THE RESTORATION OF PERIKLES' ODEION AT ATHENS IN THE FIRST CENTURY BC: NEW AND ANCIENT BARBARIANS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the restoration project of the Odeion of Perikles at Athens, carried by the Cappadocian king Ariobarzanes II sometime between 63 and 52 BC, after its partial destruction during the Sullan sack of 86 BC. This sack occurred as a punishment for the alliance between Athens and the Pontic king Mithridates VI in his war against Rome. In that context, the restoration project of this fifth century B.C. covered-theatre was meaningful for the formation of diplomatic links and networks between Athens, Rome and Cappadocia, in particular considering the complexity of the antibarbarian narratives involved. From the viewpoint of the Athenian urban history, the restoration project is an eloquent example of a new attitude towards the urban space which would become a central feature in the social production of Athenian space throughout the first century B.C.: the antiquarian urbanism.

Keywords

Odeion of Perikles; Ariobarzanes II of Cappadocia; Sula; Roman Athens; hellenistic eugetism.

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Resumo

O artigo discute a restauração do Odeion de Péricles em Atenas, realizada por rei Ariobarzanes II da Capadócia entre 63 e 51 a. C. O teatro coberto, localizado próximo à encosta sudeste da acrópole, foi construído no século V a. C. e destruído durante o cerco do general romano Sula à cidade em 86 a. C., seja pelos invasores, seja pelos sitiados. A restauração deste “monumento anti-persa” é extremamente significativa para a compreensão das políticas externas ateniense na primeira metade do século I a. C., quando o poder romano criou um novo quadro geopolítico no Mediterrâneo oriental; argumenta-se que a formação de uma identidade anti-bárbara, profundamente relacionada a uma propaganda que relacionava Mitridates e os partas aos antigos persas, foi a principal motivação para a intervenção capadócia no espaço urbano ateniense. A partir do ponto de vista da história urbana ateniense, a restauração é um exemplo eloquente de uma nova atitude diante do espaço urbano, que se tornaria uma característica central nas intervenções urbanas de Atenas nos período tardo-republicano e augustano: o urbanismo antiquário.

Palavras-Chaves

Odeion de Péricles; Ariobarzanes; Capadócia; Sula; Atenas romana; Evergetismo helenístico.
Hardly other city than Athens could concentrate, in its monuments and literary culture, so many testimonies of the opposition between Greeks and Persians: from temples’ friezes to tragic paths, from rhetorical speeches to spoils housed in shrines, the Athenian participation in the Greek victory was a core element of the local civic identity from classical period onwards (Hall, 1989; Miller, 1997; Hall, 2002). The proliferation of images representing Giants, Centaurs, Amazons, Trojans, Persians and Gauls inside the city’s walls would, however, have ironically inserted the ‘barbarians’ into a city which have with so much effort struggled to repel them. This paper aims to discuss a specific case of this ambiguous inclusion of barbarians in Athenian urban landscape, namely, the restoration project of the Odeion of Perikles in the first century BC, a building deeply related to the Athenian antibarbarian discourse. The multiple dimensions and meanings of this restoration will be discussed in the terms of both the processes of Mediterranean integration (Horden, Purcell, 2000; Morris, 2003; Guarinello, 2010) and the euergetic production of the Athenian urban space (Morales, 2015).

In a recent book, Kostas Vlassopoulos (2013) has argued against the historiographical emphasis on the conflictual relations between Greeks and Barbarians, especially after the Persian Wars. According to the author,

[…] many scholars agree that the distinction between Greeks and Barbarians had little importance during archaic period; it was only in the early classical period that Greeks created a categorical distinction between themselves and the Barbarians, and constructed a discourse of identity that exalted Greek identity and Greek culture, and viewed the Barbarians in a dismissive and pejorative manner that sometimes bordered on being racist. […] There is undoubtedly an element of truth in the above description, but it is also deeply misleading. This description presupposes that each period had a single way of constructing Greek identity and its relationships to the Barbarians. But this is hardly credible given the peculiar nature of the Greek world (Vlassopoulos, 2013: 35-34).

The author continues discussing the peculiarities of Greek world – “the perennial lack of unity or of a center, and the great diversity among Greek communities” (Vlassopoulos, 2013: 36) – and the multiple ways in which the Greeks were related to the four parallel worlds of empires, panhellenism, networks and apoikiai, which have modeled both Greek culture and the cultures of Greek-influenced communities across the Mediterranean in the long term (Vlassopoulos, 2013: 34-128). However, the antibarbarian discourse, even though often taken as the major example of the conflict-centered historiography of classical and post-classical Greece, was nonetheless an important channel for communication and collaboration between Greeks and non-Greeks, justly because the definition about the barbarian identity was not a monopoly of Greek communities (Champion, 2004: 30-66). Although exhaustively studied in the case of Roman uses of barbarian identities (Spawforth, 2012: 103-106, with previous
this phenomenon have received few attention for earlier periods such as
the Hellenistic age, when, after the establishment of Greek monarchies across the
Eastern Mediterranean and Near East, assertions of Greek identity became an
important strategy to power legitimation (Gruen, 2006; Burstein, 2008; Vlassopoulos,
2013: 278-320). For this operation, Greek urban landscapes were particularly well-
suited (Veyne, 1976: 233; Ma, 2013: 67-110), and Athens, with its various antibarbarian
monuments – such as the Odeion of Perikles – was surely a privileged stage.

The building called ‘Odeion of Perikles’ (figs. 1 and 2) was a covered theatre located on
the Athenian acropolis’ southeast slope, aside the theatre of Dionysus. This odeion – one
of the three Ancient Athenian odeia3 – is known from scarce literary and epigraphic
sources4, to which were added the conclusions from partial excavations made along the
twentieth century5. It was an hypostyle building with a roughly square plan (c. 62x68
meters), covered by a pyramidal roof supported by 90 stone columns disposed in 9
east-west and 10 north-south rows, with a regular interaxial space of 6.15m. It is not
clear if the building had a wall and, if so, where its main entrance was located. M.
Korres (apud Miller, 1997: 229-230) even suggests that the building did not have a wall,
what would solve problems of lighting and ventilation; the access control would be
made either by provisional structures or the restrictions imposed by the high platform
upon which the building was laid. The number and placing of so many columns was,
nonetheless, a problem to the visualization of the activities that have taken place there:
literary sources mention the Odeion been used as seat for musical contests during
Athenian festivals, law court, stage for philosophical disputes, center of grain
distribution, seat of agonistic magistrates’ offices and eventually shelter for the
Athenian cavalry’s horses (Tofi, 2010). M. Miller also suggests a use of the Odeion
associated with the Athenian allies ‘contributions’ during the fifth century BC, which
are collected and displayed in the theater of Dionysus: the Odeion would have been a
stop for organization of contributors’ procession to the theater (Miller, 1997: 241-242).

According to the literary sources, the construction should associate to Perikles,
although Vitruvius mentions Themistokles as the commissioner; scholars traditionally
take this reference as a mistake, although we should not discard an unfinished
building activity before the Periklean work (Mosconi, 2000; Tofi, 2010: 162). The

3 Along with the first century BC ‘Odeion of Agrippa’ and the second century AD ‘Odeion of Herodes
Atticus’.
4 Literary sources: Aristoph. Wasps, 1109; Andoc. 1.38; Hyp. frag. 118; Xen. Hell. 2.4.9; Dem.59.52,
34.37; Cratin. fr. 73; Eup. fr. 325; Tphr.Char. 3.3; Herac. Crit. GGM. 1.98; Diod.Sic. Lib., 1.48.5-6;
Vitr. 5.9.1; App. Mith. 38; Plut. SVF2.605a, De ex. 605a, Per. 13.9-11; Paus. 1.20.4; D.L. 7.184; Suda
s.v. Odeion; Aeschin. esch. 3.66-67; Aristoph.schol. Wasps, 1109a. Inscriptions: IG II2 968.47; 1688.3;
3426; 3427.
5 For the discussion of remaining literary and archaeological evidence, see Miller (1997: 218-242).
connection with Themistokles could also be explained by the Odeion’s ornamental program: Vitruvius mentions the use of Persian naval spoils taken after the Salamina battle (Vitruvius, 5.9.1), and Plutarch and Pausanias state that its wooden cover was similar to the tent of Xerxes (Plutarch, Perikles, 13.9; Pausanias, 1.20.4). M. Miller, after discussing the problems relating to the long time span between the construction date and the first literary evidences for the ‘tent of Xerxes’ hypothesis, concludes that the existence of a hypostyle hall, an autochthonous Iranian architectural form developed centuries earlier, was sufficient to its identification by a Greek audience as a Persian-like building (fig. 3; Miller, 1997: 239). In this sense, the Odeion of Perikles, aside its practical functions, could be interpreted both as a memorial of the Persian Wars and, considering its association with the Athenian allies’ contributions and the persian spoils’ naval origin, as a symbol of the Athenian imperial power.

The building was not radically changed for the subsequent three centuries, although the Lycourgan monumentalization program of the acropolis’ south slope in the fourth century must have included some work on the Odeion (Mercuri, 2004; Étienne, 2004: 122-126). The great rupture in the history of the building would come only in 86 BC, when it was total or partially destroyed during the sack of Athens led by the Roman general L. Cornelius Sulla. The sack of 86 BC was the final act of the tragic path that had begun two years earlier, when Athenians broke a secular alliance with Rome. The beginning of hostilities between Rome and the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator, motivated by territorial disputes between the Pontic kingdom and its Roman-allies neighbors such as Bithynia and Cappadocia (Madsen, 2009), had strengthened anti-Roman groups in Athens. In 88/7 BC, an Athenian philosopher named Athenion, serving as Mithridates’ ambassador, was enthusiastically welcomed in Athens by members of the local elite and the Athenian guild of Dionysiac actors, being appointed to the office of hoplite general. Shortly after, Athenion was replaced by another Athenian philosopher, called Aristion, who, taking the treasures of Delos (since 166 an Athenian possession conceded by Rome), imposed a pro-Mithridatic ‘tyranny’ – according to pro-Roman sources such as Posidonios and Appian – upon the city. Meanwhile, the Roman general Sula, after a violent struggle with Mario and their followers for the command of the Asian war, depart from Rome to Athens in 87/6, beginning a months-long siege which would take the city in 86 BC. The massacre and destructions would produce many testimonies both in the literary tradition and archaeological record: Pausanias, writing in the second century AD, qualified Sulla’s attitudes as ‘so savage (ἀγριώτερα) as to be unworthy of a Roman’ (1.20.7), and many

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evidences of damages in public buildings dating to the sack were discovered in the twentieth excavations in the Athenian Agora (Hoff, 1997). One of the damaged buildings was the Odeion of Pericles, although the sources disagree about the identity of the responsible for it: Appian (Mithridatic Wars, 38) charges the tyrant Aristion, who would have fired the building to prevent the utilization of its building materials for Roman war machines; Pausanias (I.20.4), instead, charges Sulla, who would have fired the building during the final siege against Aristion and his allies on the acropolis. Such divergence could be derived either from contradictory versions related to different viewpoints or by the authors’ different political-literary projects (Bucher, 2000; Alcock, 2001), as will be discussed below.

The subsequent history of the Odeion is known from Vitruvius and two inscriptions found near the Dionysus sanctuary. Vitruvius mentions the building ‘burned during the war with Mithridates, and afterwards restored (restituit) by king Ariobarzanes’ (5.9.1), what is corroborated by two inscribed bases for statues of Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia found near the sanctuary of Dionysus, which runs:

To the king Ariobarzanes Philopator, the king Ariobarzanes Philorhomaios and queen Athenides Filostorgos’ son, having being designed by him to the preparation of the Odeion, Gaius and Marcus Stalli sons of Gaius, and Melanippus, [dedicate] to theirs euergetes (IG II2 3426).

The demos [dedicate] to the king Ariobarzanes Philopator, the king Ariobarzanes Philorhomaios and queen Athenides Filostorgos’ son, his euergetes (IG II2 3427).

The honored king was Ariobarzanes II, who ruled Cappadocia between 63 and 52 BC – the only clue for the Odeion’s reconstruction date. The kingdom of Cappadocia, a former Persian satrapy (Thierry, 2002), became independent in the middle of the third century BC with Ariarathes III, founder of the dynasty which would rule the kingdom until the death of Ariarathes IX in 96/5 BC (Will, 2003: 292) . The contact between Cappadocia and Athens were known from the second century BC: Stratonices, daughter of Ariarathes IV and wife of Eumenes II e later of Attalos of Pergamon, was honored in Delos with a statue dedicated by the Athenian demos (ID 1575; Habicht, 1997: 253); her brother, Ariarathes V, who ruled Cappadocia from 163 to 130 BC, was agonothetes of a Great Panathenaia and was honored, along with the queen Nysa (daughter of Pharnakes of Pontus), with proclamations at festivals and an exclusive feast day according to an honorific decree passed by the Athenian guild of Dionysiac actors (IG II2 1330) – the king have “guaranteed them personal immunity and safe conduct within his real” (Habicht, 1997: 282). The last honor given to an Ariarathid king in Athenian domains was a bust to Ariarathes VII in the sanctuary of the Cabeiri gods in Delos, itself dedicate to the gods, Mithridates VI of Pontus and Rome in the final of the second century BC (ID 1562; Habicht, 1997: 263).
The end of the Ariarathid dynasty, with the deposition of Mithridates VI’s son Ariarates IX by the Roman Senate and factions of Cappodocian elites, was crucial not only for the history of Cappadocia but also to the entire Asia Minor geopolitics. In this occasion, after the rejection of a republican regime suggested by the Senate (Justin, 38.2.8), a member of the local elite, with Greek and Persian descent, was enthroned with the name Ariobarzanes I Philorhomaios (96/5-63 BC). During his rule, however, Ariobarzanes I would be deposed several times (Sullivan, 1980: 1127-1137). The first deposition occurred in 95 BC, made by a Mithridates’ ally named Gordion, but the king would be re-enthroned in the same year by Sulla, then governor of Cilicia (Santangelo, 2007: 29-31). Plutarch (Sulla, 5.4) mentions a meeting between Sulla, Ariobarzanes I and Orobasos, an ambassador of Mithridates II of Parthia – what would become the first contact between Romans and Parthians (Santangelo, 2007: 28, n.39). A second deposition occurred around 92 BC, when Tigranes I of Armenia –a former protectorate of Parthia – enthroned Ariarathes IX, son of Mithridates VI of Pontus, alleged last living successor of the former dynasty. The Senate intervenes with an embassy led by Manius Aquilius, who, in 90 BC, not only restore Ariobarzanes I rule but also incites Nicomedes of Bithynia to attack the kingdom of Pontus, at time impeded by the Senate to defend itself; the defense of Mithridates would lead to the First Mithridatic War of Rome (Madsen, 2009). The third deposition would take place in 89/8 BC by the hands of Mithridates, to be reverted again by Sulla in 85 BC after his victories over the Pontic army. Finally, Ariobarzanes would be deposed again by Mithridates in 67 BC, during the Third Mithridatic War, being restored to the throne this time by Pompey in 63. Shortly after, Ariobarzanes renounces in favor of his son, Ariobarzanes II Philopator (63-52 BC), in the presence of Pompey itself (V. Max, 7.7; Sullivan, 1980; Kallet-Marx, 1996, pp. 291-334).

The troubled reign of Ariobarzanes I Philorhomaios was deeply related to the reorganization of the geopolitical powers in Asia Minor in the late second century BC (Habicht, 1989). The end of the Pergamene dynasty and the long decadence of the Seleucid power opened space for the growth of Pontic, Armenian, Bithynian, Parthian and Roman ambitions in Asia Minor and Anatolia. To the weaker kingdoms, such as Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Sophene and Commagene, remained the tense balance of diplomacy with ambitious neighbors and the powerful but distant Rome authorities, besides the instabilities created by internal factions associated with different geopolitical options and dynastic loyalties.

In Cappadocia, Ariobarzanes I tried to conciliate different factions with multiple strategies: the king married his son with one daughter of Mithridates VI of Pontus, maintained Ariarathid iconographic traditions (Simonetta, 1961), and as well as strengthened the ties with Rome, above all with Sulla and Pompey (Appian, Mith., 61; Dio, 36.9.2; Sullivan, 1980, p. 1130-2; Santangelo, 2007: 50-66). After ascending to the
throne in 63 BC, Ariobarzanes II continued his father’s conciliatory policy: while his coronation occurred under the auspices of Pompey in person, his queen, daughter of Mithridates VI, took the name of his mother-in-law, Athenais Philostorgos, signaling the union between the pro-pontic factions and the new dynasty; the epithet adopted by the new king, Philopator, indicated the continuity in relation to his father’s reign (Sullivan, 1980: 1137-1138). However, the conciliatory policy was not successful: after the appeal for Roman help to suppress a revolt in 57 BC, the king was murdered in 52 BC by a conspiracy probably related to the long-standing anti-ariobarzanid opposition. The conspiracy could have been fueled by the growing ambitions of the Parthian kingdom in Asia Minor: in a letter dated to 51 BC, Cicero mentions rumors about a Parthian invasion of Cilicia through Cappadocian territory, which was, according to Cicero, ‘open to invasors’ (adFam. 15.2). If Cicero was right, the existence of a pro-Parthian faction in Cappadocia would be very plausible, especially after the Parthian victory over the Roman army led by Crassus in 53 BC.

At this point, we can back to the Odeion’s restoration. Why a Cappadocian king, with so many challenges in his own kingdom, would be interested in the restoration of an Athenian historical monument? The question could be answered, on the one hand, through the connections between Ariobarzanes II, Athens, Sulla and Pompey. The king is listed in an Athenian ephabetic decree of 80/79 BC, according to which the ephebes of that year offered sacrifices during the Syleia, a festival celebrated since 84/3 BC in honor of Sulla (IG II2 1039.57). So, a Cappadocian king, whose father was re-enthroned several times by Sulla and as ephebe sacrificed to Sulla in Athens, restored a building destroyed during the Sullan sack of 86. This association could be at the basis of the disagreement about the responsible for the destruction: while Appian, writing in the first century AD Alexandria against anti-Roman dissidents, blames explicitly the ‘tyrant Aristion’ for the destruction, Pausanias, writing for a philhellenic audience, emphasizes the barbarism of Sulla, destroyer of the Odeion. To blame Sulla for the destruction, in some situations such as first century BC Athens and first century AD Alexandria, could be taken as an anti-Roman posture; this was not the case, however, for Pausanias’ Periegesis, given the celebrated philhellenic model offered by Hadrian. The honors given by the Athenians for Sulla just after his return to the city in 84 BC (Kallet-Marx, 1996: 212-221) could have been part of an operation which aimed to justify the Roman violence by associating Aristion with tyranny/barbarism and Sulla with the restoration of the ancient politeia: in fact, the coinage of 84/3 BC depicted the late archaic tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogeiton on the reverse (Habicht, 1976), in the same year that the venerable festival in honor of Theseus (the Theseia), the local civilizing hero seen as one of the fathers of Athenian democracy (Walker, 1995), was renamed in honor of Sulla (Raubitschek, 1951). This could have been the context for blaming Aristion, the ‘tyrant’ allied to the ‘barbarian’ Mithridates, for the destruction of the Odeion of Perikles, a democratic and anti-Persian memorial. The participation of
Ariobarzanes II in the restoration, employing two Roman architects, could be interpreted as part of this disassociation between Romans and the destructions, an operation facilitated by either the benefactions given by the Roman philhellene Titus Pomponius Atticus to the city during the two decades after the sack (Morales, 2015: 225-235), or the gift of 50 talents given by Pompey to restorations in Athens in 62 BC, after his decisive victory over Mithridates and the coronation of Ariobarzanes II as king of Cappadocia (Valverde, 2005; Morales, 2015: 235-248). In fact, the restoration of the Odeion should not be linked with the 50 talents offered by Pompey, given the absence of his name (or marks of erasing) in the inscriptions related to the restoration mentioned above; nevertheless, the climate of change in the Romans’ image from plunderers to benefactors and savioirs (Habicht, 1997: 332) offered the perfect opportunity for the restoration of the building, thus strengthening the ties between the former Athenian ephebe Ariobarzanes II with the Roman power and the Athenian classical tradition.

On the other hand, the choice for the Odeion’s restoration could be explained both by the wide, Mediterranean audience reached by Athens and the strong antibarbarian meaning implicit in the Odeion’s structural and ornamental program. In fact, by this operation Ariobarzanes could strengthen the association of Mithridates and the Parthians with the Achaemenid Persians (Ballesteros-Pastor, 2005; Rose, 2005; Curtis, 2007; Olbrycht, 2009), locating himself in the long, myth-historic antibarbarian commemoration. The location of the Odeion, just below the Parthenon’s east façade and the Attalid dedication in the southeast corner of the acropolis’ wall – monuments which commemorate the sequence of victories over Giants, Centaurs, Amazons, Trojans, Persians and Gauls – facilitate the association of Ariobarzanes and Rome with this cosmological struggle between civilization and barbarism (Morales, 2015: 102-123). Thus, the participation of Ariobarzanes II could be interpreted as a legitimation strategy of his pro-Roman position against the supposedly ‘pro-Barbarian’ Cappadocian dissidents and foreign enemies (from Pontus, Armenia and Parthia), directed towards a philhellenic Mediterranean audience.

From the point of view of Athenian urban history, in turn, the restoration had an ambiguous nature. On the one hand, the restoration continued a secular tradition of Hellenistic kings’ building euergetism towards the city, strongly influenced by the antibarbarian discourse present in the Athenian urban landscape (Morales, 2015: 346-356). Besides, not only by the use of the building as place of musical contests during the Great Panathenaia, but also by its proximity with the sanctuary of Dionysus – whose guild, as seen above, had since the second century BC, royal guaranties of safety and immunity in Cappadocian territory –, Ariobarzanes II continued the pattern of the second century BC monarchical euergetism with buildings related, by proximity
and/or use, to the Athenian agonistic tradition, inscribing himself in this particularly visible dimension of the city’s euergetic history.

However, the Odeion restoration must be distinguished from the building euergetism of the second century BC in a very important aspect: while the Attalid monarchs built whole new buildings cleared inspired by Pergamene architectural traditions (which profoundly altered the city landscape, such as stoai in the agora and the acropolis’ south slope), the Cappadocian king restored an ancient building with no innovations or alterations in the original plan. Although the Vitruvian choice for the word *restituto* could also signify ‘innovate’, the excavations revealed that the building’s main functional problem – the visibility obstacles created by the inner columns – wasn’t solved, despite the astonishing contemporary technical developments for covering great areas without dozens of inner supports, such as in the Milesian Bouleuterion or the Pompeian Odeion (Winter, 2006: 96-111, 135-149). Furthermore, the decision to restore a building deeply related to the classical memory reveals, in a broader sense, an antiquarian attitude towards the urban space. The desire of rescue the past as it were – according to literary or oral traditions – was subjacent to this ‘antiquarian urbanism’, radically different from the Attalid urban interventions in Athens, more preoccupied in updating the city to Hellenistic urban standards than restore venerable buildings related to the classical past (Morales, 2015: 353-357).

The Sullan sack of the city, with its half-accomplished possibility of total annihilation, was at the base of this antiquarian urbanism: the material supports of the Athenian cultural heritage must be protected and restored. The sack created a new relation of Athenians and foreigners towards the urban space. Cicero’s efforts in defense of Epicurus’ house and his non-accomplished project of giving a new portico in the Academy in the mid-first century BC (Rawson, 1985; Morales, 2015: 228-232) and, above all, the wide-ranging Augustan program of building restorations in the late first century BC attitude (Schmalz, 1994: 43-68; Morales, 2015: 259-344) were evidences for the diffusion of that antiquarian attitude in the social production of urban space. That the first step was taken by a king with Persian origins ruling an Eastern kingdom demonstrate eloquently how Athenian history could not be isolated from the Mediterranean networks and integration processes, with its historically constructed barbarians – Romans or Pontians, Cappadocians or Parthians, old or new Persians – simultaneously included in and excluded of the Athenian urban landscape.
FIG 2. PLAN OF THE ODEION OF PERIKLES (HIGHLIGHTED IN RED) ACCORDING TO J. TRAVLOS IN 1969.

7 Available at the site: 
FIG 3. PLAN OF PERSEPOLIS. HALL OF THE HUNDRED COLUMNS HIGHLIGHTED IN RED (IRANICA ONLINE®).

Bibliography


