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Mediterranean World

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The important geographical position of Cyprus, which constituted a point of transition to the East, the island's presence in various historical developments, and especially its rich mythology, offered ancient Cyprus many opportunities to appear – explicitly or implicitly – in Classical, Postclassical and Modern European literature and art. The studies in this volume move in this direction and attempt to shed light on the presence of Cyprus in the ancient world and on how it was perceived, as well as to consider its contribution to the Roman world and, by extension, to Western European culture.



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D.E.

SPYRIDON TZOUNAKAS (ED.)

THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT CYPRUS

3



THE SEEDS OF
TRIPTOLEMUS

3

Spyridon Tzounakas (ed.)

THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT CYPRUS IN ROMAN SOURCES AND BEYOND: ELEVEN STUDIES

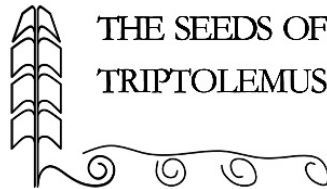


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SPYRIDON TZOUNAKAS is Associate Professor of Latin Literature at the University of Cyprus, where he is currently Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Letters. His main research and publications focus on Roman satire (especially Persius), Roman epistolography (especially Pliny the Younger), Roman epic (especially Lucan and Valerius Flaccus), Roman elegy (especially Tibullus), Cicero's orations, and Roman intertextuality. He has published many articles in international refereed journals and collective volumes, has edited a book on praises of Roman leaders, co-edited a book on the reception of ancient Cyprus in the culture of the western world and another one on Cyprus through travel literature (15th - 18th centuries), and completed a book on Persius' *Satires*. He is currently working on a volume on Pliny the Younger's intertextuality and on a research project on Persius' intertextuality.

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On the cover: reworking of the mosaic of the House of Dionysus, Paphos
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PREFACE

Spyridon Tzounakas

This volume (*The Reception of Ancient Cyprus in Roman Sources and Beyond: Eleven Studies*) emerged as a result of the papers presented in two Workshops that took place in Nicosia, on 29 May 2021 and 7 July 2021 respectively, within the context of my research programme entitled *The Reception of Ancient Cyprus in the Culture of the Western World* (RACCWW). This work was co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Republic of Cyprus through the Research and Innovation Foundation (Project: EXCELLENCE/1216/0525). The main aim of this research programme is to shed light on the presence of Cyprus in the ancient world and on how it was perceived, as well as to consider its contribution to the Roman world and, by extension, to Western European culture. The important geographical position of the island, which constituted a point of transition to the East, the island's presence in various historical developments, and especially its rich mythology, offered ancient Cyprus many opportunities to appear – explicitly or implicitly – in Classical, Postclassical and Modern European literature and art. The studies in this volume move in this direction and supplement a volume with a similar title that ensued from an international conference held in Nicosia in February 2021: Spyridon Tzounakas, Stella Alekou and Stephen Harrison (eds.), *The Reception of Ancient Cyprus in Western Culture*, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter 2023 (Trends in Classics 139). For more information on the aims and the main findings of the research programme, see the “Introduction” there (pp. 1-10), as well as the website of the programme (<https://receptionofancientcyprus.com.cy>).

The present volume is divided into three parts. Part 1, entitled “The Roman Conquest of Cyprus and the Exemplarity of the Island”, includes three studies. Spyridon Tzounakas (“The Roman Conquest of Cyprus in the Rhetorical Strategies of Cicero’s *De domo sua* and *Pro Sestio*”) examines the way the Roman conquest of Cyprus is rhetorically exploited by Cicero in his attempt to denigrate Clodius’ image in two speeches. He argues that the case of Ptolemy, king of Cyprus, is harmoniously incorporated in the broader argumentation of the speeches, reinforces the tragic aspects of Clodius’ opponents and works as an *exemplum* that illuminates Clodius’ stance towards Cicero and Sestius. Georgios Vassiliades (“The Roman Conquest of Cyprus in Ancient Sources: A *bellum iustum* or *iniustum*?”) continues the discussion of the Roman conquest of Cyprus. Through the analysis of relevant Latin and Greek sources, his chapter attempts to show how the Roman authors and, probably, the Roman public opinion of the 50s BC morally evaluated the annexation of Cyprus on the basis of the moral and legal category of *bellum iustum*. It is concluded that Roman public opinion, which is reflected in

contemporary and later sources, was divided on the moral evaluation of whether the annexation of Cyprus was a *bellum iustum* or a *bellum iniustum*, by thus adopting the arguments of Clodius or Cicero respectively. Margot Neger (“Cyprus *in exemplis*: Cypriot Episodes as Narrated by Valerius Maximus”) scrutinizes the presence of Cyprus in Valerius Maximus’ narrative techniques. The chapter investigates a series of anecdotes concerning the island of Cyprus in the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* of Valerius Maximus. The single *exempla* are both self-contained narrative units and parts of different thematic sections on various virtues and vices. The chapter argues that the anecdotes on incidents regarding Cyprus can be read not only within their respective section but also as a cycle which reaches from the first to the last book of the collection. It also examines how the island, its inhabitants and visitors are depicted in a literary work composed in the time of the emperor Tiberius.

Part 2, entitled “The Cypriot Myths in Ovid and Beyond”, deals with the Cypriot myths in Orpheus’ song in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 10 and their reception in later literature and art. In his study “Prostitution in Ancient Cyprus, the Myth of the Propoetides in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the Perpetuation of a Stereotype” Spyridon Tzounakas examines various ancient sources (with special emphasis on Latin literature and the myth of the Propoetides in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*) that contributed to the entrenchment of the promiscuous Cypriot women stereotype, which survives for centuries and is especially evident in travel writing from the 15th to the 18th century. Sophia Papaioannou’s study (“Pygmalion’s Inspiration and Pygmalion as Inspiration”) on the one hand discusses the presence of the myth of Pandora in Pygmalion and Ovid’s engagement with one of the most celebrated myths of the Hesiodic corpus, while on the other, it examines the incorporation of the Pygmalion episode in the stories of agalmatophilia featuring famous works of art and creators as well as in the Roman ideology of the *imagines maiorum*. In Stella Alekou’s study (“The Ambiguity of Love and the Ideology of Rape in Ovidian *ekphraseis*: Pygmalion’s Prequel to Arachne’s Story”) the myth of Pygmalion is examined as a prequel to that of Arachne, another famous artist in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. She reveals the ambiguous representation of love in these episodes, when Ovid exposes rape while apparently praising love, and argues that Ovid employs optical illusions to shed light on the image of love which in art appears as distorted, to address the politics of rape. The next study of this Part (“From the Humble Workshop in Cyprus to the Victorian Stage: Ovidian Pygmalion’s Reception in W. S. Gilbert’s Mythological Comedy *Pygmalion and Galatea*”) also deals with Ovid’s Pygmalion. Here Stamatia Kitsou demonstrates that W. S. Gilbert exploited the main outline of the Ovidian myth and proceeded to a generic transformation composing the first mythological comedy with Galatea, the statue’s name after Rousseau, as a

protagonist. As Galatea's inanimation and interaction with the other characters of the play is problematic and a series of misunderstandings arises from her lack of social education, Gilbert proves himself to be prolific in social criticism and masterful, almost latent, considerations regarding the gender-based roles and their social construction. In her second contribution to this volume ("The Ovidian and Alfierian Myrrha as an Odalisque in Lord Byron's *Sardanapalus*: Transformations and a Play of Identities"), Stamatia Kitsou investigates the presence of the Ovidian myth of Cinyras and Myrrha in Lord Byron's tragedy *Sardanapalus*. She argues that for the formation of Myrrha's dramatic persona, Byron takes into account the Ovidian Myrrha (*met.* 10.298-502) and mainly the protagonist of the pre-Romantic tragedy of Vittorio Alfieri, *Mirra*; thus, he creates a play of mutual transformations and conflicting identities, while maintaining the core of his classical models.

Part 3, entitled "Numismatic and Archaeological Evidence", includes three studies. In the first of them, Daniele Castrizio ("A Coin Series with Capricorn and Scorpion from Cyprus") deals, from an iconographic point of view, with an emission of bronze coins generally attributed to the island of Cyprus, and provides elements for a more precise dating of the coin series. Based on the writings of Manilius, this paper provides an interpretation of the importance of the zodiacal signs on ancient coins, and discusses the relationship between the zodiacal sign of Capricorn and the imperial propaganda at the time of Augustus. Next, Antonio Corso ("Pliny, *nat.* 34.81: The Bronze Sculptor Styppax of Cyprus and the *Splanchnoptes*") studies Pliny's inclusion of Styppax and of his bronze statue of the *Splanchnoptes* in his selective catalogue of the most important bronze statues and connects it to the political environment of the Flavian dynasty. Finally, Alessandra Bravi's article ("An Excellent Foreigner: Titus at the Sanctuary of the Paphian Aphrodite") sheds new light on the visit paid by Titus to the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Paphos. Based on the archaeological data, she reconstructs the site as it looked at the time of the visit of Titus, and suggests a link between the sanctuary at Paphos and the *Templum Pacis*, inaugurated by the Flavians, where Venus has her own space. She concludes that the great eastern goddess Aphrodite/Isis/Astarte was the primary legitimacy of the *imperium* of the Flavians, since her oracle was needed to a plebeian family which could not claim mythical ancestors.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Research and Innovation Foundation of Cyprus, which generously supported our research project, to the Department of Classics and Philosophy of the University of Cyprus, which immediately embraced our workshops, to my dear colleagues and collaborators Dr. Stella Alekou, Dr. Despina Keramida and Dr. Stamatia Kitsou for their valuable involvement in the preparation of these events, and, of course, to all the speakers and the participants in these two

workshops, who contributed to their success. Special thanks go to Stefano Rocchi, the Director of the series *The Seeds of Triptolemus*, who supported the preparation of the manuscript with his help and advice, as well as to our publisher, Dr. Zaira Maranelli, and to Dr. Marco Filippi, at Deinotera Editrice, for their assistance and patience. I also thank the anonymous readers for their invaluable comments and suggestions which helped to improve the quality of the volume.

Nicosia, July 2022

PART 2
THE CYPRIOT MYTHS IN OVID AND BEYOND

THE OVIDIAN AND ALFIERIAN MYRRHA
AS AN ODALISQUE IN LORD BYRON'S *SARDANAPALUS*:
TRANSFORMATIONS AND A PLAY OF IDENTITIES*

Stamatia Kitson
University of Cyprus

King Sardanapalus of Assyria constitutes a special, intriguing case, where myth, fiction and reality commingle, giving rise to a sense of luxurious exoticism and mystery. The information for Sardanapalus derives from Diodorus Siculus (2.23.1-2.27.3), culled from a now lost work, the *Persica* of Ctesias from Cnidus. Sardanapalus' identification with a known historical person remains questionable, nonetheless, since his name is not included in the catalogue of the Assyrian Kings.¹ Within this context, it has been argued that his portrait consists of a whimsical combination of the characteristics of three other monarchs, and that his name alludes to that of the last King of Assyria, Ashurbanipal.²

The figure invented by Ctesias and possibly adopted by Diodorus is a totally inert man, hedonist, effeminate, steeped in pleasures and submerged in laziness; his way of life was sybarite, lascivious and idle. Sardanapalus was known for his lovers, men and women, and his propensity for feminine activities, but most important is the fact that his way of life destroyed the Assyrian Empire (Diod. 2.23.4):

τοιούτος δ' ὢν τὸν τρόπον οὐ μόνον αὐτὸς αἰσχρῶς κατέστρεψε
τὸν βίον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν Ἀσσυρίων ἡγεμονίαν ἄρδην ἀνέτρεψε,
πολυχρονωτάτην γενομένην τῶν μνημονευομένων.

Because he was a man of this character, not only did he end his own life in a disgraceful manner, but he caused the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire, which had endured longer than any other known to history.³

* This work was co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Republic of Cyprus through the Research and Innovation Foundation (Project: EXCELLENCE/1216/0525).

¹ See ROSA 2019, 328-331.

² On Ashurbanipal, the last King of Assyria, see STEINER / NIMS 1985.

³ The Greek text of Diodorus Siculus and its English translation are quoted from OLDFATHER 1933.

According to Diodorus, the story of the king's life runs as follows: the passive, salacious and lustful king was indifferent with regard to the administration and politics of the empire. His negligence led to a conspiracy, and an ally of enemies attacked the Assyrians. Sardanapalus acted properly and defended the conspirators several times in the battlefield. Nevertheless, he did not manage to defeat them; believing that he had successfully concluded his mission, he returned to his previous way of life, ordering sacrifices and festivities. In the meanwhile, the attackers were reinforced with armies from Bactria and blindsided Sardanapalus' forces. The king, having sent his family away to be safe, returned to Nineveh and took action. The severe rainfall and the overflow of Euphrates led to the collapse of the defensive walls and the river became the capital's enemy fulfilling the prophecy. Sardanapalus, wishing to avoid capture, immolated an immense funeral pyre and threw his treasures and himself into it. Eunuchs and concubines accompanied him to death.

The mysterious life of this king inspired Byron to write a tragedy,⁴ abiding by the standards of the ancient Greek tragedy, dramatizing impressive events of the past and presenting them in ways that would be comprehensible to his contemporaries. Byron, in a letter to his editor,⁵ admits that he follows Diodorus' account, yet only as a base which has to be enriched as his intention was to write a concise and solid drama in five acts; his motives for the dramatization of Sardanapalus' last day and his fight against his enemies vary, arising from deeply personal, accurately historical, and extending to strictly literary and social ones. More specifically, Byron's revolutionary idealism and sense of virtuous civic duty, his belief that humanly structured institutions function as hostile, disruptive forces, and his inherent unflinching pessimism inspired the treatment of a similar thematic with a genuine undiminished tragic tension. Moreover, this conception is enriched and further extended by Byron's real-life experiences through his participation in conspiracy agencies against the tyrannical forces in European countries,⁶ and by his ardent support for the oppressed nations. Additionally, it is probable that his engagement with the King of Assyria is attuned with a specific interest for the East, enhanced by the Orientalist movement which was in rise during this era, as the proclivity of the Europeans for the culture and mythology of the Orient was at its acme.⁷ Thus, Byron's Sardanapalus reproduced the stereotypical concept Europe had for the eastern reigns and their subjects, mainly

⁴ See PROTHERO 1898/1901, 323.

⁵ See PROTHERO 1898/1901, 172.

⁶ See POMARÈ 2014, 257.

⁷ On the movement of Orientalism and its influence on nineteenth-century Europe see BOHRER 2003; on the reception of the Orient in the Victorian theatre see ZITER 2003.

credited with eroticism, almost suffocating sensuality, male voluptuousness, female passivity and perversity. These elements constitute the overarching characteristics in the European depiction of the eastern 'other'.

It has been pointed out that the literary ambitions that prompted Byron to proceed to restorative changes concerning tragedy are strictly connected to a necessity for social reformation of the degraded life and culture, easily reflected in the literary decay of time.⁸ The intention of the dramaturgist, as stated in his correspondence, was the creation of a drama with classical structure and cohesion, away from the influence of Shakespeare, whose literary production he criticizes as raw, ill-structured and full of errors, with the only exception being the beauty of the language.⁹ Byron's erudition and classical education is apparent throughout his poetic corpus as he exploits the literary tradition and proceeds to a crossing of a plethora of classical texts; yet his main ruling models, from a dramaturgical point of view, are the Senecan¹⁰ and neo-classicist tragedies. The dramaturgist's main purpose remains the maintenance of the unity of place and time, as he strongly believes that the collapse of this unity cancels the intention for the creation of a drama.¹¹ With regard to the dramaturgical organization and treatment Byron does not adhere to a singular classical model, neither thematically nor structurally; he observes strictly, on the one hand, the Aristotelian classical trinity of unity of time, place and action, and, on the other, the Senecan division into five acts and the emphasis on passionate soliloquies and monologues. The plot is linear and simple, without reversals and recognitions, but with artful escalations and de-escalations of tension that culminate in the fifth Act. Within the context of these concrete dramaturgical principles, the conspiracy against Sardanapalus starts and concludes within the same day and the place of action is firmly at the royal palace of Nineveh; anything that happens outside the boundaries of the palace is transferred through extended and precise narrations. Additionally, Byron amplifies the circle of the dramatic persons¹² – in order to adapt Diodorus' account¹³ to the rhythm and the conventions of a drama and causally organize the plot – and the formation of an impressive figure results: Sardanapalus' beloved concubine, Myrrha, a

⁸ See CORBETT 1988, 3.

⁹ See PROTHERO 1898/1901, 323

¹⁰ See KAHN 1969, 654-671.

¹¹ See COLERIDGE 1901, v; 9.

¹² *Dramatis personae*. Sardanapalus, Arbaces, Beleses, Salemenes, Altada, Pania, Zames, Sfero, Balea, Zarina, Myrrha, Women composing the harem of Sardanapalus, Guards, Attendants, Chaldean Priests, Medes.

¹³ Sardanapalus, Arbaces, and Beleses are the only characters taken from Diodorus Siculus. All the others are invented.

slave from Ionia, a dominant persona who acts as a catalyst and directs the evolution of the story. Several models have been proposed about Myrrha's dramatic formation, especially the (pseudo-)Senecan Iole in *Hercules Oetaeus*.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, in Byron's tragedy generic synergy and enrichment thrive, especially essential echoes of the Senecan tragedies; notwithstanding, I esteem that Myrrha's particular mentality invokes and exploits blatantly Ovid's story of Cinyras and Myrrha (*met.* 10.298-502) and mainly its reception in Alfieri's pre-Romantic tragedy, *Mirra*, a theatrical play which Byron had attended and which strongly impacted him.¹⁵ As it has been aptly argued, Ovid's work had had a significant bearing on Byron's poetic production;¹⁶ this influence is equally apparent in *Sardanapalus*, for the composition of which Byron relied on a commingling of classical and neo-classical models. Thus, Byron borrows and combines elements drawn from the Ovidian, as well as from the Alfierian work, for the presentation of a unique Myrrha in a unique dramatic situation and a play of mutual metamorphosis and conflicting identities, while maintaining the core of his literary models.

Ovid's treatment of Myrrha's impure love and transgressive passion for her father focuses on her distraught mental state and disarray provoked by her contradictory thoughts, ranging from acceptance and justification of her love to disapproval of her nefarious passion and rebukes to herself for her hideous desire (*met.* 10.321-323; 335-337):¹⁷

di, precor, et pietas sacrataque iura parentum,
hoc prohibete nefas scelerique resistite nostro,
si tamen hoc scelus est.

[...]

quid in ista revolvor?

spes interdictae, discedite! dignus amari
ille, sed ut pater, est.

O gods, I pray you, and piety and the sacred rights of parents, keep this sin from me and fight off my crime, if indeed it is a crime. [...] Why do I dwell on such things? Avaunt, lawless desires! Worthy to be loved is he, but as a father.

¹⁴ See KAHN 1969, 664.

¹⁵ See COLERIDGE 1901, 5; see also WOLFSON 1991, 891.

¹⁶ See NICHOLSON 1999; more generally on the influence of Latin literature and culture in Byron's poetic and theatrical work see COCHRAN 2013.

¹⁷ The Latin text and the English translation are quoted from MILLER / GOOLD 1984, 86-89.

This unremitting mental crisis and psychological turbulence result in her decision to commit suicide, but her nurse intervenes and rescues her (*met.* 10.382-387). Following her nurse's suggestions and prompts, she deceives Cinyras, satisfies her passion and commits incest. The punishment for her sin consists in a metamorphosis into a myrrh tree whose resin symbolizes her tears (*met.* 10.500-502). An interpretative approach of the Ovidian text – mainly an examination ranging from the manipulation of space and time, dramatic irony, pathos and monologues to the dramatic person's *ethos* – reveals that Ovid treated and encoded Myrrha's story as a tragedy by adopting and modifying tragic structural patterns and elucidating devices from his sources, mainly the *Hippolytus* of Euripides,¹⁸ aiming at the presentation of a drama within the context of an epic narrative.

The Ovidian Myrrha's inner torture inspired Vittorio Alfieri to compose a tragedy, *Mirra*,¹⁹ with the Cypriot princess as a protagonist, and present a story seldom dramatized on stage before, as far as is known.²⁰ Alfieri detected the genuine tragic quality of Ovid's treatment²¹ and followed its outline deviating essentially, mainly by cushioning salient elements of the Ovidian account. More specifically, the dramaturgist does not include the incestuous episode – prominent in the Ovidian narration of the story²² – as his protagonist does not proceed to the satisfaction of her passion. It is impressive, from the standpoint of the dramaturgical organization, that during the first four Acts Alfieri does not drop the slightest hint with regard to Mirra's true passion, her impure love for her father; this will be revealed only at the end of Act 5, followed by her suicide.²³ Until then, Mirra struggles painfully to avoid confessing the truth and explaining the cause of her distraught mental state and frustration, mainly resorting in silence (2.2.130: “Disdegno e morte il tuo silenzio spira”) and isolation that does not serve as a solution (2.3.128-129: “né un istante, / Io rimaner vo' sola con me stessa...”).²⁴

In this light, the Alfierian Mirra's persistent inner battle and disarray, expressed in the antithetical scheme of love vs. social and moral normative

¹⁸ On Ovid's debt to Euripides' *Hippolytus* for the formation of Myrrha's story see OTIS 21970, 227; ANDERSON 1972, 501; SCAFFAI 1999, 380.

¹⁹ On Alfieri's debt to Euripides and Ovid here see MASELLI 2000.

²⁰ A tragedy entitled *Cinyras* is mentioned by Flavius Josephus (*AJ* 19.1.13), but the details he gives about its plot are scant.

²¹ See FERRERO / RETTORI 2013, 298-299.

²² For an analysis of the Ovidian account and the episode of incest see NAGLE 1983.

²³ Alfieri intended for the spectator to reveal gradually the cause of the disordered impulses of the protagonist; see FERRERO / RETTORI 2013, 299.

²⁴ The Italian text is quoted from DI BENEDETTO 1977.

values,²⁵ is transferred in the tragedy of Byron and transformed into a constant and tenacious dilemma and oscillation on national grounds:²⁶ Byron's Myrrha maintains a double conflicting identity – as does the Ovidian and Alfierian heroine – and suffers because of the conflict between her inner feelings and her national identity: she is a Greek, still a slave and in love with a barbarian king. Her amorous bond with Sardanapalus amounts to a humiliating passion from which, as she admits, she cannot escape (1.2.497-502):²⁷

Master, I am your slave! Man, I have loved you!
Loved you, I know not by what fatal weakness,
Although a Greek, and born a foe to monarchs
A slave, and hating fetters – an Ionian,
And, therefore, when I love a stranger, more
Degraded by that passion than by chains!

Byron's portrayal of Myrrha amalgamates elements from Ovid and Alfieri, although generally it is considerably closer to the latter's concept: both women have full consciousness and self-knowledge, achieve a true recognition of self and avoid recourse to illusion or to self-dissimulations as a means of relief; under this spectrum, a crucial deviation can be detected regarding the Ovidian Myrrha, since the latter finally submerged herself and pretended to be someone else, disowning her true identity, at least for a considerable space of time during which her repeated sexual intercourses with her father took place. On the other hand, in *Sardanapalus*, Myrrha's passion tamed her true independent nature, linked to her Greek origin, and totally prevailed. This is a strong allusion to the Ovidian protagonist who, in sharp contrast with the Alfierian Mirra's uninfluenced resistance, succumbed to her passionate impulses, surpassed her hesitation and inner fight and slept with her father, predetermining in this way her bleak future. Likely, the Greek slave in Byron's tragedy has a passionate relationship with Sardanapalus and has already made her choice; in this regard, her *praxis*, in the Aristotelian sense of the term,²⁸ defines her participation in misery (1.2.497-502, see above).

Nevertheless, as it has already been pointed out, the Ionian slave, in sharp contrast with her Ovidian counterpart, does not delude herself nor hides her true identity pretending to be someone else; she steadily refers to her Greek

²⁵ On the Alfierian Mirra's conflicting identities see STREIFER 2013.

²⁶ In opera an equivalent to these three cases can be found in Spontini's *La Vestale*, a lyric tragedy in three acts, where Julia, the Vestal virgin, finds herself trapped and divided between her religious duty and love for the victorious general Licinius.

²⁷ The text of Byron throughout is quoted from COLERIDGE 1901.

²⁸ Arist. *Poet.* 1450a 16-24 and 1450b 8-10.

legacy, recognizes her submission and dependence on Sardanapalus, her status as a concubine, and her participation, as a third person, in the deconstruction of the king's legal marital relationship with the Queen, Zarina. Her slavery already constitutes a paradox considering her Greek origin, while this amorous condition constitutes the extreme part of this paradox resulting in a humiliating and painful situation which perpetuates and progressively increases her distress. Myrrha acknowledges her conflict and its various manifestations ranging in a spectrum from despised assimilation to a brave verbal or practical rejection. Apparently, her eroticism, lustful desires and devotion to the king clash with the heroism, the love for liberty and independence, the hatred for the slavery that her Greek identity, her country's national code dictates (1.2.641-651):

Why do I love this man? My country's daughters
Love none but heroes. But I have no country!
The slave hath lost all save her bonds. I love him;
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain –
To love whom we esteem not. Be it so
The hour is coming when he'll need all love,
And find none. To fall from him now were baser
Than to have stabbed him on his throne when highest
Would have been noble in my country's creed:
was not made for either. Could I save him,
I should not love *him* better, but myself.

Subsequently, her frustration is evinced by tears (1.2.46: “What! in tears, my Myrrha?”), a reaction to the inner painful conflict which is already causally linked to her Ovidian counterpart (*met.* 10.500-502). In this context it is noteworthy that Myrrha, trying to cushion the negative aspects of her love for a foreign succulent king and the irony that rules her life, relies on fact: as she comments in her soliloquy, Sardanapalus deviates from the model of a barbarian man and, consequently, is hated by the other barbarians (1.2.654-656):

And yet, methinks, I love him more, perceiving
That he is hated of his own barbarians,
The natural foes of all the blood of Greece.

When Ovid's Myrrha tries to console herself, she resorts to *exempla* from nature (*met.* 10.324-328) and human communities (*met.* 10.331-333) where her desire can be freely fulfilled. In Byron's tragedy Myrrha's attempt to restore her self-esteem and save her self-respect has a more realistic foundation

related to the *hinc* and *nunc*. Byron's portrayal of Sardanapalus both as a king and as a man deviates substantially from the known descriptions of Byron's literary models and leads to a unique metamorphosis of this persona, from which a series of other essential transformations emerges. Byron's Sardanapalus is not the monster king, as presented by Diodorus, nor is he submerged in hedonism or absolutely feminine activities. The ambiguities he bears do not permit a simplified portrayal; his balanced effeminacy neither cancels nor erodes his masculinity and consequently he corresponds sufficiently to tasks and roles traditionally assigned to men. On the other hand, he disowns voluntarily and with full consciousness the bloodthirsty ideology of his predecessors, linked to cruelty, violence, imperialism, and military operations, and proposes a life according to the principles of Bacchus, correlating his glory and grandeur with the peaceful life of his citizens (1.1.62-66):

I leave such things to conquerors; enough
 For me, if I can make my subjects feel
 The weight of human misery less, and glide
 Ungroaning to the tomb: I take no license
 Which I deny to them. We all are men.

Sardanapalus vacillates and sways between effeminate behaviour and masculinity, something that does not abide by the standards and norms of the empire, nor the way of life expected from a king. Surprisingly, the conscious rejection of the ancestral ideals, the departure from the main traits and principal characteristics of masculinity according to gender-based stereotypes, and the adoption of a non-belligerent philosophy (1.2.406-407: "I feel no penitence; my life is love: / If I must shed blood, it shall be by force") is not without a counterpart within the framework of the tragedy; his deficiency is balanced by Myrrha's double hypostasis, her androgynous style, since she belongs equally to the harem and to the field of battle.²⁹ Myrrha proves herself to be the masculine equivalent of Sardanapalus' balanced effeminacy: whereas Sardanapalus resorts to compromises and avoids punishing the attackers, Myrrha is more decisive, exhibits manly qualities, requires the penalty of death and prompts Sardanapalus to resist endlessly in order to defend and maintain the grandeur of the empire providing accurate insights and wise advice strictly related to her Greek culture and the dialectic of opposites (1.2.537-541):³⁰

²⁹ On Myrrha's oscillation between the two sexes see CHRISTENSEN 1992, 353. More generally, on cases of moral and sexual ambivalence in the *Sardanapalus*, see SPENCE 1984.

³⁰ See CORBETT 1988, 87.

I speak of civic popular love, *self*-love,
 Which means that men are kept in awe and law,
 Yet not oppressed – at least they must not think so,
 Or, if they think so, deem it necessary,
 To ward off worse oppression, their own passions.

Under this prism, one of the more impressive descriptions refers to Myrrha's resistance and vigorous presence in the field of the battle against the conspirators, and the admiration for her martial virtue, something that Byron eloquently links to her national identity and Greek heritage, by comparing her to Victory (3.1.397-399: "all these things made / Her seem unto the troops a prophetess / Of victory, or Victory herself, / Come down to hail us hers."). On the other hand, given Byron's philhellenism, one may interpret Myrrha's victorious participation in the battle on historical grounds, as an allusion to the forthcoming Greek War of Independence. Given all the above, I believe that this scene lends itself to a deeper interpretation, as Byron exploits further her belligerent participation in order to elucidate her inner turbulence and create a strong scene of a passion in excess, almost the equivalent of Ovidian Myrrha's suicidal attempt and Alfierian Myrrha's delirium (Act 4); all three scenes transpire sharing a common element, identified as the depiction of the feminine *furor*.

Myrrha's masculinity, apart from balancing Sardanapalus' effeminacy – who is presented as the "she Sardanapalus" (2.1.405), the "King of distaffs" (2.1.343) – alludes further to his legendary predecessor, the appalling, adventurer and bellicose Semiramis, also characterized as the "Man-Queen" (1.1.43). But Semiramis is the embodiment of furious boldness and is steadily credited with sensationalism, lustful desires, extreme sexual impulses and mainly an incestuous passion for her son. In a nightmare, Sardanapalus tries to avoid the lurid, eerie and macabre figure of Semiramis who lustfully tries to kiss him, as if he was her son (4.1.156-158):³¹

Embraced me, while I shrunk from her, as if,
 In lieu of her remote descendant, I
 Had been the son who slew her for her incest.

He then awakes and finds Myrrha by his side. This subtle link and latent identification of Myrrha with the dead Semiramis seems purposeful, aimed at reminding us of the Ovidian Myrrha's transgressive love for her relative and

³¹ For an analysis of Semiramis' correlation to Myrrha see WOLFSON 1991, 887-888; 900 n. 39.

punishment, almost functioning as a prophecy for the Ionian slave's forthcoming death.

The tragedy ends – after the deconstruction and fall of the defensive walls of the capital – with Sardanapalus' decision to end his life by throwing himself into an immense funeral pyre, after having deliberated his slaves and having sent away his officials. Myrrha rejects his suggestion to leave for her country, and decides to die with him. Her decision is justified in terms of her national identity and mentality (5.1.466-467: “A Greek girl dare not do for love, that which / An Indian widow braves for custom?”) but even then, she painfully invokes her duality and the fact that her love for independence and self-determination was defeated by her love for a foreign king (5.1.487-491):

Then farewell, thou earth!
And loveliest spot of earth! farewell, Ionia!
Be thou still free and beautiful, and far
Aloof from desolation! My last prayer
Was for thee, my last thoughts, save *one*, were of thee!

Myrrha succumbed to her erotic passion and maintained the status of a slave betraying neither social conventions nor moral values, unlike Ovid's and Alfieri's protagonists, but her country's major ideal, the love of freedom. In this regard, the suicide constitutes the only solution and an end to her martyrdom and sufferings stemming from her conflicting identities and permanent duality. But even then, her death is not an absolutely honourable one and fails to restore her self-respect, because of her total dedication to the King. In a similar way, Ovid's and Alfieri's heroines obtain through their death a partial catharsis shadowed by the complaint for the transgression, actual or verbal, of the imposed limit.

The reception of the story of Sardanapalus in classical literature maintained invariably the focus on his idle and hedonistic, licentious and promiscuous nature, his extreme effeminacy and his propensity for excessive self-gratification. These elements constitute the overarching characteristics of the European depiction of the eastern 'other' as well, the stereotypical concept the West had for the eastern reigns. Byron's conception renewed the portrayal of the king – in instances maintaining a comic tenor – and revived the genre of tragedy through restorative changes and a masterful commingling of classical and modern conventions.³² On the other hand, the presentation of Myrrha as Sardanapalus' confidant and most intimate person – this crucial

³² On Byron as the Don Quixote of Neo-Classicism and his 'quixotic' attempt to imitate Seneca see KAHN 1969, 670.

metamorphosis from a princess to an odalisque – constitutes Byron's invention in its entirety and an ingenious treatment of a persona with a considerable literary past. The exploitation of Myrrha's transformation (androgynous style) and duality (Greek identity vs. slavery), are two main indicators of Byron's classical and neo-classical models and their conflation within the context of a totally different dramatic situation. In this regard, Byron's tragedy inspired a series of operas and films,³³ in which Myrrha keeps a distinct place maintaining a significant role in Sardanapalus' life and downfall.

³³ See ROSA 2019, 331-333.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANS = American Numismatic Society.

BMC Greek (Cyprus) = *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum*, vol. 24: G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Cyprus*, London 1904.

BMCRE = H. Mattingly *et al.*, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, London 1923-1976.

CNNM = J. Mazard, *Corpus Nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniaeque*, Paris 1955-1958.

DK = H. Diels, W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin ⁶1952.

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- RIC² = H. Mattingly *et al.*, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, London ²1984.
RPC = *Roman Provincial Coinage*, London / Paris 1992-.
RSC = H. A. Seaby, D. R. Sear, R. Loosley, *Roman Silver Coins*, London 1978-1987.
SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Lugduni Batavorum 1923-.
SNG = *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum*, London 1931-.
ThL = *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, Lipsiae (then also Stutgardiae, Monachii, Berolini, Novi Eboraci, Bostoniae) 1900-.
VLQ = *Codices Vossiani Latini in Quarto*.

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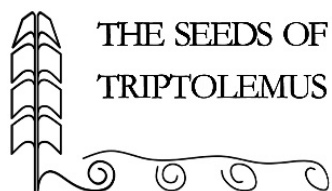
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