was a private individual, he was usually monied, influential, and well-connected with the state apparatuses of his home and the honoring state. As Mack is clear to point out, this is one reason that the “ethnic” of the *proxenos* is predominantly featured in these inscriptions.<sup>51</sup> The political connections and importance illustrated by that descriptor were central to the functionality of the *proxenos*. In the case of Nabataea, however, understanding this “ethnic” is much more

<sup>47</sup> Étienne (1990) 195 thinks that the Nabataean was a private agent, but I disagree given my analysis of Nabataean development as a state and its growth into the Mediterranean, as described in the following section.

<sup>48</sup> Thank you to the reviewer for drawing my attention back to this critical aspect of the *proxenia* institution.

<sup>49</sup> Given that the founding of Seleucia had replaced Babylon as the regional political and commercial center, it is unclear why the people of Andros elected to honor Babylon with a *proxenos*. However, that question is beyond the scope of this paper. For discussion of the term “Babylon” in this context and its possible reference to regional Babylonia see, Cohen (2013) 378-82.

<sup>50</sup> Marek (1984); Mack (2015) 123-26; Terpstra (2019) 56. For more on the mobility of *proxenoi* and the continuing discussion concerning their primary residences – which he argues convincingly is the native state rather than the granting *polis*-, see Mack (2015) 51-7.

<sup>51</sup> Mack (2015) 52-4. Étienne also makes a similar argument in his analysis of “les étrangers à Ténos et les Téniotes à l'étranger” (Étienne (1990) 173-95).



complicated given the multifaceted identity systems which existed within the political boundaries of the kingdom.<sup>52</sup>

In the case for Salamenes, his given identification is “Nabataean.” While sometimes assumed to be an *ethnos*, recent arguments have persuasively shown that instead the “Nabataean” identity seems to have been largely political and covered a large variety of dynamic social behavior within multiple tribes.<sup>53</sup> As David Graf argued, “what we call ‘Nabataean’ and understand as an *ethnicon* is better seen as the designation of a ‘state’ involving the integration of various indigenous Arab groups into a political framework or system.”<sup>54</sup> This political framework or Nabataean “state,” functioning as what might be misconstrued as an “ethnic” in a Greek *polis*, was a product of the Hellenistic period. Overstriking of Ptolemaic coinage, ca. 243–222, demonstrates an early institutional structure and a “deliberate programme” for the minting of coinage.<sup>55</sup> While purely Nabataean coinage (with inscriptions naming the king and regnal year) would not be struck until the first years of the first century BC,<sup>56</sup> these early steps show a self-conscious movement towards the development of bureaucratic practices and a state identity. The third-century Greek fragments of Posidippus of Pella as well indicate external recognition of the existence of a Nabataean king and, perhaps, this internal development of a state identity.<sup>57</sup>

Differentiated forms of identification for these “various indigenous Arab groups” were likely acceptable within the boundaries of the kingdom, where locals were familiar with the inner workings of the Nabataean state. Town of origin, familial relationships, and other such indicators of identity would have been readily understandable to others with ties to the same region. However, outside the bounds of the kingdom, local affiliations meant little, thus requiring a broader identification, especially in Greek *poleis* where state citizenry was a pervasive measure of identification.<sup>58</sup> As the Nabataean kingdom grew in power to the point where it expanded into the Aegean, a unifying descriptor of that politically-associated identity

<sup>52</sup> Wenning (2017) and Schmid (2021).

<sup>53</sup> Schmid (2021) 439–63. Unlike the conception of Greek *ethne*, while also complex, there is very little evidence of the self-referential use of “Nabataean” within the boundaries of the kingdom, as compared to the varied constructs in Greek identities (which could include self-identification with *ethne* and *polis* simultaneously), as in Beck, Buraselis, and McAuley (2019).

<sup>54</sup> Graf (2004) 150.

<sup>55</sup> Barkay (2011) 68: “The overstruck coins come from the reigns of “Ptolemy I or II (between 295 and 261/0 BC)... Ptolemy II (after the 261/0 BC reform); and...Ptolemy III (246–222 BC), the latest from the second half of the reign (c. 234–222 BC), which may well represent a *terminus ante quem* for this issue, for the good condition of the Ptolemaic undertypes suggests that they were issued not long before the Nabataean overstrikes.”

<sup>56</sup> Barkay (2019) 13–15 argues for a ca. 99 BC date for the first regnal year of Obodas I, the first Nabataean king to mint inscribed coinage (presumably at some point after taking the kingship). Anonymous issues had existed for more than 100 years previous. Two new drachms have recently been analyzed and published which may confirm this early first century date, as well as indicate an earlier King Obodas in Nabataean chronology (Hendin and Huth (2021) and Hoover (2021)).

<sup>57</sup> Graf (2006).

<sup>58</sup> For the centrality of the citizen in Greek *poleis*, see Ober (2015) 1–20. Often this attribution also includes a reference to the high god, Dushara, who is strongly linked with the kingship of Nabataea, such as in Rheneia, Egypt, Puteoli, Rome, and, perhaps, Chalchis. The complimenting use of “Nabataean” and invocation of “Dushara” seems to be not only an expression of personal identification, but also of loyalty to the Nabataean kingship.

would have been necessary. Under these circumstances, then, where *proxenia* implies an inter-state relationship and the use of “Nabataean” is an emic, rather than etic, choice – the identification of Salamenes as a “Nabataean” would seem to indicate a stronger tie with a well-defined political structure.<sup>59</sup>

Once the third-century settlement in Petra was well-established, the Nabataeans began to look outward.<sup>60</sup> In what may be described as a “second phase” of development, they slowly expanded their presence beyond the bounds of the kingdom proper and into the Mediterranean. Evidence for this coalescence both within and beyond the bounds of the kingdom may be indicated by the internal attestation of “Aretas, king of the Nabataeans” on an inscription from Elusa, ca. 168 BC, as well as the external corroboration from 2 Maccabees Chapter 5 verse 8 – both showing acceptance of the established state hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> By the later Hellenistic period, each site of their presence around the Mediterranean self-identifies as “Nabataean.”<sup>62</sup> Then in the first century BC, Nabataeans had begun to settle in foreign states, while still retaining their political and cultural affiliations with their homeland. Particularly in the case of Puteoli, Italy, the Nabataean identification was used for at least two generations, from the earliest influx of Nabataeans into the region.<sup>63</sup> Thus, we may be able to interpret this identification and self-expression of “Nabataean” as a statement for the strength of the kingdom’s inter-state reputation later in the “third phase.”

Salamenes provides evidence for the “second phase” of Nabataean expansion. For in order for him to fulfill his role (whether it be as an ambassador or philanthropic merchant), he would have needed to be well-ingratiated with developed, official mechanisms in his homeland.<sup>64</sup> The *proxenos* worked as “a true intermediary figure” to negotiate the differences between the two regions’ institutions and regulations, as well as, as in the case of Salamenes, languages and cultures.<sup>65</sup> As with Macedonian *proxenoi*, a strong, long-standing, and direct connection with the Nabataean state apparatus was probably key to his ability to sponsor and aid Teneans coming into the region – most likely the capital at Petra.<sup>66</sup> As mentioned before, Tenos had a keen interest

<sup>59</sup> For more on the differentiation of etic and emic identities, see Al-Otaibi (2015).

<sup>60</sup> The Hellenistic development of Petra is one focus of Schmid and Mouton (2013); particularly Graf (2013b) 35-56 and Renel and Mouton (2013) 57-78.

<sup>61</sup> On the Haluza/Elusa inscription, see Cowley (1914-15); Cantineau (1932) 44; Negev (1977) 545-546; Barkay (2019) 4.

<sup>62</sup> There are two exceptions to this statement. These two locations provide singular inscriptions, found in Maiuri (1921/22) 223-32 and *CIL* VI.34196. The first uses “Theudotos the Arabian” and has been attributed to a private Nabataean who joined a *koinon* or association (Accettola (2021) 304-05). Graf (2013a) thinks that Theudotos may have been a private wine merchant contributing to trans-Aegean commercial networks (Graf (2013b) 206) and supplementing the locally grown vintages (Al-Salameen (2005); Abudanah (2020); Bellwald (2020); Graf (forthcoming)).

<sup>63</sup> Lacerenza (1988/89); Lacerenza (1994); Terpstra (2015).

<sup>64</sup> We, unfortunately, have no evidence of what requirements foreigners had to meet in order to pursue their goals in Nabataea. Courts were available to them (Strabo *Geog.* 16.4.21), but how they gained entrance or if they required the equivalent of a *prostates* remains a mystery.

<sup>65</sup> Mack (2015) 126.

<sup>66</sup> Several other Nabataean locations were possibilities, such as Ostrakine, Rhinocorura or Gaza (see Graf (2013a) 199-201) or the recently economically developed area around Oboda – closer to the Hasmonean border (or less likely the more southern ports of Leuke Kome or Aila). Without more information, it is impossible to determine.



in establishing connections with regions of interest for trade. If, as argued here, Nabataean kingship had solidified, had firm control of the Transjordan region and trade routes to the north and south,<sup>67</sup> and then expanded its influence into the Aegean by the second century BC, awarding a proxeny to a member of this kingdom signifies its broader geographical importance, whether that be for political or economic purposes.

### ***Contextualizing a Nabataean in Tenos – A Hypothesis***

As stated in the beginning of this article, the original interaction between a Nabataean and the polis of Tenos was very likely due to Nabataea's place as a trade power after the third century BC. If Mack is correct in his assertion that proxenies can illuminate economic activity even if it is not explicitly stated, then economic beneficence and aid on both a public and private scale would likely have been built into the giving of "necessities" for which Salamenes was honored (line 6).<sup>68</sup> While a singular inscription or honor should not be taken as evidence of such activity, in combination with other evidence of Nabataean movement in the Mediterranean discussed in the previous sections, we may be able to hypothesize an economic motivation for the contact.

David Graf suspected that Salamenes was a commercial agent, due to the similar activities of Phoenician merchants on Tenos during that period, and the prevalence of Arabs at markets and ports during the second century BC.<sup>69</sup> This suspicion, when taken in conjunction with the prevalence of economic motives for Nabataean movement to other locations beyond the kingdom's borders, becomes more secure.<sup>70</sup> Petra's, and therefore Nabataea's, increasing importance as an inter-state market was inscribed in the aforementioned second-century honor for Moschion, son of Kydimos, of Priene (*I.Priene* 108). The dedication equates Petra with Alexandria as cities of import in 129 BC. It seems unlikely that, having reached this level of inter-state recognition, Nabataea would not have also been actively pursuing the thriving economic opportunities present in the second-century Mediterranean, especially in centrally located regions, such as Tenos.

The best evidence of the continuing development of Nabataean economic expansion comes from the first century BC when the diasporic node was founded at Puteoli. The Nabataeans first founded the site at one of Rome's most significant ports, which specialized in the incense trade, in the late 50s BC (after trade routes had largely reoriented westward) and occupied it for at

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For status and political connection of *proxenoi* from kingdoms, rather than *poleis*, see Mack (2015) 66, who argues that the usefulness of a *proxenos* was directly related to his ability to speak persuasively to the "power structures of the community" - i.e. assemblies and magistrates in *poleis*, the king in kingdoms.

<sup>67</sup> Graf (2006) 47-68.

<sup>68</sup> See fn. 19.

<sup>69</sup> Roche (1996) 86; Graf (2013a) 205. Unfortunately, no mention of a Phoenician *proxenos* has survived in Tenos, though several partial inscriptions lack the name of an honorand.

<sup>70</sup> For a more comprehensive look at all fragmentary evidence of Nabataean movement into the Mediterranean during the second century BC and the economic implications within Hellenistic socio-cultural contexts, see Accettola (2021) 265-318.

least two generations.<sup>71</sup> This site, very closely linked with Dushara and, thus, the kingship of Nabataea, remains the most clear cut evidence for Nabataea's pursuit of economic interests in the Mediterranean.<sup>72</sup> While thriving a century after the awarding of the *proxenia* under study, this site seems to be the culmination of Nabataea's interest and ability in integrating with Greco-Roman states in order to bolster their reputation and physical presence throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup> If the combination of state economic interests and Mack's assertion that proxenies can be read as "the deliberate efforts of *poleis* to assert their position within [the Mediterranean hum and buzz]"<sup>74</sup> are accurate, then we may be able to more confidently assign a mercantile understanding of the interconnection between this *proxenia* and Nabataea.

## Conclusion

At its essence, the *IG XII Suppl.* 307 inscription shows the strength of Hellenistic institutions and the incorporation of non-Greek entities, instead of emphasizing Nabataea as a state peripheral to the interconnected world of the second-century Aegean. Salamenes was able to penetrate this system by finding a way to be accepted by the society, regardless of his foreigner status, and to benefit himself and his own community. Salamenes did not simply migrate to an important Greek port city, he took the appropriate steps to fulfill a role which could provide the bridge between the Greek world and Nabataea.<sup>75</sup> His public honors left a mark of early evidence of Nabataean state formation and the expansion of its influence in the Aegean.

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<sup>71</sup> de Romanis (1996) 247-50; Hackl et al (2003) 120-22; Schmid (2004) 420-21; Schwentzel (2007); al-Salameen (2011) 70; Terpstra (2015) 87.

<sup>72</sup> For the link between Dushara and Nabataean kingship, see Starcky (1966), Healey (2001), and Schmid (2004).

<sup>73</sup> For more on the development of Nabataean "economic policy" abroad, see Accettola (2021).

<sup>74</sup> Mack (2015) 149. He mentions *poleis* specifically, but I believe that states around the Mediterranean more generally bought into the importance of Hellenistic inter-state ties, including institutions such as *proxenia*, as a way to overcome political and cultural boundaries. For more on this see Ma (2003) and Accettola (2021).

<sup>75</sup> In doing so, he adopted a "logic of appropriateness" in order to become an honored part of a completely foreign system. As defined by March and Olsen (2011) 478: "Actors seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices, and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation." See also, March and Olsen (2006) 689-708 and Mack (2015) 23-4.

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# Demetrius Poliorcetes' nickname and the origins of the hostile tradition concerning his besieging skills

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**Abstract:** The article examines Demetrius Poliorcetes' sobriquet and the origins of the hostile tradition towards this king and his besieging skills. The prevailing opinion is that Demetrius' nickname derived from his unsuccessful siege of Rhodes (305/304 BC) and was applied to him in derision. Recently, however, we have observed a rise in interest in his military undertakings, especially sieges he laid. A re-examination of the ancient sources demonstrates that king's sobriquet, emphasizing his poliorcetic talents, was well-deserved. This paper attempts to provide further arguments to support this claim. Moreover, they also shed some light on innovative aspects of Demetrius' royal self-fashioning, one of the key elements of which were his talent for designing siege engines and engineering endeavors. Such conclusion might produce an essential change in our interpretations of the origins of the hostile tradition against the king.

**Keywords:** Demetrius Poliorcetes, Diodorus Siculus, Poseidon, Plutarch, Rhodes, nicknames

'Do you control the nicknames your enemies bestow on you? 'Aldo the Apache' and the 'Little Man?'" asks rhetorically Christopher Waltz in the famous scene from Quentin Tarantino's „Inglourious Basterds". Most scholars believe this is the case of Demetrius' sobriquet – 'Poliorcetes' ('The Besieger') – which was originally a mockery of his enemies, a kind of reminder from Demetrius' rivals of his spectacular but unsuccessful siege of Rhodes (305/304 BC)<sup>1</sup>. If some scholars uphold the view that it was awarded for his besieging skills, it stems principally from Hieronymus of Cardia (ca. 350-260 BC), an historian and close secretary to the three Antigonid kings (Antigonus Monophthalmus, Demetrius and Antigonus Gonatas, at whose court he died). Hieronymus was a participant in many of the events he would have written about, and his work has been recognized long ago as the main source for the literary tradition about the early Hellenistic period<sup>2</sup>. It is assumed that attempting to cover Poliorcetes' failure at Rhodes, Hieronymus explained the nickname in a positive fashion by emphasizing Demetrius' poliorcetic talents. Hence, ancient, and modern historiography has considered that the siege of Rhodes represents the culmination of Greek warfare. Yet even Poliorcetes' influence on besieging technique has recently been challenged<sup>3</sup>. Some scholars have gone as far as to claim that

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<sup>1</sup> Gomme 1945: 17 n. 1; Heckel 1984; Berthold 1984: 79; Campbell 2006: 81–82; Hauben 2010: 103; Murray 2012: 118; Anson 2014: 168.

<sup>2</sup> On Hieronymus, see Hornblower 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003; 2011; Campbell 2006: 82; Martin 2013: 675–677; Rose 2019: 170–172.



Demetrius' extensive use of siege equipment, especially mammoth mobile siege towers, led other besiegers to a dead end<sup>4</sup>.

Some newly published studies, however, offer a more balanced perspective on Demetrius' actions. They stress that during the siege of Rhodes the son of Antigonos demonstrated his power and comprehensive mastery of existing tactics and technologies. Most of the Greek *poleis* knew they could not withstand a similar attack if Demetrius was determined to take them<sup>5</sup>. The other scholars have pointed out that he was able to conduct numerous successful sieges<sup>6</sup>. Even Demetrius' activity as a fortifier has recently received researchers' attention who demonstrate his ability in the context of the defence of cities<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, it seems to me that we might provide further arguments to support the claim that his nickname was well-deserved. A close analysis of sources reveals also that *poliorcetics* and Demetrius' royal self-fashioning were far more interrelated than previous analyses imply. Seen from this perspective we should again consider the origins of the hostile tradition concerning his besieging skills.

### 1. Demetrius' nickname in Antiquity

Several ancient authors explained why Demetrius had received his nickname<sup>8</sup>. According to Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC) and probably following his tradition Aulus Gellius (2nd century AD), and Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265-339 AD) the sobriquet was awarded for king's energy, besieging skills, meticulous preparations, and genius at designing war machines. Vitruvius (1st century BC) says that Demetrius was called *Poliorcetes* because of his stubborn courage. Seneca the Younger (4 BC-65 AD) claims that the nickname was a result of destruction he brought upon cities. Finally, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (330-391/400), Demetrius gained the name through the constant employment of one of his famous siege engines, the *helepolis* ('city taker'). In light of the above records, the meaning of Demetrius' nickname is complex. Although we deal with testimonies of Greek and Roman writers who lived in different periods, they all regarded Demetrius' *epiklesis* as confirmation of his brilliance at siege warfare and poliorcetic talents. If we accept Heckel's claim that humour in this nickname was lost on subsequent generations and on modern scholars, we must credit Hieronymus/Antigonid propaganda with undoubtedly outstanding achievement<sup>9</sup>. It is difficult, however, to establish whether Demetrius earned his nickname during the siege of Rhodes or not. The vast majority of authors pointed to general successes of the king and his talents, and evoked several Demetrius' sieges, including that one at Rhodes or elements related to it, e.g., the *helepolis*. Only Diodorus' testimony allows us to

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<sup>4</sup> Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003: 381: 'Démétrios avait conduit la poliorcétique grecque dans une impasse'.

<sup>5</sup> Murray 2012: 118-120; Lo Presti 2010; Champion 2014: 140-141.

<sup>6</sup> O'Sullivan 2009: 84 n. 13; Wheatley 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Rose 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Diod. 20.92.1-5; Vitruv. *De Archit.* 10.16.4; Seneca. *Ep. ad Luc.* 9.16.18; Aulus Gell. *NA* 35.31.1; Eusebius. *Chron.* 247 Schoene; Amm. Marc. 23.4.10; 24.2.18.

<sup>9</sup> Heckel 1984: 440.

suppose that Demetrius' nickname derived from the siege of Rhodes. Nonetheless, it is commonly believed that the king earned his *epiklesis* during the events of 305/304 BC<sup>10</sup>.

It is worth noting that for numerous ancient authors it seemed obvious that Demetrius was successful when it comes to taking cities. According to Diodorus 'no wall was strong enough to furnish safety from Poliorcetes for the besieged' and 'the king was exceedingly irresistible in his assaults'<sup>11</sup>. When Plutarch describes Demetrius' campaign in Greece of 295/294 BC, he claims that the king was thought to be the only one who could take Sparta in that time<sup>12</sup>. Claudius Aelianus and Ammianus Marcellinus expressed similar opinions. The first one says that Demetrius 'took Cities, battering their Walls with Engines, and undermining them', the second that by the use of the *helepolis*, the king overcame many cities<sup>13</sup>. Even in Polyaeus's *Strategemata* four out of twelve anecdotes related to Demetrius describe how he captured cities<sup>14</sup>. One might say that these accounts owe much to the Antigonids and their propaganda, but a catalogue of Demetrius' sieges compiled by Pat Wheatley demonstrates that he took more than 40 cities during his career<sup>15</sup>. If then, the son of Antigonos was called 'Besiegers of Cities' (Πολιορκητής), not 'Taker of Cities' (Ἐκπολιορκητής), as Arnold Gomme observed long ago<sup>16</sup>, it was due to that his successes on this field were beyond doubt of the contemporaries. Demetrius' nickname emphasized much more than that<sup>17</sup>.

Some light on king's sobriquet shed the accounts of Plutarch of Chaeronea (45/50-120/125 AD). In his chapter from the *Life of Aristides* he criticises several Hellenistic rulers who carried epithets or nicknames that in his opinion based on violence and power rather than justice. Beside Demetrius Plutarch mentions Seleucus 'Nicator' ('the Victorious'), Pyrrhus 'Aetos' ('the Eagle'), Ptolemy's I son, Ptolemy 'Ceraunus' ('the Thunderbolt'), and Antiochus' II son, Antiochus 'Hierax' ('the Hawk')<sup>18</sup>. If we look closer at origins of these nicknames, we see that they were awarded for similar features as in the case of Demetrius: they emphasised ambition, tenacity, and effectiveness<sup>19</sup>. Plutarch's account is also worthy of our attention because the author had access to hostile tradition towards Demetrius and frequently used it in his works<sup>20</sup>. He knew that Demetrius' courtesan Lamia was likened ironically by anonymous poet to *helepolis*, and that

<sup>10</sup> Note, however, Billows' remark 1990: 152: 'The siege of Salamis was the first of the series of great sieges that earned for Demetrius his nickname Poliorcetes'.

<sup>11</sup> Diod. 20.92.2: ὥστε δοξαὶ μηδὲν οὕτως ὀχυρὸν εἶναι τεῖχος ὃ δύναται ἂν τὴν ἀπ' ἐκείνου τοῖς πολιορκουμένοις ἀσφάλειαν παρέχεσθαι; 20.103.3: σφόδρα γὰρ ἦν ἀνυπόστατος οὗτος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐν ταῖς προσβολαῖς.

<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 35.2.

<sup>13</sup> Ael. *VH* 3.16: Δημήτριος... ἤρει τὰς πόλεις μηχανὰς προσάγων καὶ κατασειῶν καὶ ὑπορύττων τὰ τεῖχη; Amm. Marc. 24.2.18: superatis oppidis pluribus.

<sup>14</sup> Polyaeus. 4.7.3, 5-8.

<sup>15</sup> Wheatley 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Gomme 1945: 17 n. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Huß 2001: 190.

<sup>18</sup> Plut. *Arist.* 6.2.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. *Pyrr.* 10.1 (Pyrrhus); Memnon *FGrH* 434 F 1.5.6; Pausanias 10.19.7 (Ceraunus); App. *Syriaca*, 65 (Antiochus I); Plut. *Reg. apoph.* 184; *Frat. amor.* 489 (Hierax).

<sup>20</sup> Dio. *Chrys. Orat.* 64.22 with Rose 2015: 338-339; on Plutarch and his sources for the *Life of Demetrius* see Sweet 1951; Rose 2015, 40-54.

Demochares of Soli called Poliorcetes *Mythos*, because 'he too, like Fable, had a Lamia'<sup>21</sup>. Anna Ferrari has pointed out that Plutarch laid much weight on nicknames and willingly explains them in his biographies. For him they were a synthesis of the peculiarities of a person and an important aspect of heroes' character<sup>22</sup>. We may observe that many early imperial historians identify the irony or sarcasm in epithets when they notice the disparity between deeds of the kings and the promise of their epithet<sup>23</sup>. Despite all these factors Plutarch nowhere claims that Demetrius' *epiklesis* was derisory. He even says that the king relished the surname he was given, and he was delighted that it was most unlike those given to the Zeus: 'where the king of the gods is called 'Protector of Cities' or 'Guardian of Cities', Demetrius was known as 'Besieger of Cities'<sup>24</sup>.

In the case of Plutarch, we ought to include yet another issue in our considerations. He attempts to downplay Demetrius' achievements on several occasions. According to him Poliorcetes 'returned from the Nile without accomplishing anything', at Rhodes 'he was accomplishing nothing worthy of mention', and in a war against Athens 'he could accomplish nothing'<sup>25</sup>. The biographer even claims that 'As a general, he seems to have been better at getting an army ready for a war than at putting it to work'<sup>26</sup>. As some scholars have recently observed, Plutarch refuses also to credit Poliorcetes for the besieging skills<sup>27</sup>. He concedes that Demetrius constructed impressive siege machines and worships, but in his biography we never see any of these machines deployed effectively<sup>28</sup>. Pat Wheatley has even claimed that scholars asserting that Demetrius' nickname was derisory owe something to an emphasis in Plutarch<sup>29</sup>.

What has been overlooked by scholars in this context, however, is the account of Dio Chrysostom (40-120 BC). In his treaty *On Fortune* (64.22), he notes disparity between deeds some of the Hellenistic kings and the promise of their nicknames which he describes using the adjective ἀλαζονικός ('disposed to make false pretensions, boastful, braggart')<sup>30</sup>. To illustrate the problem Dio evokes the nicknames of Demetrius, Ptolemy's I son Ptolemy 'Ceraunus' ('the Thunderbolt'), Pyrrhus, and Antiochus II 'Theos' ('the God') and compares them with the rulers' fate. In case of Demetrius, Dio states that although the king was called 'Poliorcetes', he was taken captive and died a shameful death from wine and drunkenness, beleaguered as he was by Fortune (ὕπὸ τῆς τύχης πολιορκούμενος). It is worth noting that Dio criticises mostly the same

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 27.4.1: Δημοχάρης δ' ὁ Σόλιος τὸν Δημήτριον αὐτὸν ἐκάλει Μῦθον εἶναι γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ Λάμειαν. In Greek mythology Lamia was a child-eating monster, see Wheatley 2003: 31 n. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ferrari 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Van Nuffelen 2009: 103–104.

<sup>24</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 42.10–11: ὁ μὲν γὰρ Πολιεὺς καὶ Πολιοῦχος, ὁ δὲ Πολιορκητὴς ἐπὶ κλησὶν ἔσχευεν, transl. Waterfield.

<sup>25</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 19.4: ἐπανῆλθεν ἄπρακτος; 22.1: οὐδὲν ἄξιον λόγου πράττων; 33.3: ὡς δ' οὐδὲν ἐπέβαινε - 33.3.

<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 20.1–2: παρασκευάσασθαι δύνανται ἢ χρῆσασθαι βελτίων ἐδόκει, trans. Waterfield.

<sup>27</sup> Rose 2015: 226–227.

<sup>28</sup> Rose 2022: 67–69.

<sup>29</sup> Wheatley 2020: 156–157.

<sup>30</sup> LSJ s.v. ἀλαζονικός.

Hellenistic kings as Plutarch what begs the question whether he used the *Lives* as a source<sup>31</sup>. Both authors were contemporaries, hence, it is hard to measure the degree of dependency between their accounts. Nevertheless, we know that Plutarch's *Lives* were published late in his life what raises some doubts whether they were Dio's source<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, although both passages share similarities, the differences are there and do have their effect. Contrary to Plutarch, Dio mentions Antiochus II and omits Seleucus and Antiochus Hierax. This suggests that he did not quote Plutarch and used a different source instead – probably both authors drew information from a common source which preserved hostile tradition towards Demetrius' actions.

The existence of such a tradition before Plutarch may confirm Seneca's account that we have mentioned above in which he criticises Demetrius' violence and his destructive potential. Seneca describes the meeting between Poliorcetes and Greek philosopher Stilpo of Megara (c.380–370–c.290–280) after his city was captured by the king. Demetrius asked him whether he had lost anything, but he replied: 'I have all my valuables with me' (*Omnia mea mecum sunt*). According to Seneca Stilpo made Demetrius wonder whether he had won a victory after all. He also praises philosopher for his qualities and an enlightened character. The most important thing, says Seneca, is the fact of not regarding as valuable anything that is capable of being taken away<sup>33</sup>. Contrary to Demetrius's possessions, philosopher's knowledge is abstract, and cannot be violated. I would suggest that Seneca's passage emphasizes futility of Demetrius' undertakings – he might have been the Sacker of Cities, but his possessions were material, and he was not able to produce a real valuable result. If these conclusions are correct, then we could challenge the view that criticism of the violent nature of Demetrius's nickname has begun with Plutarch. The accounts of Dio and Seneca seem to imply the broader criticism in Antiquity. Given that aforementioned authors were linked with Stoicism, we cannot rule out that its representatives had a share in diminishing king's undertakings.

## 2. The role of siege machines in Demetrius' self-presentation.

As we have already mentioned, some scholars expressed the view that Demetrius put too much trust in siege machines. Analyzing Demetrius's actions during the siege of Rhodes Isabelle Pimouguet-Pédarros concludes that he believed that the machines were a key tool to capture the city. However, Alexander's siege of Tyre (332 BC) had proved that cities could not have been taken without extensive use of foot soldiers<sup>34</sup>. Although these assessments are not unjustified, we might attempt to understand Demetrius' approach when we look closer at how the development of Greek siegecraft challenged the security of poleis.

From the time of Dionysius I of Syracuse (405-367 BC) siege warfare became heavily mechanized and fundamentally changed the balance of power between attackers and

<sup>31</sup> This passage implies that Dio had access to a hostile tradition towards Demetrius as well, see Rose 2015: 338–339.

<sup>32</sup> Jones 1966.

<sup>33</sup> Senec. *Ep. ad. Luc.* 9.16.18. Curiously, Plutarch cites this same anecdote in the *Life of Demetrius* (9.9.1–5).

<sup>34</sup> Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003.

defenders<sup>35</sup>. The major turning point was Alexander's siege of Tyre which revealed that any walled cities were no longer impregnable<sup>36</sup>. From that moment on, as Antony McNicoll has demonstrated, the initiative remained very much in the hand of attackers<sup>37</sup>. Nicholas Milner went as far as to claim that 'by the end of the fourth century almost no city could hope to survive an onslaught by a Macedonian army'<sup>38</sup>. Then, it should not surprise us that in the Classical and Hellenistic periods the threat of destruction was a constant concern for their populations. As Jeremy Armstrong and Matthew Trundle write in the Introduction to the volume devoted to sieges in the Ancient Mediterranean: 'No other military encounter comes as close to a 'total war' experience as the siege of a major city'<sup>39</sup>. A state of siege is the threat for all civilians and brings them death or slavery. From this perspective, the fear of being attacked, enslaved or annihilated, documented in numerous ancient accounts, reflected a reality, and could broke the morale of defenders<sup>40</sup>. One might add that contrary to previous wars the siege of city raised the question of the political survival of a state. How important the sense of security was for the Greeks is best evidenced by the fact that in the Classical period over 60% of the 870 located poleis were fortified. By the end of the fourth century this was the case of almost all large cities<sup>41</sup>.

Demetrius' siege engines were useful tool for inspire fear. Their destructive potential is well-documented by ancient authors who provide us rich information about the collapse of the city-walls and cities razed to the ground due to Poliorcetes' artillery<sup>42</sup>. It may be not a coincidence that the use of wall-destroying stone-throwers is first attested by the sources on Demetrius' sieges at Salamis on Cyprus (306 BC) and at Rhodes (305/304 BC)<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, sometimes only the threat of using siege engines was sufficient to make the defenders surrender<sup>44</sup>. The most celebrated among them were mobile siege-towers, known as *helepoleis*, especially the one deployed at Rhodes<sup>45</sup>. The machine weighed 160 tons, was bristled with catapults and stone-throwers, and required 3,400 men working in relays to move it. For this reason, according to Plutarch, the *helepolis* moved 'with much loud screeching and straining'<sup>46</sup>. The structure was also 130 feet high, significantly higher than walls at Rhodes. The purpose of artillery, placed in each of its nine stories was to fired missiles over the main city walls to the

<sup>35</sup> Marsden 1969: 49–63, 77–83 and 99–101; Keyser 1994; Campbell 2006: 40–79; Gabriel 2010: 88–92.

<sup>36</sup> Martin 1996: 117.

<sup>37</sup> McNicoll 1997: 47.

<sup>38</sup> McNicoll 1997: 212.

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong, Trundle 2019: 2.

<sup>40</sup> For studies on emotions in the Hellenistic period see Chaniotis 2013; 2013a.

<sup>41</sup> Fachard, Harris 2021: 10.

<sup>42</sup> Diod. 20.46.1; 48.4; 86.2; 87.1; 93.2; 95.5; 95.7; 103.5; 21.14.1; Plin. *NH* 35.105; Ael. *VH* 3.16; Plut. *Demetr.* 10.1; Euseb. *Chron.* II 118 (Ol. 121.1); Hieron. (ed. Schoene) II, 119; Syncell. *Chronogr.* 329.28.

<sup>43</sup> The majority of scholars believe that it was an innovation used already by Alexander, but Keyser 1994: 45–46 has convincingly demonstrated that this view stems from the misunderstanding of ancient sources.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Diod. 20.102.2; 103.3.

<sup>45</sup> On the *helepolis* at Rhodes see Whitehead&Blyth 2004: 134–8 and 190; Campbell 2006: 83–7; Pimouguet-Pédarros 2011: 33–6 and 161–5.

<sup>46</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 21.3.1: ῥοίζῳ καὶ τόνῳ πολλῷ.

more vulnerable areas of the city behind them<sup>47</sup>. Consequently, bringing up his siege-towers against the walls, Demetrius towered above cities inspiring fear in defenders. Moreover, as Pimouguet-Pédarros has pointed out, during the sieges the *helepolis* was not only a mobile tower, but the symbol of the king's power and his presence on the battlefield (*la puissance du roi en representation*)<sup>48</sup>.

The extensive use of siege engines could have brought Demetrius one more benefit. We must bear in mind that changes in the ground and local area caused by the movement of the siege towers, the noise accompanying this process and the destruction of buildings/walls due to Demetrius' artillery might have evoked the phenomena that took place in the Greek world most often during an earthquake<sup>49</sup>. It was a common belief among the Greeks that Poseidon was held responsible for earthquakes and Joannis Mylonopoulos' investigations of recent years have done much to prove this point<sup>50</sup>. The shakes attributed to Poseidon were considered as the gods' warnings and punishments to the people. According to Xenophon, Lacedaemonians sang Poseidon's paean to avoid the gods' wrath<sup>51</sup>. It might have been even that there was a correlation between the dates during which earthquakes took place and minting coins with Poseidon's image<sup>52</sup>. However, one should not forget that in Greek mythology the god was also the builder and walls-building was one of his chief prerogatives. He built impregnable wall of Troy and erected the gates of bronze to Tartarus<sup>53</sup>. Poseidon is even worried that the wall constructed by the Achaeans to defend their ships surpass the wall that he had built. Thus, Zeus allows him to destroy it after the war with Troy<sup>54</sup>. Poseidon's fortification afforded to the defence, and he was both known under the name 'Ενοσίγαιος 'Earthshaker' ('Ενοσίγαιος) and 'Securer' (Ἀσφάλειος) as well<sup>55</sup>. Poseidon's son, Nausithous, the king of the Phaeacians, is also associated with building activity. He constructed the impressive walls of Scheria, admired later by Odysseus for their length and height<sup>56</sup>.

The similarities between Demetrius and Poseidon are interesting, given the presence of this deity on all the silver coinages of Poliorcetes<sup>57</sup>. There is no doubt that this was partly due to the situation of Demetrius after the battle of Ipsus (301 BC) who still possessed a powerful fleet. The Greeks and Macedonians believed that they buoyed their naval successes by Poseidon's favour and Demetrius even assumed the title of 'King' after great victory at the battle of Salamis (306 BC). For these reasons his divine parentage, assigned to him in the Athenian *ithyphallic* is argued

<sup>47</sup> Kebrick 2019: 28–29.

<sup>48</sup> Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003: 311.

<sup>49</sup> Demetrius' siege left very real traces: missiles, earth works, cut trees, damaged walls or abandoned camps, see Diod. 20.83.4; 93.1; 94.1; 95.1; 97.1; 100.4.

<sup>50</sup> Mylonopoulos 1998; 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.4.

<sup>52</sup> Güney 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Hom. *Il.* 21.446–447; Hesiod. *Theog.* 732.

<sup>54</sup> Hom. *Il.* 7.442; 12.25–27.

<sup>55</sup> For general studies on Poseidon see e.g. Burkert 1985: 136–139 and papers collected in Pevnick 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Hom. *Od.* 6.9.

<sup>57</sup> On Demetrius' coinage see Newell 1927.



as merely a reference to Demetrius' naval prowess and ambitions<sup>58</sup>. However, in the light of the previous considerations, we might assume that it stemmed also from the destructive potential of his siege-engines. Moreover, we cannot rule out that Demetrius' activity as a fortifier of cities was another issue in which the king's actions resembled those of Poseidon. Demetrius demonstrated that he had power to produce effects, which his contemporaries attributed to deity, Poseidon<sup>59</sup>.

It is likely that these similarities have been prompted by the king himself. Curiously, when Diodorus describes the overthrow the walls due to siege engines in Books 16-20, concerning the times of Philip II, Alexander, and Diadochi, he uses various verbs – e.g. ἀράσσω, καθαιρέω, καταβάλλω, περιαιρέω, πίπτω, σαλεύω, and τύπτω<sup>60</sup>. Yet in Demetrius' case, and his case only, he mostly employs the verb διασείω ('shake violently'), by which the Greeks used to describe an earthquake<sup>61</sup>. It is generally acknowledged that Diodorus based his Antigonids-related passages on the work of Hieronymus<sup>62</sup>. We might wonder whether this was an attempt to relate Demetrius' sieges with Poseidon's earthquakes. Furthermore, we already know that Demetrius took pleasure in being given a nickname which is the opposite of the one bestowed on Zeus. According to Plutarch, unlike other kings, who received from Zeus his 'divine ordinances', Demetrius' strength based on city-takers and bronze-beaked ships and for these reasons his name was linked with injustice<sup>63</sup>. We must bear in mind that in the *Iliad* Poseidon is depicted as rebellious and competitive towards the king of the gods<sup>64</sup>. Demetrius' nickname was even related to an epic epithet πολίπορθος which Ares and Odysseus carry in Homer<sup>65</sup>. If our considerations are correct, we might suggest that outlined similarity between Demetrius and Poseidon strengthen yet more view that Demetrius' *epiklesis* was not applied to him in derision.

### 3. *Poliorcetes* and Demetrius' royal self-fashioning

There can be hardly any doubt that Demetrius' passion for designing siege engines and putting them into action was the king's trademark in the eyes of ancient authors. It seems, however,

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<sup>58</sup> Chaniotis 2011: 183–185. This issue has recently been examined by Holton 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Hence, I agree with John Kroll (2007: 117–118) that bull horns on Demetrius' coins did not reflect primarily his association with Poseidon or Dionysus, especially that horns played no (Poseidon) or little (Dionysus) part in their iconography, see Wehrli 1968: 226 n. 16 on Poseidon, and LIMC III/1: 440–441; Smith 1988: 41 on Dionysus. The horned head of Demetrius appears for the first time on an issue of the bronze city coinage of Erythrae in Asia Minor (306–304 BC), where he replaced the head of Heracles (Ashton&Kinns 2002: 17–21). As a prominent motif in the ancient Near East that referred to divine power (Zervos 1979: 303–304), it was visual proof of Demetrius' god-like nature, in that case, confirmed by his power like Poseidon.

<sup>60</sup> Diod. 16.8.2; 49.1; 51.2; 60.1; 75.3; 76.2; 17.22.3; 25.2; 43.4; 45.2; 46.3; 115.1; 18.70.5; 19.45.6.

<sup>61</sup> LSJ s.v. διασείω; σείω.

<sup>62</sup> On Diodorus and his sources see Anson 2015: 4–40.

<sup>63</sup> According to Judith Maitland 1999: 12 'maritime culture conceived the shaking of the earth as emanating from the sea'. Curiously, Murray 2012: 126–128 has observed that Demetrius' massive warships were designed primarily for siege and counter-siege operations.

<sup>64</sup> Maitland 1999, 1–2, 10–11.

<sup>65</sup> Wheatley 2020: 158. According to O'Sullivan 2014: 84 the nickname is evocative of cultic titles.



that when it came to Demetrius' image, the weight of this characteristic was even heavier than commonly assumed. In chapter 20 of his *Life of Demetrius*, Plutarch describes the king's capacity to construct machines and gather required supply<sup>66</sup>. He concludes that – contrary to other rulers – Demetrius would not, however, use them for useless diversions. Plutarch even lists a couple other kings known for misusing their resources: Aeropous II of Macedon (399-395/4 BC) used to dedicate his spare time to craft little tables and lamps; Attalos I of Pergamon (236-197 BC) used to grow medicinal plants, and the kings of Parthia prided themselves on their ability to sharpen and hone the points of their weapons by their own hand. This begs a question as to why Plutarch chose this aspect of Demetrius' image as a medium to compare him to other rulers. The answer appears to lie in the subsequent passages of his narrative, where he notices that the works created on Poliorcetes' orders were not only grand and creative, but also kingly (βασιλικόν). Some would, therefore, believe that the king's involvement was not only limited to designing and funding, but indeed some of his products would have been crafted by his own hand (ἀλλὰ καὶ χειρὸς ἄξια φαίνεσθαι βασιλικῆς).

Curiously, Diodorus ascribes similar skills to Demetrius, especially in his account of the siege of Rhodes. It is worth noting that a major portion of the narrative conflates the actions of the besiegers with those of Demetrius himself. Although Diodorus states that certain tasks were performed by the king's men<sup>67</sup>, his account leaves us with the impression that Poliorcetes does almost everything<sup>68</sup>. However, of special interest are Demetrius' engineering skills: 'he' has an ample supply of everything, 'he' cuts down trees, 'he' destroys farm buildings outside the city, 'he' fortifies the camp, together with his men 'he' closes the space between the city and the exit with a mole and 'he' makes a port for his ships<sup>69</sup>. 'He' also constructs the machines, the descriptions of which are abundantly featured in Diodorus' account, 'he' ensures the machines are neither damaged nor destroyed on the battlefield. If required, 'he' also repairs the siege equipment: not only the machines, but also ships<sup>70</sup>. The scope of tasks Diodorus ascribes to Demetrius leads to a question: are we still talking about a king – or about an ancient engineer?

<sup>71</sup> It is significant that in Diodorus's *Bibliothēke* we do not hear about any engineers, architects, and craftsmen in Demetrius' army even though they are listed in other sources<sup>72</sup>.

This aspect for the royal self-presentation of Demetrius could have been reflected in a fragment by the comic poet Machon preserved to us by Athenaeus. It describes one of the

<sup>66</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 20.1–6.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Diod. 20.83.4; 94.1; 94.3, 96.5.

<sup>68</sup> This issue has recently been noted by Champion 2014a: 108. He argues that Diodorus, whose account reflects the Rhodian perspective, presents Demetrius in strong contrast to defenders who act as collective and paints him as an enemy of liberty. However, Champion states that Diodorus' narrative might be interpreted also as Antigonids' attempt to show Demetrius in a positive light.

<sup>69</sup> Diod. 20.83.3–4; 85.1

<sup>70</sup> Diod. 20.85.3; 88.1; 88.7; 91.2–8; 95.1–4; 97.3; 97.7.

<sup>71</sup> Engineers' role in the Macedonian army, see Karunanithy 2013.

<sup>72</sup> On Demetrius' engineers see e.g. Billows 1990: 384, 388–389 and 442–443. Although we know that an Athenian engineer/architect Epimachus built Helepolis at Rhodes (Vitr. 10.16.4; Ath. *Mech.* 27.2), Diodorus (20.91.2) claims that the siege-tower was constructed by the king himself (παρασκευασάμενος οὖν ὕλης παντοίας πλῆθος κατεσκεύασε μηχανὴν τὴν καλουμένην ἑλέπολιν). Notably, Plutarch (*Demetr.* 21.1) only says that Demetrius brought up against the city his famous *helepolis*.

Lamia's drinking-party, during which Demetrius was showing all kinds of perfumes to her. When she rejected all the gifts, he responded by masturbating and offering her his semen to smell instead. However, Lamia told him that his scent smells the most putrid of all. Outraged by the woman's words, he reacted by saying 'I swear, by the gods, that is produced from a right royal nut'<sup>73</sup>. It seems plausible to me that this anecdote might have been a humorous reflection of Demetrius' concept of kingship. What Demetrius has made with his hands mattered, was kingly and meant to arouse admiration!

We might ask ourselves what the reason behind the Demetrius' decision was to make besieging skills an essential part of his royal self-fashioning. As we have seen, from the time of Philip and Alexander, the siegecraft has become almost the exclusive domain of kings. It has been rightly noticed that siege was an excellent opportunity to display their power, wealth, and superiority<sup>74</sup> and, as ancient authors confirm, Demetrius mastered this art to perfection. However, in this case one other factor might have influenced. We must not forget that the Greek city has numerous associations with the feminine. The personification of the polis and her fortune (*Tyche*) was a woman adorned with a mural crown, contrary to the personification of the citizen (*Demos*) which was bearded mature man<sup>75</sup>. As Angelos Chaniotis has pointed out 'the walls, surround the city like the belt around a woman's dress, and when they fall they leave the most defenseless of the inhabitants, the women, to be taken by the victor'. Moreover, says the scholar, two virgin goddesses, Athena and Artemis, are the divine patrons of rescue in war and as such they defend cities in the same manner as drive back the men who attempt to violate their own virginity<sup>76</sup>. Sexual potency and beauty of Demetrius is well attested in our sources and played significant part in his royal-self-fashioning and marriage policy<sup>77</sup>. Curiously, what we observe from the time of Demetrius is a strong association of success not only in the battlefield but also in the siege with potency and masculinity<sup>78</sup>. Is this something perhaps that Demetrius and his successes influenced? The question is beyond the scope of this paper, yet the issue requires further research.

The analysis presented above demonstrates that Demetrius' engineering skills constituted a vital part of his royal image - he was βασιλεύς εὐμήχανος as Lo Presti has recently called him<sup>79</sup>. The emphasis placed on his roles as a designer of machines and a participant in other tasks affirms the pronounced physical and personal character of his rule. Since Plutarch chose to draw a comparison between Demetrius and selected Argeads or later Hellenistic dynasties, we might safely assume that the biographer considered Poliorcetes distinct from the rest. It is worth noting that when discussing all rulers mentioned above, the sources do not stress their passion for construction and gathering resources even remotely as often as they do in the case of

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<sup>73</sup> Machon, *Chreiai* F 13, ap. Ath. 13.577e-f: 'ἀλλὰ μὲν, νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἀπὸ βάλανου τοῦτ' ἐστί, Λάμια, βασιλικῆς.' trans. C.D. Yonge. For a different interpretation of this anecdote see Müller 2009: 46–47.

<sup>74</sup> Pimouguet-Pédarros 2011: 321.

<sup>75</sup> Chaniotis 2005: 103.

<sup>76</sup> Chaniotis 2013a: 450.

<sup>77</sup> Diod. 19.81.4; Plut. *Demetr.* 2.2–3; 9.3–4; Ael. *VH* 12.14.

<sup>78</sup> Chaniotis 2013a: 450–451.

<sup>79</sup> Lo Presti 2010. Diodor uses this adjective twice (20.92.2; 103.3).

Demetrius<sup>80</sup>. Moreover, if we browse ancient sources on Dionysius I, Philip, and Alexander – rulers who were quintessential for the development of the Greek art of siegecraft – this aspect of their activity is not particularly emphasised either. Both Dionysius and Alexander were believed to have been interested in the works of their engineers and made rounds among their craftsmen, but designing and gathering resources was attributed mainly to people in their service. We do not hear either of any instances of these two rulers repairing or intervening to protect their siege engines<sup>81</sup>.

The previous considerations lead us to a twofold conclusion: Demetrius' nickname was well deserved, and his image as the Poliorcetes became an integral component of his royal self-fashioning<sup>82</sup>. As such it raises some doubts around Wheatley's conclusion that for Demetrius, *poliorcetics* was only the route to *basileia*<sup>83</sup>. Thus, hostile attempts to undermine his authority as a ruler must have concentrated on diminishing his activity and siege achievements. This interpretation indeed allows for a new perspective on the unfavourable tradition pertaining to his skills in besieging cities. We shall focus on that in the following chapter.

#### 4. Hostile tradition

A testimony to this tradition that appears to be the oldest comes from New Comedy where he was one of the most frequently featured figures<sup>84</sup>. According to Plutarch, one of the comic poets referred to Lamia as the true *helepolis* (Ἑλέπολιν ἀληθῶς); what he hinted there, was a dinner party Lamia had arranged for Demetrius and made the citizens of Athens pay for it<sup>85</sup>. If we follow Pat Wheatley in believing that Lamia died in childbirth after 303/302 BCE<sup>86</sup>, then Plutarch's remark refers to the period preceding the battle of Ipsus (301 BC). Furthermore, right after discussing the Antigonids revival of the Hellenic League (302 BC), Plutarch mentions the famous 'Royal Toast' at Demetrius' court: during a feast, the court members entertained themselves by giving derisive epithets for the king's rivals – Seleucus was hailed as 'Elephant Commander', Ptolemy as 'Admiral', Lysimachus as 'Guardian of the Treasury' (= eunuch), and Agathocles of Sicily as 'Lord of the Isles'<sup>87</sup>. All the kings laughed at Demetrius, except Lysimachus who as his

<sup>80</sup> Strootman 2010; Klooster 2020.

<sup>81</sup> See e.g. Diod. 14.41.3–6, 42.4; 43.1; 49–51 (Dionysus); 17. 40.5; 41.5; 42.6; Arr. 2.18–24; Curt. 4.2–3 (Alexander).

<sup>82</sup> This conclusion allows us to express some doubt around Demetrius' *imitatio Alexandri* which scholars ubiquitously ascribe to him (See e.g. Pollit 1986: 31: 'the most Alexander-like (at least in intention)'; Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 56 n. 35: 'he [Demetrius] was fervent emulator of Alexander in every respect'). On this issue see Zieliński 2023.

<sup>83</sup> Wheatley 2020: 159.

<sup>84</sup> Lape 2004: 62–64.

<sup>85</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 27.3–4.

<sup>86</sup> Wheatley 2003: 34–35.

<sup>87</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 25.7–8; *Prae. ger. reip.* 823 C–D. This well-known anecdote is attested also by the fragments of Phylarchus preserved by Athenaeus (FGrH 81 F 31= Athen. 14.614F–615A). Not one of three versions mentions Cassander.

fiercest adversary deeply resented the jest. However, according to Heckel, Lysimachus responded in kind, calling him Poliorcetes<sup>88</sup>.

Nonetheless, it is possible to date both Lamia's death and the 'Royal Toast' differently. Firstly, let us note that there is no certainty that Lamia died in 303/2 BC. Athenaeus and Plutarch claim that, at one point, Demetrius compared her restraint to the extravagance of Lysimachus' "Penelope"<sup>89</sup>. Neither of the authors specifies which of the king's wives they had in mind (Lysimachus had three of them), although the story seems to refer to Arsinoe II, Ptolemy's daughter, whom he married as late as in 300-299 BC<sup>90</sup>. Thus, it is quite likely that Lamia was still alive in the initial years of the 3rd century BC. Concerning the toast, Erich Gruen noted that a more appropriate context for such an event is to be found in the 90s of the 3rd century. The fact that Plutarch included the anecdote in his discourse on the period before 301 BC cannot be a definitive proof in favour of an earlier date, as it is evidently a digression<sup>91</sup>. Furthermore, we know that chronological precision was hardly a priority for him<sup>92</sup>.

These conclusions are supported by Michael Dixon's recent study on Menander's *Perikeiromene* ('The Girl with her Hair Cut Short')<sup>93</sup>. Preserved in fragments only, Menander's play tells the story of a siege a mercenary called Polemon laid to a house in Corinth, which probably alluded to Demetrius' siege of Corinth in 303 BC. In line 483, the slave Sosias, Polemon's "commander", describes a female participant of the siege, Habrotonon, the flute player – she is a clear reference to Lamia, who also played flute – and claims that she has what is useful in besieging a city (πολιορκίαν). The use of that noun is the only occurrence of the word in Menander's extant works, which might have been noted by his contemporaries. The allusion must have, therefore, stemmed from the fact that the Demetrius' sobriquet had already been known. Dixon states, however, that due to its tone, we ought to date Menander's work to the period after 302/1 BC, that is when Demetrius had already left Athens and lost the battle of Ipsus<sup>94</sup>.

As we search for the origins of the tradition of hostility towards Demetrius' talents in the art of siegecraft, we ought to look also at what some of the sources say about the actual sieges he laid. The earliest account comes from Vitruvius and concerns the siege at Rhodes. He claims that the *helepolis* booged down in effluent, after the Rhodians, following an advice of one of their architects, poured all the water, filth, and mud outside the city walls. This made Demetrius abandoned the siege and sailed away<sup>95</sup>. Vitruvius' account is not, however, confirmed in any other source, which prompted John Oksanish to conclude, convincingly, that the described fate of the *helepolis* is, in fact, fiction aimed at those doubting the value of architectural expertise<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> Heckel 1984: 439.

<sup>89</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 25.9; Ath. 14.614E–F.

<sup>90</sup> Ogden 1999: 236 n. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Gruen 1985: 259–260, accepted e.g. by Billows 1990: 158 n. 43 and Paschidis 2013: 132 n. 56.

<sup>92</sup> See e.g. Plut. *Sol.* 27.1; Habicht 1970, 44–55.

<sup>93</sup> Dixon 2005.

<sup>94</sup> cf. O'Sullivan 2009: 70.

<sup>95</sup> Vitr. 10.16.7–8.

<sup>96</sup> Oksanish 2019: 88–93. On Vitruvius' credibility see also Kołoczek 2022.

The account remains interesting nonetheless, as Vitruvius begins it with a description of the *helepolis*' technical specifications. If we compare his version to those of other authors, we will notice that the data outlined by Vitruvius slightly differ from the rest<sup>97</sup>. For Duncan Campbell, the disparities are so pronounced that he suggests that Vitruvius described, in fact, a mobile-tower different from the one used at Rhodes<sup>98</sup>. He argues that the author might have had in mind the *helepolis* Demetrius deployed at Argos (295 BC) or Thebes (291 BC), and his proposition is further supported by the fact that in both cases, the towers had major mobility problems<sup>99</sup>. If Oksanish and Campbell are correct, the origins of the tradition of undermining Demetrius' besieging skills could then be traced back to the abovementioned sieges of Argos and Thebes. Although the first remains rather enigmatic (it is mentioned by Athenaeus only), and, thus, its historicity is somewhat doubtful<sup>100</sup>, the latter is well-confirmed: the fact that Demetrius besieged Thebes is attested not only by Plutarch but also preserved fragments from Diodorus' Book 21<sup>101</sup>.

Plutarch writes that during the siege of Thebes, it took two months for the *helepolis* to move just two stades (360 m), due to its weight and size. As such, it offered no advantage to the besiegers. It was only when Demetrius became personally involved in the combat that the tide turned. Plutarch's account significantly differs from that of Diodorus, who is silent on the problems with the *helepolis* and states that the king utilised the siege machines to, firstly, break through the city walls and then took the city by storm<sup>102</sup>. Curiously, scholars who believe Diodorus and Plutarch compiled their accounts on Demetrius' actions based on the work of Hieronymus of Cardia, as well as those who doubt this assumption, are in accord as to the fact that both authors used Hieronymus' testimony in their respective descriptions of the siege<sup>103</sup>. We could, then, perhaps conclude that the information on Demetrius' problems at Thebes originated from Plutarch himself and not from his original source. And yet, the accounts of the historians diverge in yet another aspect: in the number of the men who were sentenced to death by Demetrius. Diodorus says there were 10 of them; Plutarch – that there were 13. Given these two disparities, it appears the authors used, in fact, different sources, and Plutarch's source preserved the unfavourable tradition on the *helepolis*. It is quite likely, then, that the siege of Thebes offered the first example, or perhaps even marked the beginning, of the tendency to question the usefulness of Demetrius' siege machines. This, in turn, laid foundation to the *topos* adopted by later authors (e.g. Vitruvius). If the largest of Demetrius' machines, the *helepolis*, became indeed stuck in sewage, it could not have escaped the notice of the king's enemies. Another conclusion follows: if Vitruvius had the access to the tradition hostile towards Demetrius, he should have also been able to detect some information on the derisory character of his nickname. Yet, there is no hint of that in his work. Quite contrarily: as we have already mentioned, the author states the king received it as a praise for perseverance in his actions<sup>104</sup>.

<sup>97</sup> Diod. 20.91.2–8; Plut. *Demetr.* 21.1–3; Ath. *Mech.* 27.2–6.

<sup>98</sup> Campbell 2006: 84–85, 87, cf. Roby 2016: 107–108.

<sup>99</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 40.2–3; Athen. 10.415A; Campbell 2006: 84–85, 87.

<sup>100</sup> Wheatley 2020: 172 n. 61 calls Athenaeus' anecdote unhistorical.

<sup>101</sup> Diod. 21.14.1–2.

<sup>102</sup> Diod. 21.14.1: Δημήτριος ὁ βασιλεὺς πολιορκίᾳ τὰ τεῖχη καθελὼν, τὴν πόλιν κατὰ κράτος εἴλε.

<sup>103</sup> Hornblower 1981: 229; Paschidis 2008: 313–314; Rose 2015: 291.

<sup>104</sup> Vit. 10.16.4.

Obviously, those who were most interested in questioning Demetrius' skills were his enemies. Let us consider who could have been particularly keen on doing that. Heckel is undoubtedly correct in stating that the king's fiercest enemy was Lysimachus; we can, therefore, agree that he might have played an essential role in highlighting Demetrius' failures. In my view, a testimony to the rivalry between the two kings is found in Plutarch's anecdote on their encounter at Soli in Cilicia in Asia Minor, possibly placed in 298 BC<sup>105</sup>. According to the story, Lysimachus approached the besieged city and called upon Demetrius to demonstrate him his war machines and ships. The son of Antigonos complied, to which the Thracian king expressed his admiration and then withdrew. This anecdote is likely to originate from a source favourable to Demetrius, as it features his chief characteristic, emphasised by numerous authors: that the equipment he produced inspired fear even among his friends and admiration even among his enemies<sup>106</sup>. Thus, the information on the meeting at Soli could have been aimed at proving that even Demetrius' greatest enemy was forced to acknowledge his achievements as an engineer and architect. That is why we need to allow for the possibility that the anecdote was a response to Lysimachus' attempts to undermine Poliorcetes' siege skills.

It appears, however, that Lysimachus was not the only one interested in spreading hostile propaganda against Demetrius. A group that could have similarly resorted to highlighting the king's ineptitude were the Rhodians. Following Demetrius' departure from the island, they took a number of actions to commemorate the siege. According to Diodorus they rewarded the citizens who bravely defended their land, as well as liberated slaves and bestowed Rhodian citizenship on them. They also paid respect to those kings who had supported them throughout their armed struggle against Demetrius. They set up statues of Cassander and Lysimachus and, following the advice of the oracle of Ammon in Siwa, they dedicated a square sanctuary (*temenos*) bounded by stoas to Ptolemy and called it the Ptolemaeum. They also rebuilt the theatre as well as the sections of the city walls and other objects demolished in the siege<sup>107</sup>. Moreover, the archaeological research in a sanctuary below the acropolis of Rhodes has uncovered over 1,000 large Macedonian artillery bullets. They were piled up to remind posterity of how the Rhodians had defeated powerful enemy<sup>108</sup>. In the following years (about 300 BC) the Rhodians dedicated in Delphi a column nearly 8 metres high, surmounted by a quadriga: the chariot of Helios facing the facade of the temple of Apollo. The column stood in proximity to the Serpent Column commemorating the victory of the Greeks over the Persians at Plataea in 479 BC. The fact that the Rhodians chose this place out of others for locating their monument suggests that – similarly to the 5th century Greeks – they wished to identify themselves as the defenders of freedom against a powerful king, seemingly unrestrained in his power<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Murray 2012: 174–175.

<sup>106</sup> See e.g. Plut. *Demetr.* 20.6.

<sup>107</sup> Diod. 20.100.1–5. According to Pausanias (1.8.6) the Rhodians gave the cultic title 'Soter' to Ptolemy in thanks for his help during the siege. However, this fact is not confirmed by any other sources and raises some doubts, see Hazzard 1992; Grabowski 2014: 23–26; Worthington 2016; Caneva 2020.

<sup>108</sup> Wiemer 2013: 299.

<sup>109</sup> Wiemer 2011: 133; Partida 2017: 211.



Nonetheless, the most emblematic component of the restoration plan was the erection of the bronze statue of Helios – traditionally known as the Colossus of Rhodes<sup>110</sup>. The monument was 33-35 metres high, and its pediment – 15-17 metres. Although the researchers do not agree as to where exactly it was located, it certainly must have been visible for every ship approaching the city<sup>111</sup>. A limited source material prevents us from an exact dating; what we know, however, is that it took 12 years to construct it, it stood for 56 or 66 years and collapsed during the earthquake of 228/227, 226, or 224/23 BC<sup>112</sup>. Depending on these factors, it is assumed that the monument might have been erected either in 304-292 BC (directly after the siege) or in 296/293-284/82 BC. If we accept the ‘high’ chronology, we could conclude that the construction had been completed before the death of Demetrius in 282 BC. If the other date is correct, then a major part of the work would still have been accomplished while the king was still alive. Wheatley states that ‘it might have been flattering, or even amusing to the Besieger that his siege ultimately inspired one of the greatest artistic undertakings ever attempted’<sup>113</sup>. Was it so, however?

The Colossus was, after all, a monument of the islanders’ bravery, a testimony to their ties to Helios, and a symbol of their resilience. It was made of a typically Rhodian material: at the time, the island specialised in bronze casting<sup>114</sup>. As stated above, the statue was placed so as to be perfectly visible. Together with the pedestal it was taller than the *helepolis* (48-52 metres compared to the tower’s 41-46 metres), which might have had a symbolic dimension<sup>115</sup>. Let us also ponder the message behind the construction of the Colossus in the context of Demetrius’ siege. According to the sources, the king abandoned his machines on the island – among them, the *helepolis*<sup>116</sup>. Given its size, it could have used during the construction of the statue and maintaining it later. Robert Kebrick has observed that given its internal ladders, equipment to move weapons and ammunition, and space for many workmen, the *helepolis* would have been as useful in construction work as it was in warfare<sup>117</sup>. In the past, some scholars even went as far as claim that certain technical solutions from the *helepolis* informed the design of the Colossus<sup>118</sup>. Thus, the process of erecting a monument commemorating Demetrius’ failure utilised the very objects that on other occasions had allowed the king not only to besiege but also to conquer cities – this fact needs to be accentuated. The Colossus of Rhodes could have also been a challenge thrown down at Demetrius, who, after all, did his best to emphasise the advantage he supposedly had over his enemies due to his diligent preparations and imposing machines.

We need to note here that the sources do not agree as to how exactly the Rhodians obtained Demetrius’ machines. Plutarch states that it was during the peace talks that they asked the king

<sup>110</sup> General information about the Colossus see Hoepfner 2003; Vedder 2015; Kebrick 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Kebrick 2019; Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 447.

<sup>112</sup> Plin. NH. 34.18.41–42; Wiemer 2011: 129 n. 30; Heitmann-Gordon 2017: 387 n. 214.

<sup>113</sup> Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 445.

<sup>114</sup> Heitmann-Gordon 2017: 392.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. O’Sullivan 2014: 94: ‘This counterpoint is neatly embodied in the Rhodian Colossus itself, which was (almost literally) a reconfiguration of the very siege engines that Poliorcetes had brought against the city’.

<sup>116</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 20.9; Plin. NH 34.18.41.

<sup>117</sup> Kebrick 2019: 27–29.

<sup>118</sup> Gabriel 1932.



to leave several of them on the island – as a testimony to their bravery and his power<sup>119</sup>. In other words, the machines would have become the Demetrius's gift to the citizens of Rhodes<sup>120</sup>. Pliny the Elder, however, has a different view: he says that Demetrius, exhausted with the siege, abandoned the machines on the island; the citizens would later sell them later for 300 talents, which allowed them to fund the Colossus<sup>121</sup>. Philo of Byzantium (3rd century BC), who lived not too long after the discussed events, claimed that the Colossus costed 500 talents of bronze and 300 of iron, hence, it is likely that what Pliny had in mind was only the sum obtained from selling the machines<sup>122</sup>. There is, however, evidence that seems to point the other way. One of Pliny's sources on various Rhodian statues was the *Mirabilia* by Gaius Licinius Mucianus – a Roman consul living in the 1st century AD. Is it possible that Mucianus visited Rhodes and might have transmitted the accounts he heard from the Rhodian citizens themselves<sup>123</sup>. Prior to discussing the fate of Demetrius' machines, Pliny points out that his version of the story is the one which is 'transmitted' (*tradunt*). What is interesting, a similar account on the funding of the Colossus is found in an epigram that most scholars believe to be the genuine dedicatory inscription accompanying the statue<sup>124</sup>. The epigram praises the triumph over the Antigonids and alludes to the spoils obtained from the enemy. There can be hardly any doubt: choosing to place such an inscription on the pediment, the Rhodians propagated their own view on the statue's funding – a view that could function even when Demetrius was still alive. Thus, the two surviving sources on Demetrius' machines being sold were, in one way or another, linked to Rhodes.

The question remains by whom the transmission of this tradition might have been impacted? It is well known that the chief representative of Rhodian historiography from the turn of the 3rd BC century was Zeno of Rhodes. Although his work has not been preserved, it is believed to have served as a source for numerous later authors. One of them was Diodorus, who used Zeno's work to a certain degree in his own account of the siege of Rhodes<sup>125</sup>. The passages attributed to Zeno demonstrate that even though he was a skilled and diligent historian, he perceived the world from his own, Rhodian perspective and strove to present the history of his homeland in a positive light. During the time of his life, the memory of the siege at Rhodes was still vivid. Even though the Colossus collapsed in the 230s BC, his remnants were ostensibly visible and continued as an object of admiration well into the Roman period. We also know that until the beginning of the 2nd century, the Rhodians held an annual celebration of a festival dedicated to Ptolemy, established in the wake of the siege. The memory was significant to the growth of the island's ambitions in the second half of the 3rd century, when it aspired to assume

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<sup>119</sup> Plut. *Demetr.* 20.9.

<sup>120</sup> For other examples of Demetrius' euergetism see e.g. Diod. 20.46.4; Plut. *Demetr.* 10.1–2; 34.5.

<sup>121</sup> Plin. *NH* 34.18.41.

<sup>122</sup> *Mirab.* 4.6; Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 445.

<sup>123</sup> Ash 2007.

<sup>124</sup> *Anth. Pal.* 6.171; Wiemer 2011: 129–133; Heitmann-Gordon 2017: 395–407. See, however, Jones 2014; O'Sullivan 2014: 86–94.

<sup>125</sup> See bibliography in Wheatley 2016: 45–47.

the leading role among the Greek states<sup>126</sup>. Thus, the available information on Zeno allows us to suppose that his work could be a transmitter of the negative tradition on Demetrius.

We could ask now whether the version of the story in which the Colossus is financed by the revenue from Demetrius' machines could have been the Rhodians' response to the king's earlier actions. For this, let us look at the inscription containing the names of the contributors to the restoration of Thebes, initiated in 316 BC by Cassander<sup>127</sup>. The inscription states that Demetrius donated a considerable sum for the provision of olive oil for the gymnasium – funds that he had obtained in the siege of Rhodes (ἀπὸ τῶν] παρ' Ῥοδ[ίων λαφύρων])<sup>128</sup>. The earliest time when he could have done that was 304 BC, when, upon returning from the island, he began a campaign against Cassander in Boeotia. His gesture, then, could be interpreted as an attempt to influence the sympathies of the Greeks and restore his reputation as a defender of their freedom – especially in the light of his ongoing war against the Macedonian king. Let us remember that the restoration of Thebes was viewed as a panhellenic undertaking, and numerous monarchs of the period strove to emphasise their contribution by providing the city with gifts<sup>129</sup>. Hence, the public opinion, especially the Rhodians, could not simply ignore Demetrius' input. Another echo of Demetrius' use of the island's own resources is perhaps the passage from Diodorus, in which the king establishes a camp for his troops using local timbers and demolishing the existing infrastructure. 'The loss suffered by the enemy became a protection for his own men' – sums up the author<sup>130</sup>. If this was indeed the goal of Poliorcetes, it is quite understandable why the Rhodians would propagate their own version of the events, in which the Colossus was funded with the money obtained from the sale of the king's machines.

If we infer that there had been a propaganda debate on the events of 305/304 BC between Demetrius and the Rhodians, we can look differently at Diodorus' narrative on the origins of the king's nickname. As we remember, the Sicilian historian linked the *epiklesis* exclusively to the siege of Rhodes. Since his account probably drew upon Hieronymus' work, it became the vehicle for the myth of Poliorcetes. Should this be the case, it is likely that the connection between the nickname and the siege might have been invented by the king's faction. We need to note that Diodorus does not state it was the Rhodians to call him that, but only that this is what 'he was called' (ὠνομάσθη)<sup>131</sup>. Looking at it this way, it is yet another argument in favour of the Demetrius' sobriquet positive connotation.

<sup>126</sup> Wiemer 2011. Some of his conclusions, however, should be treated with caution because Wiemer's analysis is based on the belief that Diodorus' account largely reflect the work of Zeno.

<sup>127</sup> IG VII 2419 = Syll.<sup>3</sup> 337; Holleaux 1895; Kalliontzis, Papazarkadas 2019.

<sup>128</sup> IG VII 2419 = Syll.<sup>3</sup> 337 l. 37–40.

<sup>129</sup> Holleaux 1938: 29–30; Buraselis 2014: 165; Gartland 2016: 161. Modern reconstruction of the inscription suggests numerous contributors among the Diadochi e.g. Lysimachus, Pyrrhus and Ptolemy.

<sup>130</sup> Diod. 20.83.4 ὥστε τὴν τῶν πολέμιων βλάβην γίνεσθαι τῶν ἰδίων ἀσφάλειαν transl. R. M. Geer.

<sup>131</sup> Diod. 20.92.2.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis presented in this paper brings further arguments to consider the nickname of Demetrius as well-deserved. It seems unlikely that the king would be able to deceive the entire ancient historiography if his achievements had not reflected a reality. Moreover, we have seen that Poliorcetes attempted to turn his besieging and engineering skills into element of his royal self-fashioning. However, we might assume that the comic possibilities of Demetrius' sobriquet have not been lost on his rivals, especially since our sources preserved the hostile tradition towards the king. The period after Ipsus, when Demetrius slowly lost his superiority, seems to mark the beginning of the tendency to question the usefulness of his siege machines and poliorcetic talents. As result of the above considerations, we can also raise doubts whether it was during the siege of Rhodes that Demetrius earned his nickname. It is probable that Diodorus' account, which is the basis for such a conclusion, reflected the propaganda debate between Demetrius and his rivals, especially the Rhodians. If so, it would explain why the king attempted to ascribe his *epiklesis* to them.

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# The Return and “Purification” of Alcibiades

Alessandra Coppola

**Abstract:** This paper describes some aspects of Alcibiades’ return to Athens in 407 B.C., focusing on some neglected aspects and especially on the coincidence between his repatriation and the first day of the Plynteria, which was considered an ominous day because of the goddess Athena being veiled and purified in the sea. The question arises whether this happened by chance or in a well-orchestrated plan which aimed at presenting an impure but repented Alcibiades searching for “purification” in connection with the goddess. Some similarities with Euripide’s *Iphigeneia in Tauris* are also taken into account.

**Keywords:** Alcibiades, Return, Plynteria, Purification, Tragic models

The story of Alcibiades is well known: tried and condemned to death by the Athenians, a refugee in Sparta and then under the protection of the Persian satrap Tissaphernes, involved in negotiations with both the democrats of Samos and the oligarchs of Athens, Alcibiades finally managed to return to his homeland Athens. His return is described by Xenophon, Diodorus and Plutarch, and we learn from Plutarch that Duris, Ephoros, and Theopompus had also written about it<sup>1</sup>.

Alcibiades’ homecoming was an important event in Athens, and all the citizens gathered at Piraeus to welcome him as Athens’ last hope to end the protracted war with Sparta. The decree for his return had been proposed by Critia and voted in the summer of 411<sup>2</sup>, but caution kept Alcibiades away. Even when democracy was fully restored, he delayed going home. The right moment finally came after his long list of victories in 411-409 (Abydos, Cynossema, Cyzicus, Byzantium and Chalcedon). The precise year of his return is debated, but 407 is generally preferred over 408<sup>3</sup>. I do not wish to discuss about the year, but I will highlight the particular day of the month chosen for Alcibiades’ return.

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<sup>1</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 1.4. 8-20; Diod. 13.68; 69. 1-3; Plut. *Alc.* 32-34; Theop. *FGrHist* 115 F 324; Ephor. *FGrHist* 70 F 200; Duris *FGrHist* 76 F 70: Duris is the only one quoted by Plutarch in detail due to his unique description of how Alcibiades arrived in Piraeus. This text was presented and discussed at the Symposium Classicum Peregrinum, *Returning Home in the Greek and Roman World*, organized by P. Johnston, A. Mastrocinque, E. Santagati, G. Stern, L. Takàks, Messina, June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> For the date see Thuc. 8.97.3 (cf. 8.76.7); for the proposer Plut. *Alc.* 33.1. Diod. 12.42.2 mentions Theramenes, not Critia.

<sup>3</sup> Diod. 13.68-74 sets 408 as the year of Alcibiades’ return, his deeds until Notium, and his loss of command (given to Conon); for this date see Bearzot 1997 and 1999. Diodorus followed Ephorus who narrated by themes, not by years as Diodorus did, sometimes describing an entire event in the year of either its beginning or end; Xenophon’s narration is obscure following the conquest of Byzantium (he seems to skip one year, as it is clear from Beloch onwards). Schol. Aristoph. *Ran.* 1422 says that Alcibiades returned in 407/6 (unconvincingly argued in Munn 2000, 339). Summary of positions in Underhill 1900, xl, and Robertson 1980, who both choose 407, with Notium in spring 406 and Arginusae in summer, thus avoiding Conon and Lysander idle for more than one year, as it would be if Notium was in 407. For 407 see also Develin 1989, 171; Rhodes 2011, 188, and now Bearzot 2021, 163. For 408 see now Bleckmann 1998, 293-305; Trampedach 2015, 271-11.

According to Xenophon, Alcibiades wanted to be sure he would be appointed *strategos* before sailing to Athens; he learned of his election when he was at Gythion (the harbour of Sparta). His alleged reason for being there was to learn about the ships that the Spartans were supposedly constructing. However, it is difficult to imagine the Spartans unfazed by his formidable presence. He likely passed through Gythion to threaten his enemies with his fleet’s strength on his way to Athens, as he probably knew he had been elected *strategos* for the following year<sup>4</sup>. Plutarch and Diodorus write that he was elected when he was already in Athens, but they say he was appointed *strategos autocrator*, a role different from the normal *strategia* and probably bestowed later by the Athenians amongst other homages like the golden garland<sup>5</sup>.

So, Alcibiades reaches Piraeus as a victorious general, leading two hundred captured vessels, a multitude of captured soldiers, and a great number of spoils; indeed, his ships were embellished with gilded shields and garlands<sup>6</sup>. There are several other interesting details. On Alcibiades’ own ship, the oarsmen rowed to the music of a flute played by Chrisogonos (a famous player celebrated at Delphi) while the tragic actor Callippides kept time with his words; they were both dressed appropriately for the performance<sup>7</sup>. “Theatricality” was a major part of Duris’ narrative style as his purpose was to please the reader. He was especially fond of details regarding clothes and music. Plutarch questions his source as he did not find these details in Xenophon, Ephorus, or Theopompus. However, this description in itself is not far-fetched. Perhaps Duris of Samos, who boasted of being a descendant of Alcibiades and was interested in both him and his enemy Lysander for their relationships with his island, Samos, also aimed to create a parallel between Alcibiades’ arrival and Lysander’s entering of the defeated Athens, when he timed the destruction of the walls with the sound of flutes (this habit of playing flutes was probably typical of victorious generals entering a conquered city)<sup>8</sup>. The music played was a joyful sound, as inferred by Plutarch. Duris also states that the sails of Alcibiades’ triremes were purple-red<sup>9</sup>. It is hard to say whether this detail was indeed a part of the performance, but it is worth noting that, in some famous lines by Simonides,

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<sup>4</sup> The previous stop was Paros, where Theramenes had deposed an oligarchy in 410 (Diod. 13.47.8).

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *Alc.* 33,2; Diod. 13.69.3; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.20 says he was appointed hegemon autokrator. For other positions on the *strategia* see Hatzfeld 1931 and 1951, 292-293, n. 5; Hammond 1969, 116, argues he was appointed *strategos* of the hoplites; see discussion in Bearzot 2021, 168. For the golden garland see Domingo Gygax 2006. In Xenophon’s description of homages to Alcibiades Gray 1989 sees a demonstration of Athenian philanthropy.

<sup>6</sup> Diod. 13.68.3; Plut. *Alc.* 32.1 adds figureheads of captured ships; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.11 says he had left Paros with twenty ships.

<sup>7</sup> Ath. 12.535d assigns to Callippides a sentence that Plut. *Lys.* 19.5 (citing Theophrastus) assigns to Archestratos (*strategos* after Alcibiades’ fall): it said that Athens would not cope with two Alcibiades. The same sentence is also said of Lysander (by Eteocles in Plutarch, by Callippides in Athenaeus). See also Ael. *H.V.* 11.7. For a positive evaluation of Duris’ description of Alcibiades’ return, see Landucci 1999, 243-47.

<sup>8</sup> On Dionysius’ ships entering the conquered Naxos to the sound of flutes, see Polyaen. 5.2.5. Proietti 1987, 43, 109, makes a comparison with Lysanders’ return to Sparta, with an abundance of spoils; Due 1991 sees an ominous tone in both descriptions and finds a further parallel in Theramenes’ return to Athens from Sparta.

<sup>9</sup> FGrHist 76 F 70: “Α δὲ Δοῦρις ὁ Σάμιος, Ἀλκιβιάδου φάσκων ἀπόγονος εἶναι, προστίθησι τοῦτοις, αὐλεῖν μὲν εἰρεσίαν τοῖς ἐλαύνουσι Χρυσόγονον τὸν Πυθιονίκην, κελεύειν δὲ Καλλιππίδην τὸν τῶν τραγῶ-  
διῶν ὑποκριτὴν, στατὸν καὶ ξυστίδα καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἐναγώνιον ἀμπεχόμενον κόσμον, ἰστίῳ δ’ ἄλουργῷ τὴν  
ναυαρχίδα προσφέρεισθαι τοῖς λιμέσιν, ὥσπερ ἐκ μέθης ἐπικωμάζοντος, οὔτε Θεόπομπος οὔτ’ Ἐφορος οὔτε  
Ξενοφῶν γέγραπεν· οὔτ’ εἰκὸς ἦν οὕτως ἐντρυφῆσαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις μετὰ φυγὴν καὶ συμφορὰς τοσαύτας  
κατερχόμενον.

purple sails are said to have been used in Theseus' return to Athens after the Cretan expedition against King Minos and his Minotaur. This detail might help compare Alcibiades' return with the triumphant arrival of Theseus after his great victory. The saga of Theseus in Crete had been employed in creating the Athenian *thalassocratia*, with Athens surpassing Minos for the control of the sea, becoming master of the Aegean in his place. These stories are told in a dithyramb by Bacchilides and in the paintings of the Temple of Theseus in Athens, according to the ideological current carried on by Cymon in the middle of the V cent<sup>10</sup>. The sail colour suggested a parallel with the hero who had saved Athens from the Cretan king, recalling his triumphant return. Furthermore, once Theseus entered Athens, he pacified and united Attica through *synoecism*, just as Alcibiades' return resulted from internal negotiations and reconciliation<sup>11</sup>.

As mentioned before, many had come to meet him at Piraeus. He hesitated at first, but when he saw his cousin Euripolemos, his relatives and friends, he went ashore and was accompanied to the city by a festive crowd<sup>12</sup>. Xenophon adds a detail that stands out in this well-planned performance: he states that Alcibiades returned to Athens on the day of the Plynteria, when the statue of Athena was veiled. During that special day, no Athenian was supposed to undertake serious business, so some took this coincidence as a bad omen<sup>13</sup>. Plutarch also underlines the peculiarity of the day, saying that, as the statue was veiled, it seemed the goddess did not welcome Alcibiades and wished to keep him distant<sup>14</sup>. The fact that Alcibiades had decided to return home on such an ominous date seems quite odd. Nagy tries to explain it by arguing that the festival had no fixed date, as it can be inferred by the different dates given by Photius and Plutarch (Thargelion 29<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>): but Photius' text is confused and Plutarch's date is generally considered the canonical one<sup>15</sup>. Thus, Alcibiades returned to Athens on Thargelion 25<sup>th</sup> during the Plynteria. Little is known about this festival, its rites and duration, but the name implies the ritual washing of the statue of Athena and its holy garments: Plutarch tells that the Praxiergidai undressed the statue and covered it with a veil with secret ceremonies; Exychius adds that the Praxiergidai also dressed the statue again<sup>16</sup>. We also know that the temple of the goddess was roped off during

<sup>10</sup> Attested by Plut. *Thes.* 17.4-5: Sim. fr. 550 PMG = 242 Poltera. Bibliography and comment in Nobili 2020. On the basis of the unknown ship's captain, Phereclos, and of the unusual colour of the sails, Poltera, 2008 401-401, considers this passage spurious and expresses an excess of criticism. He believes that purple meant disgrace, whereas Plutarch is clear in saying that Alcibiades looked like one coming home from a celebration. See also Athen. 5, 203, on Philopator's ship, which had linen seals adorned with purple.

<sup>11</sup> Theseus' return was celebrated in the Oschophoria and a ship considered that of the hero was still visible in the IV cent.: Plut. *Thes.* 22-24.

<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Alc.* 32.2; Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.19; Nep. *Alc.* 6.

<sup>13</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.12. Krentz 1989, 21, thinks that Xenophon treats Alcibiades favorably throughout the *Hellenika*; Proietti 1987, 109, considers his treatment of Alcibiades an important part in books I and II; according to Due 1991 Xenophon appreciated Alcibiades as a strategos but not as a man; Root 1999, 369, sees some "darkness" in Xenophon's narrative.

<sup>14</sup> Plut. *Alc.* 34. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.12. Nagy 1994; cf. Trampedach 2015, 271-77. Phot. Lex. s.v. Καλλυντήρια καὶ Πλυντήρια: Photius links Thargelion 29<sup>th</sup> with Thargelion 19<sup>th</sup>, the day of the Kallynteria, a festival connected with the Plynteria; but Thargelion 19<sup>th</sup> was the date of the festival for the Thracian goddess Bendis: see Parke 1977, 152, and Christopoulos 1992 who points out that on Thargelion 29<sup>th</sup> an ekklesia would be held (Aeschin. Ctes. 27), which goes against the idea that nothing important was to be done on that day. Due 1991 thinks that the ill omen alludes to the final failure of Alcibiades' return; Kagan 1987, 290, ironically says that Nicias would have never forgotten it was a holy day.

<sup>16</sup> Plut. *Alc.* 34.1. Hesych. s.v. Πραξιεργίδαι: οἱ τὸ ἔδος τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἀμφιεννύοντες, which (as IG I<sup>3</sup> 7) explains that the cult was related to the statue of the ancient temple, that of the Poliàs: Robertson 2004;

the Plynteria<sup>17</sup>. A later inscription tells of ephebes accompanying the statue of Athena to the Phaleron and back again to Athens by torchlight, suggesting an evening ritual: this clearly refers to the Plynteria rites, involving purification of the statue in the sea, at Phaleron, and a procession back to Athens after sunset<sup>18</sup>.

Washing rites always imply purification. For instance, during the Eleusinian Mysteries, the initiates bathed at Phaleron: the formula “initiates to the sea” sent them off to the coast to purify themselves<sup>19</sup>. The ceremony of the Plynteria also meant washing and purification. After purification, the statue was dressed again, probably during the Kallynteria, a festival closely linked to the Plynteria, that implied κοσμεῖν καὶ λαμπρύνειν, the embellishment of the statue and the temple<sup>20</sup>.

Similarly, Alcibiades’ own situation could be compared to that of the statue of Athena: he had returned to Athens as a great general to regain and purify his public image. But victories were not enough; he was still in a condition of impurity before the city, which had cursed him for the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the destruction of the Herms. Plutarch writes that, during the popular assembly, Alcibiades blamed his bad *daimon* and misfortune, and looked hopefully towards the future. So, after the restitution of the confiscated properties, the Eumolpides and Ceryces (who ran the Eleusinian Mysteries)

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Hes. s.v. λουτρίδες αἱ περὶ τὸ ἔδος < τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς > δύο παρθένοι, αἱ καὶ πλυντρίδες λέγονται; Phot. Lex. s.v. λουτρίδες δύο κόραι περὶ τὸ ἔδος τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἐκαλοῦντο δὲ αὗται καὶ πλυντρίδες. οὕτως Ἀριστοφάνης (Aristoph. fr. 841). See Deubner 1969<sup>3</sup>, 17-21, who calls the Plynteria “ein Waschfest”, and Parker 1996, 307. An inscription of 236/5 (IG II<sup>2</sup> 776 = IG II<sup>3</sup> 1, 1026 = Kotsidou 2000 59, KNr. 13 [E4] ll. 18-20), cites a priestess of Athena Polias providing 100 drachmas to the Praxergidai for their offices, curiously in the archontate of an Alcibiades.

<sup>17</sup>For the temple being inaccessible, Poll. 8.141: περισχοινίσαι τὰ ἱερὰ ἔλεγον ἐν ταῖς ἀποφράσι τὸ παραφράζει, οἷον Πλυντηρίους...

<sup>18</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup> 1006: ll. 11-12: the ephebes συνεξήγαγον δὲ καὶ τὴν Παλλάδα Φαληροὶ κάκειθεν πάλιν συνεισήγαγον μετὰ φωτὸς μετὰ πάσης εὐκοσμίας; ll. 75-76: the cosmetes παρέπεμψε δὲ καὶ τὴν Παλλάδα Φαληροὶ κά[κειθεν συνεισή]γαγεν μετὰ φω[τὸς]. During the procession hegheteria, a mix of figs, were eaten: Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 140, 179. The nomophylakes attended the procession (at least in the Hellenistic period): Philoc. 328 F 64b: οἱ δὲ νομοφύλακες στροφίοις λευκοῖς ἐχρῶντο, καὶ ἐν ταῖς θεαῖς ἐπὶ θρόνων ἐκάθητο καταντικρὺ τῶν ἐννέα ἀρχόντων, καὶ τῇ Παλλάδι τὴν πομπὴν ἐκόσμου, ὅτε κομίζοιτο τὸ ξόανον ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν. Cf. Poll. 8, 94: νομοφύλακες ἐστεφάνωνται μὲν στροφίῳ λευκῷ, τὴν δὲ πομπὴν πέμπουσι τῇ θεῷ, τοῖς δὲ προέδροις ἐν ἐκκλησίαις συγκαθίζουσιν, διακωλύοντες ἐπιχειροτονεῖν ὅσα μὴ συμφέρει. Bettinetti 2001, 151, denies the existence of a ritual bath, but see, correctly, Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 161 n. 97. Some other scholars argue that the statue was washed on the acropolis (Robertson 1996, Hollinshead 2015), or that the statue brought to the sea was the Palladion and that the peplos only was washed (Burkert 1970, followed by Brulé 1987): this reconstruction is disproven by Nagy 1991, though linking the procession to the Phaleron with the evacuation of Athens: contra, Sourvinou-Inwood 2011; Christopoulos 1992; Parker 1996, 307-08. Photius (Lex. Καλλυντήρια καὶ Πλυντήρια) states that in the year following the death of Aglauros the holy clothes had not been washed by anyone: this shows that Aglauros too was somehow involved in the rite: Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 144.

<sup>19</sup> The ritual bath was the repetition of Eumolpos’ katapontismòs: Apoll. 3.15.4; E. 349 Nauck. The ritual formula of the mysteries was also used by Cabria, in order to invite soldiers to the sea, during the battle fought between Naxos and Paros in 376, in the same days of the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries (Ephor. FGrHist 70 F 80; Polyain. 3.11.2).

<sup>20</sup> Phot. Lex. s.v. Καλλυντήρια καὶ Πλυντήρια. Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 193-94, argues that the Plynteria lasted two days, the procession coming back on Thargelion 27<sup>th</sup>, the beginning of the Kallynteria, but IG II<sup>2</sup> 1006 seems to speak of the same day. Christopoulos 1992 assumes that the Kallynteria were carried out before the Plynteria and only regarded the cleaning of the temple. In any case, after the ritual bath, the statue was dressed in clean garments, as Hesychius states. On the basis of some integrations to IG I<sup>3</sup> 7 it was inferred that the statue was temporarily dressed with a chiton worth two minas: Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 149, 178.



revoked their curses. The stone where the curses had been carved was thrown into the sea, its contents forever canceled and the stone purified<sup>21</sup>.

Some months later, Alcibiades took advantage of another opportunity to showcase his new, positive image and right his wrongs with the Eleusinian Mysteries. Because of the war and military advice he himself had given, the Spartan king Agis was in control of Northern Attica. Therefore, the pilgrims had to travel to Eleusis by boat, and the traditional ceremony was celebrated with little to no splendor. Alcibiades offered his own soldiers as protection along the way. They led the pilgrims in a safe, decorous, and silent array so that the procession could reach Eleusis by land again, following the traditional fashion. He was then celebrated as a sort of hierophant and mystagogue<sup>22</sup>. This festival involved a purification rite at the Phaleron, as we have seen, which enhanced the idea of Alcibiades' self-purification and expiation.

It was not by chance nor mistake that Alcibiades arrived at Athens on Thargelion 25<sup>th</sup>, during the day of purification when the statue of the main Athenian goddess was being cleansed, before the restitution of clean clothes and temple, jewelry and ornaments. Alcibiades, too, required purification before the restitution of his goods and full rights. This coincidence served to underline his new attitude: like the goddess he was impure but, as a victorious general, he would soon be cleansed and become a new patron of Athens<sup>23</sup>. Thargelion 25<sup>th</sup> was an opportune day to return to Athens, although his enemies spread a negative interpretation of the choice of date.

A later incident might help prove this interpretation. Alcibiades' return, as Xenophon narrates it, seems to have been taken into consideration by the protagonist of later events, Demetrius Poliorcetes. Plutarch says that Demetrios arrived for the first time at Piraeus on Thargelion 26<sup>th</sup> 307, precisely one hundred years after Alcibiades. However, he came the day after the first day of the Plynteria—the day after the date Alcibiades had chosen—and surely not by chance. Demetrius chose the day when the purification was over and the goddess, no longer veiled, was presented in all her splendour. He, too, sought an epiphany akin to that of the goddess, like Alcibiades, but on a more appropriate day of the Plynteria. Indeed, the suggestion was that he did not require purification<sup>24</sup>. Demetrius too waited for some time before going ashore, announcing democracy and negotiating with the Athenians from his ship; according to Plutarch, he then went to Megara, tried to go to Patrae, freed Munichia from the Macedonian garrison and finally entered the city and spoke in the *ecclesia*. Diodorus says that he first went to Athens and then to Megara: this reconstruction is more interesting because, in this case, he might have spoken in the last *ecclesia* of Thargelion, which was held on the 29<sup>th</sup>, just as Alcibiades seems to have done. Demetrius' more arrogant arrival in a better day seems to mark a difference, probably on the basis of Xenophon's account and in order to avoid criticism. None of his actions was a coincidence. This attention to the right

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<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Alc.* 33.3. On the stone see Diod. 13.69.2, who says nothing on the Plynteria.

<sup>22</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.20; Plut. *Alc.* 34.3-6. Verdegem 2001 considers this incident the peak of his glory but also the beginning of his downfall, since the envy of his enemies prevailed from then onwards.

<sup>23</sup> Stuttard 2018, 258-59, though in a novelistic tone, is right in considering the Plynteria a day of rest for the city, awaiting renewal: "So it was with a real sense of renewal that, within days of his arrival, Alcibiades found himself first in the agora".

<sup>24</sup> Plut. *Dem.* 8.5. Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 141, argues that this happened in the second day of the festival, and that the statue was still under purification. However, comparison with Demetrius' arrival allows us to rule that out. Rose 2018, 266, recalling Alcibiades' return, underlines Demetrius' choice of a more appropriate day, saying that "the synchronism of Demetrius' triumphant arrival and the celebration of the Plynteria forged a connection between Demetrius and the patron goddess of the city".



moment to approach Athens might support the idea that Alcibiades, too, had carefully planned his return date, choosing the moment that best suited him: in his case, the period of purification, in an appropriate low profile.

Scholars have often compared some famous, contemporary tragedies with Alcibiades’ exile and return, although stretching the texts at times to fit their needs<sup>25</sup>. It cannot be denied that the problem of calling back a banished citizen, a courageous and effective general, in a moment of great peril, which is the plot of the *Philoctetes*, perfectly suits the political climate of 409 (the date of the tragedy), when Alcibiades’ return had already been decided but not yet enacted. The next year, Euripides’ *Orestes* was presented with the story of Orestes’ return and acquittal by Athenian judges: it was the tragedy of a hero charged with a “sacred” crime. The *Phoenician Women* also treated the theme of exile and return, possibly alluding to Alcibiades’ situation<sup>26</sup>. We could add another drama to this list, though from a different point of view, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*. This play narrates the journey of Orestes and Pilades to Tauris and their encounter with Iphigeneia, now a priestess of a local goddess whose statue Orestes had to steal, on orders from Apollo, to be purified from his sins. After the recognition, most of the plot consists of the planning of their flight from Tauris and the deceit of the local king Thoas: Iphigenia told him she had to go to the sea and purify the statue and the Greek prisoners who had touched it, as the sea “washes away all evils” (1188-1233). Once at the seashore, they managed to escape and the tragedy ends with Athena ordering Orestes to Athens. The statue of the local goddess is said to be of heavenly origin: this detail surely reminded the Athenian audience of the most important statue of Athena dedicated on the Acropolis, likewise fallen from heaven<sup>27</sup>. And the statue purified by the sea must have also recalled the Plynteria festival<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, Orestes, too, required purification. Alcibiades’ well-orchestrated return seems to be in harmony with a cleansing of recent, tragic inspiration. The drama, dated around 417-412<sup>29</sup>, tells a similar story to that of Alcibiades’ return and purification: as a final consideration, we might wonder if this play suggested Alcibiades’ supporters a similar return to Athens, employing purification and a statue of a goddess fallen from the heavens.

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<sup>25</sup> Bearzot 2008; Vickers 2008. Bibliography in Saïd 2019, who underestimates the search for contemporary allusions in tragedies and carries scepticism much too far.

<sup>26</sup> Bearzot 1999 sees in this tragedy a special homage to Thrasiboulos, one of the promoters of Alcibiades’ return.

<sup>27</sup> Eur. *Iph. T.* 87-88; on the Athenian statue, Paus. 1.26.6.

<sup>28</sup> The tragedy recounts the aition of the cult of Artemis Tauropolos at Halai, as the statue was then brought in Euboea. This cult is also attested at Amphipolis, where it was probably introduced by Athenian colonists, particularly by their oecist Hagnon: Mari 2012. He was of the deme of Stiria, which was close to Halai and Brauron, where Iphigeneia settles at the end of the drama. Interestingly, this was also the deme of Trasiboulos, one of the democratic supporters of Alcibiades’.

<sup>29</sup> Many similarities invite comparison with *Helen* (412 B.C.): recent discussion in Parker 2016, lxxvi-lxxxx; Hall 2013, xxx-xxxi; Kiriakou 2006, 41.

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# Caesarism in Ancient Rome?

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**Abstract:** This paper offers a reconsideration of the concept of ‘Caesarism’, charts its presence and development in the modern historiography on ancient Rome, and argues for its validity to the understanding of the history of the late Roman Republic and the early Principate.

**Keywords:** Caesarism; Julius Caesar; Augustus; Late Roman Republic; Roman Principate; Roman political culture; history of classical scholarship.

alla cara memoria di Leandro Polverini (1935-2023)

1. There are at least two explanations for the question mark in the title of this paper. The word ‘Caesarism’ has no equivalents in Greek or Latin: it is a modern invention, first devised in German and French, and then readily taken up in other European languages. That does not necessarily invalidate it as an analytic category, but it is worth bearing in mind that its use entails resorting to an etic category, rather than an emic one: it exists in the eyes of the observer, but does not belong in the cultural and intellectual landscape of the culture it aspires to discuss. The terms of its application, then, require especially careful definition. The debate on how to carry out this operation has had a complex development, and our question mark also reflects that. Arnaldo Momigliano forcefully argued that Caesarism is an important theme of the history of political thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but has no value to the understanding of Roman history.<sup>1</sup> The concept of ‘illegitimate monarchy, built on a twofold military and political basis’ (to use Momigliano’s working definition), is alien to Graeco-Roman political thought.<sup>2</sup> Bluntly put, there is no such thing as ancient Caesarism.

This influential view is based on some interpretative assumptions, and warrants close reconsideration, not least because the debate on the political culture of the Roman Republic has known significant developments over the last half century or so. Revisiting the dossier is also relevant to the appreciation of Caesarism in a broad diachronic perspective: in order to make sense of how Romieu, Proudhon or Weber understood Caesarism, it might be useful to get a clearer account of what the basic terms of the strategy of Caesar, or indeed of the Caesars, were. ‘Caesarism’ (whether ancient or modern) sits on the cusp between practice and ideology, and stands out as a powerful example of their fundamental integration. It is surely far-fetched to regard it as a political doctrine, not unlike Marxism or liberalism, although the argument has been made in some important discussions, such as those by Jean-

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<sup>1</sup> Momigliano 1956 (= 1960, 273-282). On Caesarism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Baehr 1998; Cervelli 2004; Prutsch 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Momigliano 1956, 220 (= 1960, 273): ‘una monarchia non legittima, a duplice base militare e popolare’.

Baptiste-Victor Coquille in the 1870s and by Yann Le Bohec in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> However, the closer one starts looking at how the realities of power operate and play out, the more necessary it becomes to tease out the conceptual assumptions that underlie them, the expectations that are set upon those in power, the values and discourses to which those who seek and hold power make appeal to, and indeed even the arguments of those who oppose them. A further complication should be considered in this connection. In turning to the Roman case as a blueprint of Caesarism, it is important not to lose sight of the longevity of the imperial model, and of the complex set of changes that it underwent. Otherwise put, it is important to differentiate between Roman imperial practice and ideology at the time when the regime was well established, and in the phase that leads up to its formation and its early history: between what may be termed imperatorial ideology and what may be defined imperial ideology.<sup>4</sup>

When we speak of Roman emperors we are of course taking a degree of terminological liberty: the *imperator* is the victorious commander, while the emperor is typically referred to as *princeps*, or indeed as *Caesar*. The link with Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus is unfailingly stated even by the emperors who have no direct kinship ties with them – it is a form of asserting legitimacy by a claim to continuity; the way in which the Roman adoption system operates facilitates the task. There is in fact a margin of ambiguity on which Caesar should be seen as the Caesar to which reference is made when we speak about Caesarism: whether the consul and dictator who was killed on the Ides of March of 44 BCE, or his adoptive son, C. Caesar Octavianus, who held on to power for over four decades, and whose name Augustus, which he took up in 27 BCE, also became a standard feature of imperial nomenclature until Late Antiquity.<sup>5</sup> We shall need to come back to some key distinctions and tensions between Caesar and Augustus, and their relevance to a discussion of Caesarism.

2. Our more immediate concern, though, is to identify whether it may be possible to identify a *modus operandi* that is distinctly Caesarist, or may credibly be applied to sole rulership in Roman political culture. While there is no word conveying the concept of Caesarism in Greek or Latin, a passage of Cassius Dio – epitomised by Xiphilinus – shows that the behaviour of a Caesar was defined with sufficient clarity, and that a single term could effectively capture it. The story is worth relating in some detail. During his stay at Alexandria, in 70 CE, Vespasian imposed a tax of six obols on the local residents; a crowd protested that decision vehemently, angering the emperor; Titus intervened, and persuaded his father to show forgiveness. The response of the crowd, though, was even more provocative (65.9.1):

ἐκεῖνοι δ' αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀπέσχοντο ἀλλὰ μέγα πάνυ ἄθροοι ἐν συνόδῳ τινὶ κοινῇ πρὸς τὸν Τίτον ἐξεβόησαν, εἰπόντες αὐτὸ τοῦτο 'συγγινώσκομεν αὐτῷ· οὐ γὰρ οἶδε καισαρεύειν.' καὶ οἱ μὲν οὕτω τότε ἔρριψοκινδύνουν, καὶ τῆς ἀσελγείας, ὅφ' ἥς αἰεὶ ποτε κακῶς ἀπαλλάσσουσιν, ἄδην ἐνεφοροῦντο, ἢ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐπιεικείᾳ ἀποχρώμενοι· ὁ δὲ ἐκείνους μὲν εἶα...

Titus, however, begged that they might be forgiven and Vespasian spared them. Yet they would not let him alone, but in a crowded assembly all loudly

<sup>3</sup> Coquille 1872; Le Bohec 1999.

<sup>4</sup> On 'imperatorial ideology' cf. Assenmaker 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Krebs 2023, 49.



shouted in chorus at Titus these words: ‘We forgive him; for he knows not how to play the Caesar.’ So the Alexandrians at that time went on with these foolhardy demonstrations, took their fill without restraint of that impudent licence which is always working to their detriment, and abused the good nature of the emperor. But Vespasian soon ceased to notice them. (transl. E. Cary, LCL)

The crowd of Alexandria, then, appeared to have a clear idea of what sort of conduct could be expected of a Caesar, and even had a word for it: *kaisareuein*. In its role-assignment strategy, fiscal mildness was part of the package. This is a notable case, but an isolated one, and it is worth noting that it involves a provincial audience.<sup>6</sup>

Another Greek term – *apokaisarousthai* – captures the idea of a set definition of imperial behaviour. It is attested only once, and in an exceptional source like the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, which are both a work of great literary and conceptual sophistication and a text that was not intended for circulation during the author’s lifetime (6.30.1-5).

Ὅρα μὴ ἀποκαισαρωθῆς, μὴ βαφῆς· γίνεται γάρ. τήρησον οὖν σεαυτὸν ἀπλοῦν, ἀγαθόν, ἀκέραιον, σεμνόν, ἄκομψον, τοῦ δικαίου φίλον, θεοσεβῆ, εὐμενῆ, φιλόστοργον, ἐρρωμένον πρὸς τὰ πρόποντα ἔργα. ἀγώνισαι, ἵνα τοιοῦτος συμμείνης, οἷόν σε ἠθέλησε ποιῆσαι φιλοσοφία. αἰδοῦ θεούς, σῶζε ἄνθρώπους. βραχύς ὁ βίος· εἰς καρπὸς τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς, διάθεσις ὅσα καὶ πράξεις κοινωνικαί. πάντα ὡς Ἀντωνίνου μαθητής· τὸ ὑπὲρ τῶν κατὰ λόγον πρασσομένων εὐτονον ἐκείνου καὶ τὸ ὁμαλὲς πανταχοῦ καὶ τὸ ὅσιον καὶ τὸ εὖδιον τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τὸ μείλιχον καὶ τὸ ἀκενόδοξον καὶ τὸ περὶ τὴν κατάληψιν τῶν πραγμάτων φιλότιμον·

See thou be not Caesarified, nor take that dye, for there is the possibility. So keep thyself a simple and good man, uncorrupt, dignified, plain, a friend of justice, god-fearing, gracious, affectionate, manful in doing thy duty. Strive to be always such as Philosophy minded to make thee. Revere the Gods, save mankind. Life is short. This only is the harvest of earthly existence, a righteous disposition and social acts. Do all things as a disciple of Antoninus. Think of his constancy in every act rationally undertaken, his invariable equability, his piety, his serenity of countenance, his sweetness of disposition, his contempt for the bubble of fame, and his zeal for getting a true grip of affairs. (transl. A. S. L. Farquaharson)

Farquaharson’s translation ‘being Caesarified’ conveys the sense of a process of transformation; it does not quite capture the idea of full transformation that is conveyed by the prefix *apo*.<sup>7</sup> In this passage Marcus is keen not to let himself be fully absorbed by the demands of his imperial role, and to retain a degree of human and intellectual authenticity.

<sup>6</sup> The wording of the Alexandrians’ quip is reported in identical terms in the excerpts from Petrus Patricius in the *excerpta Vaticana*: see Boissevain 1901, *ad loc.* For an account of the (fraudulent) imitation of a powerful man in Cassius Dio see 57.16.3–4 (about Clemens and Agrippa), with Christoforou 2023, 226–228.

<sup>7</sup> In a forthcoming contribution Antonio Pistellato will analyse this text in greater detail: I am very grateful to him for sharing a draft. This passage is referenced, but not discussed in Momigliano 1956, 242 n. 24 (= 1960, 281 n. 24).

This does not amount to a renunciation of his role, nor to an indictment or a negative statement of the underpinning ideology. It is a warning against the pitfalls of power, a call to follow the positive model of his predecessor Antoninus Pius, and a summary of the opposition between the Caesar and the man. In no way should it be seen as the statement of an anti-Cesarist vision.

We do not find other compound words involving Caesar or Augustus, whether in Greek or Latin. However, a precedent shows that the behaviour of a political figure could be clearly identified as a recognisable type, and could even prompt the creation of a neologism. When Cicero mused in a letter to Atticus on the behaviour of Pompey in the early stages of the civil war (April 49 BCE), he said that his mind was ‘Sullanising’, *sullaturit animus eius* (9.10.6): he was showing patterns of behaviour that were closely comparable to those of Sulla three decades earlier, and was threatening violence and proscriptions. The use of that verb (a hapax, yet again) has a strong ironic streak, but is no mere wordplay: it is an attempt to capture a distinctive, and potentially subversive mode of using and deploying power. Precisely because it was possible to explicitly articulate that possibility, it is all the more remarkable that such linguistic play does not appear to have occurred more often. Another comparable, if less neatly relevant case may also be invoked. In February 50 BCE, Cicero wrote a long letter to Ap. Claudius Pulcher, his predecessor in the governorship of Cilicia, with whom organising a handover meeting had proved surprisingly difficult. In a vaguely polemical aside, he stressed that both Claudius and another former governor of the province, P. Cornelius Lentulus, belonged to distinguished families (unlike him). He captured their status with the terms *Appietas* and *Lentulitas*: two words that have clear descriptive value, but may also be regarded as hinting more generally to a certain patrician haughtiness.<sup>8</sup>

Such a meagre harvest should not lead to the conclusion that no attempts were made in antiquity to construct a definition of what the power of Caesar and the Caesars was about. A number of ancient sources present us with influential reflections on this count: the *Panegyric* of Pliny the Younger is a central reference point, in which the celebration of Trajan’s outstanding qualities is also a carefully hedged attempt to define his duties and contain his power;<sup>9</sup> Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium* offers an insight into a provincial response to imperial power and ideology in the Julio-Claudian period.<sup>10</sup> The balance of the surviving evidence, though, is slanted towards accounts of imperial power after its consolidation. What remains relatively less clearly defined is the tension between the process that leads one to seize power – the Caesarian mode, so to speak – and the dynamics that enable one to retain it – the Augustan one.

3. It is crucial to put these general coordinates to the test of the specific historical experience, and to attempt a summary of what is distinctive about the cases of Julius Caesar and Augustus, and the strategies through which they secured supremacy. Inevitably, much of it will rehearse familiar – if not always uncontroversial – ground. Caesar achieved power at the end of a civil war: the basic condition that enabled his victory was the ability to lead his army to prevail in a conflict against an army of fellow-citizens. The civil war with Pompey and the majority of the senatorial order was the outcome of a long-drawn process of political tension

<sup>8</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 3.7.5: *ullam Appietatem aut Lentulitatem ualere apud me plus quam ornamenta uirtutis existimas?* For this reading see e.g. Syme 1939, 45.

<sup>9</sup> See Morford 1992; Wilkinson 2012, 21–30.

<sup>10</sup> Christoforou 2021.

and instability, which brought to its extreme consequences the heavily competitive setup through which the Roman nobility had been operating for generations. Caesar had gained control of his army under a provincial command that was entrusted to him on the basis of a piece of legislation: due process had been followed, although the duration of his provincial term was at odds with the well-established constitutional practice.<sup>11</sup> This tension between tradition and exception is productive and problematic in equal measure, and is an especially distinctive feature of Caesar's strategy. When Caesar articulated the case for civil war, in January 49 BCE, he based it on two eminently traditional principles: the defence of his own standing, his *dignitas*, which his enemies were determined to undermine; and the protection of the prerogatives of the tribunes of the plebs, after the decision of the Senate to declare his allies Scribonius Curio and Mark Antony public enemies.

Another key tenet of Caesar's strategy is his power of persuasion, which crucially supports his military leadership. On the one hand, there is his ability as a speaker, which rests on a talent for reading the moment: in 47 BCE, when a mutiny broke out among his soldiers, he famously addressed them as *Quirites*, 'Romans', fellow-citizens, rather than *commilitones*, 'fellow-soldiers', instantly marking a distance;<sup>12</sup> that deceptively simple gesture led to a marked change in the mood of the audience, and resolved the crisis. On the other, Caesar builds much of the consensus that supports him on a diffused use of wealth: first through gifts to the Roman plebs, dating back to the early stages of his political career, and then through donations to the soldiery and in a major building programme in the city of Rome, enabled by the accumulation of war booty during the Gallic campaign.<sup>13</sup> His will provided for a substantial cash donation to each plebeian.<sup>14</sup> Again, that was far from unparalleled: elections were very expensive affairs, and in the late Republic much of the Roman political elite was heavily indebted. Caesar, however, developed that connection between wealth and political strategy to an exceptional extent, and with an unprecedented degree of consistency.

Caesar's victory is followed by a comprehensive resettlement of the institutional setup of the Republic; however, that does not lead to the undoing of the established framework of elective magistracies. Caesar's prominence is starkly shown by his tenure of a number of consulships and dictatorships, but the other magistracies are kept in existence, and remain an important venue of competition for the political elite. Caesar turns the dictatorship (traditionally a magistracy to be used in emergencies) into an office without a set end point, just before his intended departure for a campaign against the Parthians: a choice that is best understood as a way of avoiding the need to renew it during his absence, but undoubtedly marked a clear departure from established practice.<sup>15</sup> The scholarly debate on Caesar's aims is of relative importance here. For our purposes it suffices to note that a complex balance of new and traditional elements was devised, even though it was not fully established by the time Caesar was killed. There is a further level of complexity: the scale of the honours and distinctions that Caesar received during his lifetime, which included the creation of a cult in

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<sup>11</sup> On the degree of senatorial oversight under the terms of the *lex Vatinia* see Morstein-Marx 2021, 176-177, 586-587.

<sup>12</sup> Sources and discussion in van der Blom 2016, 175.

<sup>13</sup> Early gifts: Plut. *Caes.* 5.8. Purchase of land in Rome for major building projects: Cic. *Att.* 4.16.8; Plin. *Nat.* 36.103; Suet. *DJ* 26.2.

<sup>14</sup> His adoptive son took charge of the implementation of that crucial clause: Aug. *RG* 15.1; Suet. *DJ* 83.2; Plut. *Ant.* 16.2, *Brut.* 20.3; App. *BC* 2.143, 3.88; Cass. Dio 43.21.3, 44.35.3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the important recent discussion in Morstein-Marx 2021, 532-537.

his honour. Caesar is undoubtedly a foundational figure in the history of the so-called imperial cult; his strategy on this front, however, should be understood as the original development of a tradition of civic distinction and honours that was strongly embedded in Roman Republican culture, and was in turn complicated and diversified by the interaction with Greek contexts.

A new use of political violence; an effective and often obfuscating political language; a robust institutional vision; the accumulation and use of wealth; new ways of defining and celebrating achievement. These elements are central to the rise and success of Caesar, and are relevant to the understanding of the motives of those who brought about his demise.<sup>16</sup> They are also central, in various ways, to any modern attempts to define Caesarism in different historical settings. It is less clear, though, whether they should be understood as aspects of a coherent ideology. From the outbreak of the civil war in January 49 BCE Caesar pursued a clear plan; it would not be at all prudent, though, to trace it back to the start of his political trajectory. Caesar lived at a time when unprecedented opportunities for political advancement presented themselves within the space of just over a decade; he was able to rethink aspects of his strategy in the light of those circumstances. There is much to be taken seriously about the aspects of the ancient tradition that emphasise the speed and effectiveness of Caesar's actions. Anecdotes such as those on his ability to lead the army from Rome to Geneva in eight days in March 58 BCE, or his reported skill in dictating up to seven letters at once further contribute to the construction of an exceptionally effective leadership.<sup>17</sup> As Luca Grillo has noted, *celeritas* is a leading theme of Caesar's account of the civil war: not simply speed in itself, but competently managed speed.<sup>18</sup> A further aspect must be borne in mind: Caesar was one of the most original and accomplished intellectuals of his time. He wrote historical works, tragedies, a political pamphlet against Cato, a treatise on astronomical matters;<sup>19</sup> unlike Cicero, though, he did not engage directly in political theory.

This does not make him an unreflective political operator, not did late Republican politics unfold in an ideological vacuum. There were different, and indeed competing views on how the polity should be run, and much of the political struggles of the period can be traced to those disagreements of principle. However, the Roman political language tends to revolve around some key themes and principles, which are raised and pursued in closely comparable terms by figures on different sides of the argument. Ronald Syme influentially invoked the weight of 'political catchwords' in this period, and shed light on how they became the focus of competition between different factional agendas, and a valuable viewpoint on the tension between continuity and change.<sup>20</sup> Robert Morstein-Marx has spoken of the 'ideological monotony' that pervades the political debate of the period, and its tendency to revolve around some key themes: an appeal to the primacy of the people is not an indication of allegiance to the *populares*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the role of violence in Caesar's political strategy in 59 BCE cf. Rafferty 2022, 645-650.

<sup>17</sup> Geneva: Plut. *Caes.* 17.5. Seven letters: Pliny *Nat.* 7.91; cf. Plut. *Caes.* 17.4, 7. On the role of anecdotes in the construction of the imperial persona cf. Christoforou 2023, 24-28.

<sup>18</sup> Grillo 2012, 14-36.

<sup>19</sup> Suet. *DJ* 56.

<sup>20</sup> Syme 1939, 168-181. On this aspect of Syme's work see Santangelo 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Morstein-Marx 2004, 230-240.

4. The case of Caesar Augustus, which is both closely related to that of Julius Caesar and hardly comparable to it, is further testimony to the value of this interpretative approach.<sup>22</sup> We are presented with over four decades of political supremacy, rather less than a quinquennium, and with a much larger and more diverse body of evidence. Augustus is not as deeply engaged in intellectual work as Julius Caesar was, but the autobiographical text that he made public right after his death and was published in a number of epigraphical copies in Rome and across the empire did mark the emergence of a new kind of monumentalised historical writing.<sup>23</sup> The *Res Gestae* provide a crisp summary of how Augustus mapped out his rise to power, and are directly relevant to our discussion. The starting point of that account focuses on the initiative that Octavian took in a private capacity and at his own expense when he was barely nineteen, restoring liberty to the republic from the oppression of the dominance of a faction.<sup>24</sup> Two complementary aspects are brought into focus: on the one hand, the personal intervention that resolves a crisis; on the other, the stated commitment to going beyond and above factional politics. Violence is asserted as a factor of order; once its mission is accomplished, the Senate recognises its significance by inviting Octavian to join its ranks and granting him major honours. As has often been noted, the opening chapter of the *Res Gestae* is also a prime example of obfuscation.<sup>25</sup> It glosses over the clash between Octavian and the Senate, and his decision to march on Rome in August 43 BCE, after he was denied the right to put forward his candidacy to the consulship; it does not make any hint to the likely involvement of Octavian in the deaths of the consuls of that year; and does not acknowledge that the whole process leading to his rise to power was a patent violation of the established constitutional order. Augustus consistently sketches for himself the image of a reluctant first citizen, who turns down a number of magistracies, in spite of the explicit request of the Senate. The settlement of January 27 BCE, whereby C. Caesar Octavianus takes on the name Augustus and his position as *princeps* is formally defined by the Senate, is framed as an act of restraint and renunciation on his part, through which he handed back his powers to the Senate and the people, and was honoured in return.<sup>26</sup> This rhetoric of restraint and selfless service played out in a text whose main copy was inscribed on bronze tablets right outside the mausoleum that Augustus had built in the Campus Martius: a building that stood out in the monumental landscape of the city, and explicitly harked back to the architectural traditions of the Hellenistic monarchies. Contemporary viewers will have been acutely aware of that tension.

The establishment of the new regime is presented as the restoration of the republican order: not just of its spirit, but of its practice too. The honours, distinctions, and powers that Augustus receives are conferred upon him by the people and the Senate, in recognition of his merits and generosity. All the key principles that we saw at play in Caesar's strategy are discernible: the appeal to ancestral tradition; the use of wealth as a vector of political action and as a marker of moral qualities; the pointed claim of having been driven by necessity, rather than by personal ambition. Even the willingness to use clemency towards one's enemies is stressed, along with the commitment to following due process. Augustus stresses

<sup>22</sup> On the survivals of Caesar in the Augustan period cf. Devillers - Sion-Jenkins 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Elsner 1996 remains a seminal contribution.

<sup>24</sup> RG 1.1: *annos undeuiginti natus exercitum priuato consilio et priuata impensa comparauit, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem uindicauit* ('When I was nineteen years old, I got ready on my own initiative and at my own expense the army by means of which I set the state free from the slavery imposed by the conspirators', transl. A. Cooley).

<sup>25</sup> Hodgson 2014 is a valuable read on the 'Republican idiom' of the opening section of RG.

<sup>26</sup> RG 34.



his loyalty to the memory of his adoptive father, and indeed identifies it as a motive of his actions: it is a moral quality that feeds into his devotion to traditional values. However, unlike Caesar, he steers clear from defining his power in terms that might be explicitly seen as monarchic. The emphasis is shifted from the holding and use of magisterial power to the assertion of his standing and authoritativeness. Augustus codifies his power more as a form of patronage than as a personal regime.

Much of the best modern scholarship has undermined and ultimately unmasked this account, which on close scrutiny emerges as tendentious as it appears factual and neutral. Augustus' power is rooted in a civil war: it is a military monarchy that rests on an unprecedented accumulation of financial resources. Far from owing its existence to the continuing consent of the people and the Senate, it is a personal regime that establishes a dynastic profile. However, the complex strategy through which Augustus articulates its construction is no mere superstructure. It is a hegemonic process that creates a distinctive balance between continuity and change, and brings about a fundamentally original outcome in the history of the polities in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>27</sup> The longevity of the regime that Augustus established was crucially enabled by the compromise that it struck in codifying its self-representation along modes that were not exclusively, and indeed not predominantly monarchic.

In the foundational text of the history of Caesarism as a modern political concept, Auguste Romieu's *L'ère des Césars*, Augustus receives greater attention than Caesar – *et pour cause*.<sup>28</sup> There is indeed good reason to regard his strategy as a valid example of Caesarism, and not simply because the name *Caesar* was so central to his rise, and remained part of his official nomenclature throughout.

5. Assessing the applicability of the concept of Caesarism in Roman history also entails a discussion of its trajectory in modern historiography. The risk of undesirable intersections between Roman and contemporary politics was already apparent in the discussions of Caesarism that appeared in the years immediately following the early occurrences of the term. Theodor Mommsen produced a famously laudatory account of Julius Caesar, his personal qualities, and his role in the political history of the Roman Republic. In the second edition of his *Römische Geschichte* (1857) he felt the need to make clear that his admiration for Caesar did not entail a positive judgment on Caesarism as a modern political system: quite the contrary, the history of the late Roman Republic is an indictment of absolute monarchy.<sup>29</sup> The solution devised by Caesar was a lesser evil, but an evil nonetheless. The rule of the Julio-Claudians would go on to show that beyond doubt. Famously, and tellingly, Mommsen did not continue his history into the Principate.

Mommsen's Caesar is a statesman of exceptional skill and vision. This portrait had considerable influence, well beyond professional scholarship. Half a century later, another account of late Republican Rome had a comparable impact, although it was not written by a professional historian: Guglielmo Ferrero's *Grandezza e decadenza di Roma*. Caesar is singled out as the greatest demagogue in history: an exceptionally capable revolutionary leader, who mobilises the forces of trading groups against those of traditional agrarian society. He is no statesman, though, and it is paradoxical that emperors of much later periods, operating in

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<sup>27</sup> For an attempt to apply the category of hegemony to the Augustan settlement cf. Smith 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Romieu 1850, 7, 34, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Mommsen 1857, 458-459. See the invaluable discussion in Polverini 2011.



altogether different contexts, took up his name.<sup>30</sup> Remarkably, Ferrero did not invoke the concept of Caesarism. In other works (notably *L'Europa giovane* and *Il militarismo*) he did discuss modern Caesarism at great length, and identified it as a key operating principle in modern politics.<sup>31</sup> He found no room for it, though, in his history of the Roman world.

Ferrero's choice is all the more noteworthy since in a certain phase in the history of the modern historiography on the Roman world the term 'Caesarism' was used rather unproblematically, and its application could in fact be broadened to the whole of imperial history. That was the view that the political scientist Ernest Baker put forward in 1923 in his contribution to a collective volume entitled *The Legacy of Rome*. His assessment is worth quoting in full, not least because it provides another sharp working definition:<sup>32</sup>

We may define Caesarism as a form of autocracy, backed by an army, which rests formally on some manner of plebiscite and actually – so long, at any rate, as it is successful – on a measure of popular support. So defined Caesarism is identical with Bonapartism. But there is a fundamental difference. Bonapartism showed itself personal and transitory, an ephemeral chase of flying glory: Caesarism became a permanent institution. Modified and veiled at first by the policy of Augustus, but showing itself clearly as it grew firmer and stronger, it controlled the Mediterranean world for centuries. The reasons for its permanence were partly negative, but largely positive. There was no nationalism abroad to oppose a non-national State: there were only dying City-States which had lost the instinct for autonomy, and tribal formations which had not learned to cherish political ambitions. There was no democratic spirit in the air to wither an absolute government: the temper of the times was one of acquiescence, and even of gratitude.

Fifteen years later, in *The Roman Revolution*, Ronald Syme used the word only once, in touching upon the hostility of the senatorial nobility to Octavian, the 'young adventurer who had made his way by treachery', and who 'represented Caesarism and Revolution in all that was most brutal and odious'.<sup>33</sup> It is a single occurrence, but a revealing one, because it draws attention to the contentious nature of any Caesarist dynamic: it entails emphatic winners and aggrieved losers. The revolution that Syme envisaged was firmly focused on the political domain: if it had a social dimension, it was confined to the change of personnel in the Roman political elite that the emergence of the new regime enabled and fostered. Syme was not keen on heavily relying on theoretical coordinates – let alone spelling out those he did resort to. There is no doubt, though, that he regarded Caesarism as a valid analytic category. In the 1960s he started working on a book entitled *The Triumph of Caesarism*, whose coverage started in mid-first century BCE, with the emergence of Pompey the Great as a major political player, and continued until the end of Augustus' reign.<sup>34</sup> The envisaged final chapter of the volume was entitled 'The Apologia': the book was not brought to completion, but the final chapter of Syme's last major work, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (1986) is entitled 'The Apologia for the

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<sup>30</sup> Ferrero 1904, 514-515.

<sup>31</sup> See De Francesco 2006, 77-80.

<sup>32</sup> Baker 1923, 57-58.

<sup>33</sup> Syme 1939, 222.

<sup>34</sup> Santangelo 2014.

Principate', and is a remarkable summary of the arguments that were invoked to make the case for the new regime and assert its desirability – 'a shabby chapter in the 'history of ideas''.<sup>35</sup>

However, Syme's position is rather unusual in the context of the historiography of the second half of the twentieth century, in this as in so many other respects. Caesarism had reasonably wide currency in the scholarship of the second half of the 1800s and in the early 1900s;<sup>36</sup> it later faded from view as, on the one hand, scholars become more reluctant to draw neat analogies between ancient and modern politics and, on the other, the fascination with the political genius of Caesar and Augustus left room for the dry critical assessment of their agendas and language. Syme, with his uncompromising focus on the realities of power and the treacherousness of political language, played a major role in bringing about that shift. Shortly after the end of World War II, Lily Ross Taylor devoted a whole chapter of her study of *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* to the ideological dimension of the political controversy of the period, and to the exploration of Caesarism and Catonism. For her, Caesarism is predicated on the identification between Caesar and the Roman people, through a somewhat contrived reading of a passage of the *De bello ciuili*.<sup>37</sup> Caesar aimed at a 'frank monarchy', and found its neat ideological opposite in Catonism, which upheld and promoted the Republican tradition; Augustus 'veiled it in republicanism, in Catonism, if you like'.<sup>38</sup> At its core it remained Caesarism, though. In recent work there are occasional occurrences of the term, in a rather narrow and factual sense. 'Caesarism' can indicate the political movement that Caesar led, the agenda that it pursued, and its short-term legacy: that is the use that two distinguished Oxford historians, Andrew Lintott and Barbara Levick, resort to in their contributions to a 2009 *Companion to Caesar*, and a similar choice is made in some important studies by Roberto Cristofoli.<sup>39</sup> It seems fair to say, though, that Caesarism has largely run its course as a category of historiographical analysis; or, at any rate, that it is hardly ever uttered in polite scholarly company. The potential for anachronism seems too strong for comfort.

6. However, the case for jettisoning Caesarism is not compelling. In what precedes it has come into focus as a useful morphological category: as the outcome of the convergence of different patterns of political behaviour, and possibly as a political method, in which personal ambition, violence, persuasion, wealth, speed, vision, all play a central and necessary role. Julius Caesar embodies it effectively, and there is a considerable body of evidence for his actions. There is no intrinsic reason, though, why he should be regarded as the inventor of that pathway to power, or Caesarism should be viewed as a distinctively, or indeed exclusively Roman development. In principle it would be quite legitimate to read

<sup>35</sup> Syme 1986, 441.

<sup>36</sup> Yavetz 1971 and 1983, 10-57 remain essential reading.

<sup>37</sup> Caes. BC 1.22.3: *ut se et populum Romanum factione paucorum oppressum in libertatem vindicaret*, 'to assert the freedom of himself and the Roman people who had been oppressed by a small faction'.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor 1949, 180. Cf. the stern criticism in Momigliano 1956, 241 (= 1960, 280): 'termini non intelligibili a un antico e non esatti per un moderno'.

<sup>39</sup> Lintott 2009, 79; Levick 2009, 211; Cristofoli 2008, 123 and 2022, 18. Luciano Canfora's longstanding and highly original engagement with Caesarism (ancient and modern) would warrant a separate discussion: its latest instalment is Canfora 2023, 15-19.

Greek tyranny through the lenses of the Caesarist paradigm.<sup>40</sup> To probe that possibility further, we should turn to a 1940s debate between two distinguished political philosophers.

In his review of Leo Strauss' *On Tyranny* (1948) Eric Voegelin drew a distinction between a constitutional order and a post-constitutional one: while it is meaningful to differentiate between a king and a tyrant in a context in which there still is a constitutional order, it is no longer meaningful to do so after the 'breakdown of constitutional forms in the city-state'.<sup>41</sup> When that occurs, Caesarism intervenes as a necessary development, which is thus fundamentally different from tyranny (necessity, as we have seen, does play an important role in the ideological underpinning of the Augustan settlement). In Voegelin's view, the theorist of rulership in a post-constitutional situation is Machiavelli; the concept does not exist in antiquity. In a riposte to the review Strauss took issue with that contention.<sup>42</sup> The lack of an ancient theory on how post-constitutional regimes operate is partly the outcome of a focus on the best political system, and partly a conscious effort not to undermine the sacrality of the established political order. The distinction between Caesarism and tyranny – between necessary evil and intentional evil – was obvious even in antiquity. Caesarism was based on force, and could look after itself: it needed no theoretical underpinning.

There is an easy, even facile objection to this argument: so much of ancient literature has floundered that it is impossible to state with any confidence that no theoretical reflection ever took shape on a given topic. The isolated appearances of *kaisareuein* and *apokaisarousthai* are a strong warning against rushing to firm conclusions. As Pierre Manent has noted, building on an insight from Montesquieu's *Considérations*, Strauss' model has another limitation: it does not acknowledge that Caesarism is a monarchic regime which intervenes after a republican one, and is thus the outcome of a process of change, which bears the mark of the previous political setup.<sup>43</sup> It never occurs in a vacuum, nor does it neatly follow the emergence of a post-constitutional setup. Rather, Caesar's own case shows that a Caesarist strategy can emerge in a republican context, and play a decisive role in bringing down the republican edifice.

7. Some tentative conclusions may be drawn. The category of Caesarism (understood, in Momigliano's terms, as 'an illegitimate monarchy, built on a twofold military and political basis') has real descriptive value, and can be applied to ancient Rome to capture a distinctive political method, which revolves around the rise to sole power of an individual through a distinctive combination of violence, persuasion, wealth distribution, and institutional change; Julius Caesar is its best-attested example. Like any political programme, it is not devoid of an ideological dimension, but it is first and foremost about certain ways of achieving power and status. What makes Roman Caesarism distinctive is not so much that it marked a return to monarchy after a five century-long republican interlude, but that it occurred in a city-state which had become the centre of a Mediterranean empire. The

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<sup>40</sup> For an early attempt in that vein cf. Schäffle 1896, 486, with the discussion in Baehr 2008, 82-83. Cf. also the explicit, if cursory analogy between some Greek tyrants (Pisistratus, Periander, Pittacus) and Cromwell and 'i due Napoleon' in De Sanctis 1970, 134 (perhaps tellingly, a diary entry, rather than a scholarly piece).

<sup>41</sup> Voegelin 1949, 242. On this exchange see Manent 2010, 145-150.

<sup>42</sup> Strauss 1963, 190-192.

<sup>43</sup> Manent 2010, 207-208. It is far-fetched to argue, though, that Caesarism occurs when a monarchy succeeds a republic that had in turn replaced a monarchy (Manent 2010, 143-144).

strategies devised by Julius Caesar and Octavian had to reckon with that degree of complexity.

Turning Caesarism into a byword for ‘imperial ideology’, or even for ‘Principate’, would be misleading. Applying it to ancient Rome, though, is a productive operation, because it does mark out a significant and distinctive historical pattern of political action. But let us end by flagging up a challenge. If Caesarism is a distinctly possible outcome in a city-state setting, one may wonder how it could be applied to ancient city-states beyond Rome, without necessarily confining the discussion to the ancient Mediterranean. It is a project that awaits to be undertaken. If we were to rid ourselves of the misplaced opposition between Caesarism and tyranny, we might be able to look forward to some new inroads into the understanding of ancient monarchies.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> I have presented aspects of the argument of this paper at the ‘Conceptualising Political Leadership: Towards an Intellectual History of Caesarism’ conference in Göttingen and at a research seminar in Glasgow; I have greatly benefited from the reactions of the audiences on both occasions. I am very grateful to Francesca Antonini, Panayiotis Christoforou, and the *AHB* referees for their comments on earlier versions.

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