

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

Tomasz Zieliński

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)¹. 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 period². 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 challenged³. Some scholars have gone as far as to claim that

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

² On Hieronymus, see Hornblower 1981.

³ 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 end⁴.

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 them⁵. The other scholars have pointed out that he was able to conduct numerous successful sieges⁶. Even Demetrius' activity as a fortifier has recently received researchers' attention who demonstrate his ability in the context of the defence of cities⁷. 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 nickname⁸. 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 achievement⁹. 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

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

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

⁶ O'Sullivan 2009: 84 n. 13; Wheatley 2020.

⁷ Rose 2019.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 BC¹⁰.

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'¹¹. 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 time¹². 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 cities¹³. Even in Polyaeus's *Strategemata* four out of twelve anecdotes related to Demetrius describe how he captured cities¹⁴. 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 career¹⁵. If then, the son of Antigonus was called 'Besiegers of Cities' (Πολιορκητής), not 'Taker of Cities' (Ἐκπολιορκητής), as Arnold Gomme observed long ago¹⁶, it was due to that his successes on this field were beyond doubt of the contemporaries. Demetrius' nickname emphasized much more than that¹⁷.

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')¹⁸. 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 effectiveness¹⁹. 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 works²⁰. He knew that Demetrius' courtesan Lamia was likened ironically by anonymous poet to *helepolis*, and that

¹⁰ 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'.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Plut. *Demetr.* 35.2.

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

¹⁴ Polyaeus. 4.7.3, 5-8.

¹⁵ Wheatley 2020.

¹⁶ Gomme 1945: 17 n. 1.

¹⁷ Cf. Huß 2001: 190.

¹⁸ Plut. *Arist.* 6.2.

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ 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'²¹. 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' character²². 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 epithet²³. 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'²⁴.

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'²⁵. 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'²⁶. As some scholars have recently observed, Plutarch refuses also to credit Poliorcetes for the besieging skills²⁷. He concedes that Demetrius constructed impressive siege machines and worships, but in his biography we never see any of these machines deployed effectively²⁸. Pat Wheatley has even claimed that scholars asserting that Demetrius' nickname was derisory owe something to an emphasis in Plutarch²⁹.

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')³⁰. 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

²¹ 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.

²² Ferrari 2014.

²³ Van Nuffelen 2009: 103–104.

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

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

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

²⁷ Rose 2015: 226–227.

²⁸ Rose 2022: 67–69.

²⁹ Wheatley 2020: 156–157.

³⁰ LSJ s.v. ἀλαζονικός.

Hellenistic kings as Plutarch what begs the question whether he used the *Lives* as a source³¹. 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 source³². 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 away³³. 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 soldiers³⁴. 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

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

³² Jones 1966.

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

³⁴ Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003.

defenders³⁵. The major turning point was Alexander's siege of Tyre which revealed that any walled cities were no longer impregnable³⁶. From that moment on, as Antony McNicoll has demonstrated, the initiative remained very much in the hand of attackers³⁷. 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'³⁸. 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'³⁹. 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 defenders⁴⁰. 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 cities⁴¹.

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' artillery⁴². 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)⁴³. Therefore, sometimes only the threat of using siege engines was sufficient to make the defenders surrender⁴⁴. The most celebrated among them were mobile siege-towers, known as *helepoleis*, especially the one deployed at Rhodes⁴⁵. 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'⁴⁶. 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

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

³⁶ Martin 1996: 117.

³⁷ McNicoll 1997: 47.

³⁸ McNicoll 1997: 212.

³⁹ Armstrong, Trundle 2019: 2.

⁴⁰ For studies on emotions in the Hellenistic period see Chaniotis 2013; 2013a.

⁴¹ Fachard, Harris 2021: 10.

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Diod. 20.102.2; 103.3.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ Plut. *Demetr.* 21.3.1: ῥοίζῳ καὶ τόνῳ πολλῶ.

more vulnerable areas of the city behind them⁴⁷. 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*)⁴⁸.

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 earthquake⁴⁹. 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 point⁵⁰. 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' wrath⁵¹. It might have been even that there was a correlation between the dates during which earthquakes took place and minting coins with Poseidon's image⁵². 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 Tartarus⁵³. 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 Troy⁵⁴. Poseidon's fortification afforded to the defence, and he was both known under the name 'Ενοσίγαιος 'Earthshaker' ('Ενοσίγαιος) and 'Securer' (Ἀσφάλειος) as well⁵⁵. 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 height⁵⁶.

The similarities between Demetrius and Poseidon are interesting, given the presence of this deity on all the silver coinages of Poliorcetes⁵⁷. 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

⁴⁷ Kebrick 2019: 28–29.

⁴⁸ Pimouguet-Pédarros 2003: 311.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ Mylonopoulos 1998; 2006.

⁵¹ Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.4.

⁵² Güney 2015.

⁵³ Hom. *Il.* 21.446–447; Hesiod. *Theog.* 732.

⁵⁴ Hom. *Il.* 7.442; 12.25–27.

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

⁵⁶ Hom. *Od.* 6.9.

⁵⁷ On Demetrius' coinage see Newell 1927.

as merely a reference to Demetrius' naval prowess and ambitions⁵⁸. 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, Poseidon⁵⁹.

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 τύπτω⁶⁰. Yet in Demetrius' case, and his case only, he mostly employs the verb διασείω ('shake violently'), by which the Greeks used to describe an earthquake⁶¹. It is generally acknowledged that Diodorus based his Antigonids-related passages on the work of Hieronymus⁶². 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 injustice⁶³. We must bear in mind that in the *Iliad* Poseidon is depicted as rebellious and competitive towards the king of the gods⁶⁴. Demetrius' nickname was even related to an epic epithet πολίπορθος which Ares and Odysseus carry in Homer⁶⁵. 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,

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

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ LSJ s.v. διασείω; σείω.

⁶² On Diodorus and his sources see Anson 2015: 4–40.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ Maitland 1999, 1–2, 10–11.

⁶⁵ 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 supply⁶⁶. 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 men⁶⁷, his account leaves us with the impression that Poliorcetes does almost everything⁶⁸. 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 ships⁶⁹. '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 ships⁷⁰. The scope of tasks Diodorus ascribes to Demetrius leads to a question: are we still talking about a king – or about an ancient engineer?

⁷¹ 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 sources⁷².

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

⁶⁶ Plut. *Demetr.* 20.1–6.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Diod. 20.83.4; 94.1; 94.3, 96.5.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Diod. 20.83.3–4; 85.1

⁷⁰ Diod. 20.85.3; 88.1; 88.7; 91.2–8; 95.1–4; 97.3; 97.7.

⁷¹ Engineers' role in the Macedonian army, see Karunanithy 2013.

⁷² 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'⁷³. 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 superiority⁷⁴ 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 man⁷⁵. 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 virginity⁷⁶. Sexual potency and beauty of Demetrius is well attested in our sources and played significant part in his royal-self-fashioning and marriage policy⁷⁷. 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 masculinity⁷⁸. 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 him⁷⁹. 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

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

⁷⁴ Pimouguet-Pédarros 2011: 321.

⁷⁵ Chaniotis 2005: 103.

⁷⁶ Chaniotis 2013a: 450.

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

⁷⁸ Chaniotis 2013a: 450–451.

⁷⁹ Lo Presti 2010. Diodor uses this adjective twice (20.92.2; 103.3).

Demetrius⁸⁰. 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 engines⁸¹.

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-fashioning⁸². As such it raises some doubts around Wheatley's conclusion that for Demetrius, *poliorcetics* was only the route to *basileia*⁸³. 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 figures⁸⁴. 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 it⁸⁵. If we follow Pat Wheatley in believing that Lamia died in childbirth after 303/302 BCE⁸⁶, 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'⁸⁷. All the kings laughed at Demetrius, except Lysimachus who as his

⁸⁰ Strootman 2010; Klooster 2020.

⁸¹ 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).

⁸² 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.

⁸³ Wheatley 2020: 159.

⁸⁴ Lape 2004: 62–64.

⁸⁵ Plut. *Demetr.* 27.3–4.

⁸⁶ Wheatley 2003: 34–35.

⁸⁷ 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 Poliorcetes⁸⁸.

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"⁸⁹. 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 BC⁹⁰. 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 digression⁹¹. Furthermore, we know that chronological precision was hardly a priority for him⁹².

These conclusions are supported by Michael Dixon's recent study on Menander's *Perikeiromene* ('The Girl with her Hair Cut Short')⁹³. 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 Ipsus⁹⁴.

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 away⁹⁵. 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 expertise⁹⁶.

⁸⁸ Heckel 1984: 439.

⁸⁹ Plut. *Demetr.* 25.9; Ath. 14.614E–F.

⁹⁰ Ogden 1999: 236 n. 17.

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

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

⁹³ Dixon 2005.

⁹⁴ cf. O'Sullivan 2009: 70.

⁹⁵ Vitr. 10.16.7–8.

⁹⁶ 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 rest⁹⁷. 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 Rhodes⁹⁸. 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 problems⁹⁹. 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 doubtful¹⁰⁰, the latter is well-confirmed: the fact that Demetrius besieged Thebes is attested not only by Plutarch but also preserved fragments from Diodorus' Book 21¹⁰¹.

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 storm¹⁰². 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 siege¹⁰³. 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 actions¹⁰⁴.

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

⁹⁸ Campbell 2006: 84–85, 87, cf. Roby 2016: 107–108.

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

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley 2020: 172 n. 61 calls Athenaeus' anecdote unhistorical.

¹⁰¹ Diod. 21.14.1–2.

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

¹⁰³ Hornblower 1981: 229; Paschidis 2008: 313–314; Rose 2015: 291.

¹⁰⁴ 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 BC¹⁰⁵. 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 enemies¹⁰⁶. 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 siege¹⁰⁷. 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 enemy¹⁰⁸. 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 power¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁵ Murray 2012: 174–175.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Plut. *Demetr.* 20.6.

¹⁰⁷ 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.

¹⁰⁸ Wiemer 2013: 299.

¹⁰⁹ 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 Rhodes¹¹⁰. 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 city¹¹¹. 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 BC¹¹². 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’¹¹³. 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 casting¹¹⁴. 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 dimension¹¹⁵. 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*¹¹⁶. 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 warfare¹¹⁷. In the past, some scholars even went as far as claim that certain technical solutions from the *helepolis* informed the design of the Colossus¹¹⁸. 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

¹¹⁰ General information about the Colossus see Hoepfner 2003; Vedder 2015; Kebrick 2019.

¹¹¹ Kebrick 2019; Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 447.

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

¹¹³ Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 445.

¹¹⁴ Heitmann-Gordon 2017: 392.

¹¹⁵ 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’.

¹¹⁶ Plut. *Demetr.* 20.9; Plin. NH 34.18.41.

¹¹⁷ Kebrick 2019: 27–29.

¹¹⁸ Gabriel 1932.

to leave several of them on the island – as a testimony to their bravery and his power¹¹⁹. In other words, the machines would have become the Demetrius's gift to the citizens of Rhodes¹²⁰. 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 Colossus¹²¹. 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 machines¹²². 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 themselves¹²³. 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 statue¹²⁴. 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 Rhodes¹²⁵. 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

¹¹⁹ Plut. *Demetr.* 20.9.

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

¹²¹ Plin. *NH* 34.18.41.

¹²² *Mirab.* 4.6; Wheatley&Dunn 2020: 445.

¹²³ Ash 2007.

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

¹²⁵ See bibliography in Wheatley 2016: 45–47.

the leading role among the Greek states¹²⁶. 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 Cassander¹²⁷. 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])¹²⁸. 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 gifts¹²⁹. 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 author¹³⁰. 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)¹³¹. Looking at it this way, it is yet another argument in favour of the Demetrius' sobriquet positive connotation.

¹²⁶ 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.

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

¹²⁸ IG VII 2419 = Syll.³ 337 l. 37–40.

¹²⁹ 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.

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

¹³¹ 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.

TOMASZ ZIELIŃSKI

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY IN KRAKOW

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