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SARDANAPAL(L)US IN CICERO AND PHILODEMUS' *ON RHETORIC* BOOK 3*

According to Arrian 2. 5. 2, legend has it that the famous Assyrian king Sardanapal(l)us¹ built the cities Anchiale and Tarsos in a single day.² Specifically, Arrian describes the fortifications of Anchiale as follows:

Ταύτην (i.e. Ἀγχιάλην) δὲ Σαρδανάπαλον κτίσαι τὸν Ἀσσύριον λόγος· καὶ τῷ περιβόλῳ δὲ καὶ τοῖς θεμελίοις τῶν τειχῶν δῆλη ἐστὶ μεγάλη τε πόλις κτισθεῖσα καὶ ἐπὶ μέγα ἐλθοῦσα δυνάμεως.³

In Book 3 of Philodemus' *On Rhetoric*, Sardanapal(l)us is mentioned twice in two papyri (*PHerc.* 240 and *PHerc.* 1095), which belong to the definitive version of this book.⁴ In the first passage, a small fragment now available only as a Neapolitan *disegno* of *PHerc.* 1095, Sardanapal(l)us is said to have fortified the towns of Tarsos and Anchiale.⁵

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¹ For a detailed discussion of Sardanapal(l)us, see the extensive entry in Weißbach 1920.

² Bing 1971, 101 and n. 16.

³ Cf. Ath. 12. 39 (Kaibel).

⁴ A new critical edition of this book, including an introduction and commentary, is under preparation by me in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grant 885222-GreekSchools (H2020, Excellent Science, European Research Council). Sudhaus was the first editor of the book. See Sudhaus 1896, 196–272. For partial reeditions of this book see Hammerstaedt 1992 and Avdoulou 2022.

⁵ *PHerc.* 1095, fr. 3 = Sudhaus 1896, 188.

τῶν πολλα[
 τικου⁶ δο[
 κλέους [
 . . .] μέγα ν[ομίζων
 5 μηδὲν καὶ [τὸν θανμαστὸν
 περίβολον [τῆς πόλε-
 ως κατασκευάσ[ας, καθά-
 περ Ἀγχιάλην [καὶ Τάρ-
 σον ὁ Σαρδανά[παλ(λ)ος.
 10 Καὶ γὰρ εἰ σεμν[ύνονται
 κατὰ τοῦτο, κα[ὶ πολιτι]-
 κὸς ἀνὴρ πᾶς ἄ[ν εἴη

At the beginning of l. 3, the *disegno* hands down the ending of a masculine proper name in -κλῆς or the noun κλέος in genitive. I suggest that the missing name is most likely Themistocles. In Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* 10. 8. 7, we read:⁷

non sunt omnia colligenda quae tu acutissime perspicis, sed
 tamen ea pone ante oculos; iam intelleges id regnum vix se-
 menstre esse posse. Quod si me fefellerit, feram, sicut multi cla-
 rissimi homines in re publica excellentes tulerunt, nisi forte me
Sardanapali vicem in suo lectulo mori malle censueris quam
 <in> exsilio **Themistocleo**. Qui cum fuisset, ut ait Thucydides,
 τῶν μὲν παρόντων δι' ἐλαχίστης βουλῆς κράτιστος γνώμων, τῶν
 δὲ μελλόντων ἐς πλεῖστον τοῦ γενησομένου ἄριστος εἰκαστής,
 tamen incidit in eos casus quos vitasset si eum nihil fefellisset.
 Etsi is erat, ut ait idem, qui τὸ ἄμεινον καὶ τὸ χεῖρον ἐν τῷ ἀφανεῖ
 ἔτι ἑώρα μάλιστα, tamen non vidit nec quo modo Lacedaemo-
 niorum nec quo modo suorum civium invidiam effugeret nec
 quid Artaxerxi pollice<re>tur.

Cicero compares himself to the historical *exempla* of Themistocles and Sardanapal(l)us, who both suffered unfortunate deaths: the first died in his bed,⁸ while the second died in exile. Given a choice

⁶ Most probably πολ[ι]τικου should be restored.

⁷ Shackleton Bailey 1968, 248.

⁸ Cicero follows Cleitarchus' version of Sardanapal(l)us demise. See Shackleton Bailey 1968, 410 and n. 7; below n. 12.

between these two fates, Cicero would prefer a death similar to that of Themistocles. The latter is praised for his insightfulness, yet he is also criticized for failing to escape the jealousy of both the Spartans and his own co-patriots. The association of Themistocles and Sardanapal(l)us in this Ciceronian passage may suggest the presence of Themistocles in the passage of Philodemus' *On Rhetoric*, Book 3, cited above.⁹ Notably, both Sardanapal(l)us and Themistocles are mentioned in that passage for fortifying their cities.

Of course, the contexts of these two testimonies differ: in *Letters to Atticus*, Cicero wonders whether he should act like Sardanapal(l)us or Themistocles. On the other hand, the context in Philodemus is less clear. In the third book of *On Rhetoric*, Philodemus systematically criticizes the views of the Stoic philosopher Diogenes of Babylon, who denied that political orators made great contributions to their cities, considering the Stoic sage to be the only true politician. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether the passage from *On Rhetoric* quoted above reflects the ideas of Diogenes or those of Philodemus himself. As expected, an Epicurean would never approve the fortifications of cities instigated by famous politicians. Notwithstanding, despite being an Epicurean, Philodemus appears to acknowledge the value of political orators, in direct opposition to Diogenes.¹⁰ Thus, in the context of the third book, it would not be surprising if Philodemus appreciated the fortification of cities by Sardanapal(l)us and Themistocles.¹¹

⁹ Another possible supplement could be Περι[κλέους, as Pericles was also renowned for promoting the building of the Long Walls. Nevertheless, the connection between Sardanapallus and Themistocles in Cicero suggests the supplementation of Themistocles' name in the passage from *On Rhetoric*. Moreover, Pericles is never associated with Sardanapal(l)us in the existing sources. Themistocles's foresight, for which he is praised in the Ciceronian passage, led him to propose the construction of the Long Walls. However, a syntactical observation should be made regarding *PHerc.* 1095, 1–7: the genitive of the proper name ending in -κλής in l. 3 does not align with the following participles ν[ομίζων and κατασκευάσ[ας, which are in the nominative. The presence of the first participle can be doubted, as it is largely conjectural, whereas the second appears almost certain. Unfortunately, the passage cannot be reconstructed with certainty, leaving the syntax of these lines unclear.

¹⁰ See Avdoulou 2022, 146.

¹¹ *PHerc.* 1095, 10–12 could have a sarcastic tone if these lines are attributed to Diogenes.

In any case, it is fascinating, how philosophical perspectives can cast different light on the same individual – in our case, a mythical figure.

The next question to address concerns the identity of Sardanapal(l)us in the Philodemean passage. The earliest references to him appear in Hellanicus of Lesbos and Herodotus. A search in *TLG* reveals that this name is attested more than 400 times in various works of ancient Greek literature. Sardanapal(l)us is generally depicted as an extremely wealthy king, fond of luxury (see e.g. D. S. 2. 24. 4), who met a tragic end by setting himself, his treasures, and his courtiers ablaze after being defeated by his enemies.¹² According to M. Schneider, the discrepancy about Sardanapal(l)us' death raises questions about his identity: were there more than one figures named Sardanapal(l)us in antiquity¹³ and is there a correct spelling of the name – with a single or a double 'l'?¹⁴ The double consonant dominates before the first century CE, whereas later authors predominantly use the single consonant.¹⁵ Unfortunately, in the Philodemean passage, the Neapolitan *disegno* does not preserve the full form of the name. However, in another passage of the same book of *On Rhetoric*, the name appears again with a double consonant:¹⁶

¹² Cleitarchus' account deviates from this tradition, stating that Sardanapal(l)us died at an old age (Ath. 12. 39 Kaibel). He likely died of natural causes, though this remains uncertain.

¹³ In Hesychius' *Lexicon*, s.v. Σαρδανάπαλ(λ)ος, it is stated that there were two individuals with this name, though the identity of the second remains unclear. Callisthenes, *FGrHist* 124 F 34, and Hellanicus, ib. 4 F 63a, also mention two Sardanapal(l)i (ἓνα μὲν δραστήριον καὶ γενναῖον, ἄλλον δὲ μαλακόν). See Weißbach, 1920, 2437, 2443. Interestingly Weißbach 1920, 2454–2455, comments on Hellanicus' and Callisthenes' accounts of two Sardanapal(l)i: "Hellanikos hat bereits zwei Sardanapale unterschieden, sei es auf direkte Überlieferung hin, sei es, weil er in der Schilderung des Charakters S.s Widersprüche fand, die er in einer und derselben Persönlichkeit für unmöglich halten mußte. Fast möchte man bei Kallisthenes auf die letztere Annahme kommen. Dieser unterscheidet ebenfalls zwei Personen des Namens S. und charakterisiert sie scharf ἓνα μὲν δραστήριον καὶ γενναῖον, ἄλλον δὲ μαλακόν". For the debate in Assyriology regarding the number of Sardanapal(l)i see Weißbach 1920, 2457–2458.

¹⁴ Schneider 2000, 122.

¹⁵ On the spelling of Sardanapal(l)us see also Weißbach 1920, 2436–2437.

¹⁶ *PHerc.* 240, fr. 18 = Sudhaus 1896, 278.

θησομεν[
 περίοδον ἔ[νεκεν ἐπι]-
 δείξεως¹⁷ τα[ἔξ-
 ετάζομεν τῶν [
 5 τῇ`ι´ κοινολογία`ι´ τ[
 θεις εἰ¹⁸ τὸν Σύρον [
 Σαρδανάπαλλον [
 τυχόντων καὶ τ[
 χην τοιοῦτον οὐο[
 10 [.]η παραδέδωκ[
 11 ρα φησὶν ἀλλ[¹⁹

Should we then restore the name with a double consonant in the first Philodemian passage? Cicero, who was contemporary with Philodemus, writes the name of the Assyrian king three times with a double consonant and only once with a single ‘l’. In the first three cases Sardanapallus is portrayed as a deficient statesman correspondingly to his image in ancient literature as an *exemplum* of vice. However, in the passage from the *Letters to Atticus* quoted above, Sardanapalus is written with a single ‘l’.²⁰ According to Schneider this cannot be a coincidence: Cicero was probably aware of two (or more?) distinct traditions of Sardanapal(l)i:²¹ on the one hand, he is portrayed as a vicious and incompetent ruler, on the other hand, he is a lesser-known individual who was nevertheless well known in rhetorical schools. However, his mention in *Letters to Atticus* once again carries negative connotations, as it does in its other appearances within Cicero’s works.²² The *exemplum* of Sardanapallus is contrasted with that of Themistocles: both met tragic ends, but at least Themistocles remained active in the political arena and faced the consequences of his actions. It should therefore be clear, that the spelling of the name in Cicero has no influence on its spelling in Philodemus or any other author.

¹⁷ An alternative reading could be ἔ[νεκα τῆς] | δείξεως.

¹⁸ The reading]θεῖσι corresponding to a dative plural participle, is also possible.

¹⁹ L. 8–11 are partly preserved in the *scorza PHerc. 240, pezzo 3*, of *On Rhetoric*, Book 3.

²⁰ Schneider 2000, 123–125.

²¹ On Cicero’s treatment of Sardanapal(l)us see Weißbach 1920, 2442.

²² See also *Tusc.* 5. 101; *Fin.* 2. 32. 106; *De rep.* 3 fr. 4.

So far in this contribution, it has been argued that the presence of Sardanapallus in Philodemus could carry a positive connotation, as the Assyrian king is said to have built fortifications to protect cities. One may wonder whether Philodemus simply conflated different traditions about the same person, or if there was more than one figure named Sardanapal(l)us. Sardanapal(l)us was not a typical proper name, suggesting that other notable individuals besides the Assyrian king may have borne it. Therefore, it is highly likely that we are dealing with the same figure, around whom both positive and negative accounts circulated in antiquity. The attribution of various, seemingly contradictory, characteristics to Sardanapal(l)us could be explained according to Weißbach in the following way: “Der angebliche assyrische König S. ist keine geschichtliche Persönlichkeit, sondern eine romanhafte Gestalt, zu deren Schöpfung gewisse Personen der assyrisch-babylonischen Königsgeschichte ... beigetragen haben”.²³ In any case, it is important to note that the presence of both good and bad qualities in an individual should not seem unusual, nor should it imply that we are dealing with a mix of characteristics of different individuals. Most importantly, in the case of Philodemus, his potentially positive view towards the Assyrian king must be understood within the polemical context of the third book of *On Rhetoric*, which argues against the Stoic Diogenes, as previously highlighted.

Undoubtedly Cicero knew Philodemus and his treatises, as he refers to him a few times in his works.²⁴ D. Delattre rightly noted that echoes of Philodemus' treatises can be found particularly in Cicero's *Letters*. According to Delattre, several terms from Philodemus' *On Rhetoric* also appear in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*.²⁵ Philodemus may have served as one of Cicero's sources on certain individuals / mythical figures and anecdotes.²⁶ For the first time in ancient literature, Sardanapal(l)us appears in the same context as Themistocles in *Letters to Atticus*. About the orthography of the

²³ Weißbach 1920, 2475.

²⁴ Delattre 1984, 28, 30.

²⁵ Delattre 1984, 32–34.

²⁶ See Avdoulou 2022, 130. Philodemus and Cicero employ similar vocabulary when referring to a well-known episode about Themistocles, suggesting that Cicero's text may aid in restoring the Philodemian passage. The same applies to an anecdote about Demosthenes. See Avdoulou 2022, 135.

name in *PHerc.* 1095 one can only make assumptions. Even if we accept the Ciceronian text as edited by Shackleton Bailey,²⁷ and thus recognize the form *Sardanapali* with a single consonant, it is not necessary to deduce that in *PHerc.* 1095 Philodemus had written this name with a single ‘l’ in contrast to the form of the same name with a double consonant in *PHerc.* 240, fr. 18. Schneider’s hypothesis that the different spellings indicate distinct individuals appears arbitrary. *PHerc.* 240, fr. 18 has little text and does not allow a full understanding of why Sardanapal(l)us is mentioned. It remains possible that the passage concerns a stylistic matter, as suggested by the words περίοδος, κοινολογία and the supplement ἐπιδείξεως. Does Philodemus refer here to the rhetorical abilities of Sardanapal(l)us? The available sources on the Assyrian king make no mention of his rhetorical skill or lack thereof. Schneider’s assumption that there was another Sardanapal(l)us known to the rhetorical schools cannot be verified on the basis of the fragmentary *PHerc.* 240, fr. 18. Although this fragment seems to place Sardanapal(l)us in a rhetorical context, it clearly refers to the famous Assyrian Sardanapal(l)us.

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²⁷ Shackleton Bailey 1968, 248, preferred the form with the single consonant, as transmitted by some manuscripts (PMZ¹), over the form with the double consonant, found in another group of manuscripts (ORδ). His preference was presumably based on the significance of the manuscript group preserving the form *Sardanapali*. However, the manuscripts’ history in the introduction to the first volume (Shackleton Bailey 1965, 77–101) does not necessarily justify the editor’s choice of *Sardanapali*. For instance, it is explicitly stated that the manuscript R is superior to P. In any case, it remains possible that the reading *Sardanapali* simply resulted from a scribal error of *Sardanapalli*. Interestingly, Winstedt 1913, 304 had printed the form *Sardanapalli*.

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The present article examines a reference to the Assyrian king Sardanapal(l)us as a builder of Anchiale and Tarsos in Philodemus' third book *On Rhetoric*. The name of Themistocles, possibly as a builder of Athenian walls, can be restored in the same passage. This restoration is backed up by a reference to both Sardanapal(l)us and Themistocles in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* (10. 8), a work that contains Philodemean echoes, as already noted by D. Delattre. However, while Sardanapal(l)us is typically mentioned with negative connotations in Cicero, I argue that, considering the context of the third book of *On Rhetoric*, Philodemus might have credited Sardanapal(l)us, and possibly also Themistocles, for their efforts in protecting their cities. Furthermore, I criticize M. Schneider's thesis that the different spellings of *Sardanapal(l)us* may suggest the existence of more than one Sardanapal(l)i.

В статье рассматривается упоминание ассирийского царя Сарданапала как строителя городов Анхиалы и Тарса с их укреплениями в третьей книге *О риторике* Филодема; в том же контексте можно восстановить имя Фемистокла, вероятно, как строителя афинских стен. Подтверждением этого восстановления служит упоминание Сарданапала вместе с Фемистоклом в одном из писем Цицерона к Аттику (X, 8), – в них, как заметил уже Д. Делатр, видны следы знакомства Цицерона с сочинениями Филодема. В этом пассаже, как и в других случаях у Цицерона, Сарданапал предстает в негативном свете. Однако Филодем, судя по контексту третьей книги *О риторике*, мог отзываться о стараниях Сарданапал(л)а и, возможно, Фемистокла защитить свои города с одобрением. В статье оспаривается предположение М. Шнейдер, что написание имени *Сарданапал* с одним или двумя л отражает представление о двух разных царях, носивших это имя.

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