THE NEW SCHOLAR
Leiden Student Journal of Humanities
Universiteit Leiden Humanities

# Nero as Neoptolemus: Greece and Rome in Diodorus I

Maud Y.P. van Es
Master Classics

**Abstract:** This article discusses an epigram by Diodorus of Sardis (Diodorus 1 ed. Gow and Page or AP 9.219), in which a return to Rome of someone called Nero is compared with Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy. Although the epigram seems to be praising, it also contains subversive elements. The exemplum of Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy is problematic, since the goal of his voyage is to capture the city. Not only can Neoptolemus' role in the fall of Troy be seen negatively from a Roman perspective, but it also suggests that Nero's return to Rome is dangerous for the city as well. Moreover, the mythical connection between Troy and Rome suggests that the Greek conquest of Troy can be seen as a conquest of proto-Rome. Finally, by connecting apparent praise of Nero to the word θύω ("to rage"), Nero is placed further in a negative light. This article analyses these elements with a focus on the cultural tension between Greece and Rome, and subsequently argues that the poem resists, in its own way, Roman domination.

**Keywords:** Garland of Philip, Diodorus of Sardis, Early Roman Empire, Greek Epigram, Greek Literature in the Roman World, Resistance



## Introduction

During the time of the Roman Empire, Greek literature flourished and was being written in great quantities. Until recently, scholars have mainly argued that the Greek texts from this period are nostalgically looking back to the Greek past, ignoring the current Roman domination of Greece.[1] Around the turn of the century, however, the way scholars look at Greek literature under the Roman Empire began to change: these texts are *not* ignorant of the current situation, but are, in their own way, reacting to it, such as by praising or criticizing the Roman power, most often in an implicit manner.[2]

A group of such texts is the *Garland of Philip*, an anthology of Greek epigrams, most likely compiled during the reign of Nero by Philip of Thessalonica. This garland contains poems from circa 60 BC until AD 55, and thus of the Late Republic and Early Roman Empire.[3] Rome is an important factor in Philip's *Garland*: not only are some of the poems about Roman emperors or other important figures in Rome, but it is also likely that many of the poets represented in

[1] E.g. Bowie, "Greeks and their Past."
[2] E.g. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*. Goldhill, *Being Greek under Rome*, and Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature*.
[3] See Cameron, "The Garland of Philip," Argentieri, "Meleager and Philip," 158–160, Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 138, Höschele, "Greek Epigram," 484, and De Jonge, "Greek Migrant Literature," 24.

the *Garland* have visited Rome or even lived there.[4] Many of these epigrams show an ambiguous relationship to Rome, showing for instance praise in combination with irony or critique.[5] In this article, I will discuss one epigram from the *Garland of Philip* that is involved with Rome, namely the first epigram by Diodorus of Sardis in the edition of Gow and Page (Diodorus 1 ed. Gow and Page or *AP* 9.219). In this poem, the return to Rome of someone called Nero is compared to Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy.

Diodorus 1 has not yet received much scholarly attention: the two main works that discuss this epigram are Gow and Page's commentary on Philip's *Garland* and an article by Whitmarsh on patronage between Greek poets and Roman patrons.[6] Gow and Page mostly pay attention to the identity of Nero and do not interpret the poem any further than summarizing it as "a welcome to Nero on his return to Rome."[7] Whitmarsh, on the other hand, gives more of an interpretation: he uses this epigram as an example of a poem in the *Garland* in which "troubling hints (…) disrupt the smooth surface of the client's praise." He argues that this ambiguity between praise and hidden criticism in "troubling hints" can be explained in regard to patronage. According to him, patronal poetry is a gift, and gift giving is, he says, "an attempt to impose power, or at least to limit the other's, by defining the nature of the relationship," especially when the gift is "freighted with cultural self-definition," as is the case when it is a gift between Greek poets and Roman patrons. By including some criticism in the poem, the poet can thus keep some distance from the patron and protect his own Greek identity. In addition, Whitmarsh suggests that the patron would want some bite in the poems as well, in order that it seems like the poet can say what he wants. Finally, the poems are usually performed for a public audience and the poet has to pay attention to their wishes as well. Whitmarsh argues that they would not want to hear mere flattery. Hence, the poet must find a way among these three parties and not flatter the patron outright, but there must rather be some bite in it, too.[8]

Whitmarsh argued well how these patronal relationships between Greek poets and Roman patrons could have worked and how there can be some irony or critique in poems resulting from patronage, instead of them being merely flattery. However, I will discuss Diodorus 1 in this article in more detail and argue that it goes further than showing "troubling hints" and that it even shows, in its own way, resistance to Rome. After beginning with providing some background to Diodorus and the epigram, I will discuss four main elements that give the poem a troubling or subversive layer: the problematic exemplum of Neoptolemus, the theme of civil war in the poem, the relationship between Troy and Rome, and finally the use of the word θύω ("to rage"). In the analysis of these elements, I will focus on the cultural tensions between Greek and Roman perspectives. Lastly, I will show how this poem can be interpreted as resisting Rome.

## 2. Diodorus I

### 2.1. Poem and Poet

Not much, if anything, is known about the poet Diodorus: it is even unclear how many Diodori actually are represented in the *Garland of Philip*. Our epigram is the only one that is ascribed

[4] E.g. Höschele, "Greek Epigram," 485 and De Jonge, "Greek Migrant Literature," 24.
[5] E.g. Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 137–153, De Jonge "Greek Migrant Literature," 24–25, and Bowie, "Luxury Cruisers?".
[6] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265–266 and Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 143–144, 147–148.
[7] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265.
[8] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 147–149, 151–152.

to "Diodorus of Sardis", but there are 17 more poems attributed to just "Diodorus", and Gow and Page assume that these are also by the same Diodorus of Sardis.[9] Three of these poems deal with Rome: besides Diodorus 1, there is a poem in which an unidentifiable Roman called Maximus makes sacrifices to the goddess Hera, and one about Drusus — probably a member of the imperial family.[10] There is also one possible external source on Diodorus: Strabo writes that he was befriended by "the younger Diodorus of Sardis" and that this Diodorus wrote historical works, as well as lyric and other poetry, "which display full well the ancient style of writing" (τὴν ἀρχαίαν γραφὴν ἐπιφαίνοντα ἱκανῶς, Strabo 13.4.9).[11] Gow and Page assume that this Diodorus is the same as our poet, but it is by no means sure.[12]

Let us now turn to the poem itself:

αἰγιβότου Σκύροιο λιπὼν πέδον Ἴλιον ἔπλω
οἷος Ἀχιλλείδης πρόσθε μενεπτόλεμος,
τοῖος ἐν Αἰνεάδηισι Νέρων ἀγὸς ἄστυ Ῥέμοιο
νεῖται ἐπ᾽ὠκυρόην Θύμβριν ἀμειψάμενος,
κοῦρος ἔτ᾽ ἀρτιγένειον ἔχων χνόον· ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν ἔγχει
θῦεν, ὁ δ᾽ ἀμφοτέροις, καὶ δορὶ καὶ σοφίηι.

"Such as the son of Achilles once, steadfast in battle, sailed to Troy, leaving the ground of Skyros, browsed by goats, so Nero, leader amid the descendants of Aeneas, returns to the swift-flowing Tiber, changing his ground to the city of Remus, still a boy having the first down on his chin with the beard just sprouting. But the former rages with the spear, and the latter with both, with the spear and in wisdom."[13]

The poem can roughly be divided into two parts: the first four lines and the last two. The first part consists of the comparison between Nero and Neoptolemus and is arranged in a chiasmic structure: the first and the fourth line correspond with each other, as well as the second and third line (ABBA). The first and the fourth line tell us where Neoptolemus is leaving from and where Nero is going to, and both consist of a participle, a verb and a geographic term with an epithet. In the two lines in between, Neoptolemus and Nero are named and placed together in a structure with οἷος…τοῖος. The construction of this first part strengthens the assimilation between Nero and Neoptolemus and invites the reader even more to compare them.[14] The second part, consisting of the last two lines, zooms out again: there, more general statements about Nero and Neoptolemus are made.

## 2.2. The Addressee

Cichorius, as well as Gow and Page, discusses who the Nero in this poem is and after which event he returns to Rome.[15] They agree that it most likely refers to the future emperor Tiberius,

[9] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 263–264 . See there also for further details about this discussion.
[10] Diodorus 3 and 8 ed. Gow & Page. See also Bowie, "Luxury Cruisers?" 247. Gow and Page (*The Greek Anthology*, 270) discuss with whom Drusus should be identified: they consider Drusus Claudius Nero (son of Tiberius), Drusus Julius Caesar (son of Germanicus) and Nero Claudius Drusus (brother of Tiberius).
[11] Edition and translation of Jones.
[12] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 264.
[13] Edition is of Gow and Page. Translation is my own.
[14] Cf. Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 144.
[15] Cichorius, *Römische Studien*, 299 and Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265.

reasoning that he was often called "Nero" before Augustus adopted him and that he had an interest in literature, thus σοφία ("wisdom") seems to be fitting. They disagree, however, on the return that is described here. Gow and Page believe that the occasion of the poem is Tiberius' return from military service in Spain in 24 BC, while Cichorius argues that it is about his return from Armenia in 20 BC. Gow and Page reject his argument because at that moment Tiberius was 22 years old and that would be too old to be called having his first beard. At the moment of his return from Spain, on the other hand, he would have been 17 or 18 years old: a fitting age to have one's first beard.

This is, however, not the only option: another possibility that deserves attention is the identification of the addressee as the emperor Nero.[16] Gow and Page discuss this, but conclude that it is unlikely that the poem is about Nero: they argue that there are no other poems in the *Garland* that can be dated any later than AD 40, while Nero is born in AD 37. If the poem is about the emperor Nero, it would have been written in the period of circa AD 53–57, the time of his first beard. Furthermore, Gow and Page argue that the author could not be the same "Diodorus of Sardis" that Strabo wrote about if the poem is written in the mid-first century AD.[17] Cichorius also rejects Nero as the addressee; he does this on the grounds of there not being any military campaigns or voyages known to us from Nero's youth.[18] However, I do not think that these arguments are fully convincing. Unlike argued by Gow and Page, there actually are more epigrams in the *Garland* that can be assigned to a later date than AD 40. Cameron dates multiple poems under the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54), while Hartigan argues about another poem that it is written under Nero.[19] To date Diodorus' epigram in the 50s is thus late for the *Garland*, but not impossible. At the other hand, Gow and Page are right that this late date would make it more difficult to identify our Diodorus with Strabo's "younger Diodorus", although it would not be completely impossible: Strabo lived from 63 BC to AD 23, while Diodorus would have written his epigram around AD 55. This is 30 years after Strabo's death, which means that they could have known each other, but that Diodorus would have been much younger than Strabo. It is, however, not necessary at all for our author to be the same person as Strabo's friend Diodorus: he may very well be another Diodorus. Lastly, the fact that we do not know of any military activity Nero could have returned from in his youth is not persuasive either: it is certainly possible that the occasion of the poem is not handed down to us.

Nero can hence not be excluded as the addressee of the poem. What's more, the interpretation I will give in the rest of this article seems to be more apt to Nero, although it could be applied to Tiberius as well. Especially the use of the name Ἀχιλλείδης ("son of Achilles") for Neoptolemus, the theme of civil war and the use of θύω ("to rage") in combination with σοφία ("wisdom") are more suitable for Nero. I'll explain this below, in the main text as well as the footnotes. Additionally, taking Nero as the addressee, allows the epigram to postdate the publication of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Vergil's epic is published after his death in 19 BC, and thus later than the proposed date if Tiberius is the addressee. In the remainder of this article, I'll discuss some themes that seem to be influenced by the *Aeneid* or at least by ideas that are also expressed in the *Aeneid*.

---

[16] In addition, Gow and Page (*The Greek Anthology*, 265) consider two other Nero's as addressee, namely Nero Claudius Drusus (stepson of Augustus and brother of Tiberius) and Nero Claudius (a son of Drusus). They reject them partly on the grounds that they were too old for their first beards during their first known military campaigns, and partly because they are usually not called "Nero", but instead "Drusus" and "Germanicus" respectively. Although the first reason is not fully persuasive, I find the second reason convincing enough not to consider them here any further.

[17] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265.

[18] Cichorius, *Römische Studien*, 299.

[19] Cameron, "The Garland of Philip" and Hartigan, *The Poets and the Cities*, 108-109. See also Argentieri, "Meleager and Philip," 158–159.

In conclusion, there is a lot of uncertainty around the date, addressee and occasion of Diodorus' epigram. Both Tiberius and the emperor Nero are plausible candidates. If Tiberius is the addressee, the epigram was probably written around 24–20 BC, while it can be dated to AD 53–57 if Nero is meant in the poem.[20]

## 3. A Troubling Poem

### 3.1. Neoptolemus as a Problematic Exemplum

Nero is like Neoptolemus: a good and fearless warrior, playing an important role in an important war, one could say. Neoptolemus is, however, an ambiguous figure and can be seen as a problematic exemplum. Not only is he the less famous son of one of the most famous Greek heroes, Achilles, but also his own actions, such as his killing of Priam at the altar, can show him in a dubious light.

The poem especially invites us to reflect on the first point by only calling Neoptolemus "the son of Achilles," and not by his own name. Whitmarsh discusses this: he says about Neoptolemus that he is "the lesser son of an egregious father" and he sees this in regard of the later adoption of Tiberius by Augustus and the question of how Augustus could be successfully succeeded. The adoption will only take place in AD 4, so more than 20 years later, but Whitmarsh states that if this poem was written after the death of Marcellus in 23 BC "then issues of succession may well have been in the air."[21] This would then suggest that Tiberius, if he were the successor, would not be able to match Augustus. However, problematic about this interpretation is that even after the death of Marcellus, Tiberius still isn't the most likely candidate to follow Augustus up: soon after Marcellus' death in 23 BC, Augustus made his general and friend Marcus Agrippa his son-in-law and successor.[22] In addition, since Tiberius hadn't been adopted by Augustus in 23 BC, Augustus would probably not be the first person you would think of as his father. The situation is different for Nero: he was adopted by Claudius and appointed as his successor when he was only 12 years old. He became emperor four years later, in AD 54. If the epigram is about him, he would most likely already be the emperor, or at least the appointed successor. This could make the point of calling Neoptolemus Ἀχιλλείδης ("son of Achilles") stronger. It can imply that Nero is not going to be able to match his adoptive father Claudius as emperor, or even, in a broader perspective, all the Julio-Claudian emperors before him.

Furthermore, the reception of Neoptolemus himself is also ambiguous. In Homer's *Odyssey* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* a predominantly positive image of Neoptolemus is formed, while he is portrayed quite negatively in Vergil's *Aeneid*.[23] In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus tells Achilles about his son when he consults the spirits of the dead in book 11: he describes there how well Neoptolemus speaks during councils and how brave and martial he is, in combat as well as inside the wooden horse.[24] It has to be kept in mind that Odysseus is talking here to the dead Achilles — maybe not the place for criticism on his son. By contrast, in Aeneas' story to Dido in the *Aeneid*, Neoptolemus is described in a very negative manner, in particular the way in which he kills Polites, a son of Priam, and subsequently Priam himself, just before the altar and

[20] In the rest of the article, I mean with "Nero" the addressee; not specifically the emperor. If the emperor is meant, that will be said explicitly.
[21] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 147.
[22] See e.g. Tacitus, *Annales* 1.3.
[23] See Scherf, "Neoptolemus."
[24] Homer, *Odyssey* 11.505–537.

in the blood of his son.[25] This again is not an unbiased story: the Trojan Aeneas is likely to emphasize the wickedness of his enemy killing the Trojan king. Although both accounts have their own agenda, the difference between Odysseus' and Aeneas' interpretation of Neoptolemus still shows the ambiguity of Neoptolemus' reputation and the cultural differences that are related to it. From a Greek perspective, Neoptolemus can be a positive example of someone who helped them win the Trojan War, while the Romans, who see themselves as descendants of the Trojans, can emphasize his negative characteristics.

### 3.2. Civil War

Not only the comparison between Nero and Neoptolemus themselves is remarkable, but also that between their journeys: Nero's return to Rome is compared to Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy. However, Neoptolemus goes to Troy to *siege and capture* the city: this raises the question of whether Nero also goes to Rome to capture it. This idea is strengthened by the crucial role that Neoptolemus plays in the fall of Troy: not only is he one of the Greeks in the wooden horse and the one that kills Priam, as discussed in the previous section, but according to a prophesy by Helenus, his presence was even a necessary condition for the Greeks to capture Troy. It is because of this prophesy that Odysseus goes to Skyros and brings Neoptolemus to Troy. Thus, the reason and result of Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy is the fall of Troy. Nero's arrival at Rome is hence compared with the attack on Troy that leads to its fall, and is therefore also portrayed as an attack on Rome and an attempt to capture the city.[26]

In this way, the poem evokes the idea of civil war.[27] Rome has a history of civil wars: there have for instance been civil wars between Marius and Sulla in the 80s BC, between Pompey and Caesar in the 40s BC and, most recently, between Mark Antony and Octavian from 30–32 BC, finally resulting in the Roman Empire with Augustus as the emperor. The theme of civil war in this epigram seems to be confirmed when Rome is called ἄστυ ‘Ρέμοιο, "the city of Remus". Although Whitmarsh does not recognize a broader treatment of civil war in the poem, he notices here the connection with civil strife. He also remarks that ἄστυ ‘Ρέμοιο, or a similar phrase, is not before attested in Greek literature, which makes it even more remarkable.[28] The murder of Remus by his brother Romulus at the very foundation of Rome, is sometimes — at least in Latin literature — used as a symbol of or a reason for the civil wars that plague Rome throughout history.[29] Here, Rome is named after the victim of this fratricide. By doing this, Diodorus portrays Rome as a victim of civil war: as a victim of the suggested civil strife evoked by the return of Nero and as a victim of the civil wars that have actually taken place earlier, but most of all as a victim of the recurring civil wars since this first fratricide.

---

[25] Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.479–559, especially 527–559. See above on the date of the *Aeneid* in relation to the date of Diodorus' epigram.

[26] This interpretation speaks in favour of the emperor Nero as the addressee: 17-year old Nero seems to be much more of a threat to Rome than Tiberius. Nero is already emperor at that age and could thus potentially be a lot more dangerous for Rome than Tiberius. Although the first years of his reign are often seen as relatively prosperous, he was already familiar with the murder of relatives: he became emperor after his mother murdered the previous emperor, Claudius, and he killed his stepbrother, Brittanicus, when he was 17 year old, fearing that he would be a threat to his power.

[27] Cf. Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 147, who sees a "potential hint of aggression toward the city."

[28] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 147–148. In Latin literature, it is also unusual to call Rome by Remus' name, but cf. Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.60.

[29] See also Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 148 n. 32. See especially Horace, *Epodes* 7.17–20, as Whitmarsh mentions. If the emperor Nero is the addressee of the poem and if the poem postdates 55 BC, the reference to Remus and his fratricide can allude to Nero's murder of his half-brother Britannicus as well. I own this point to the anonymous reviewer of this article.

Nero's attack on Rome is, moreover, portrayed as more important than any military activities he may have performed abroad. Not only does it remain unnamed where he comes from and what he did there, but the pleasant description of Neoptolemus' place of departure even seems to downplay it. The "land of Skyros, grazed by goats" (αἰγιβότου Σκύροιο (…) πέδον) does not sound militaristic. If we extend the comparison to include the places of department, this could imply that Nero, too, came from quite a peaceful place. The external military service of Nero is thus not depicted as of any importance: the only important war here is the civil one after his return. From a Greek perspective, the Roman civil war can here be contrasted to Greece as well: the Greek Neoptolemus went to war against an actual enemy, while the Roman Nero returns in a hostile attack to his own city, which has already fallen again and again into civil war.

### 3.3. Greece, Rome, and the Trojan War

The war Neoptolemus goes to, the Trojan War, is itself also important to the way in which the poem presents the relationship between Greece and Rome, namely as a connection between the "Greek past" and "Roman present." Whitmarsh sees in this epigram a strict line between the Greek past and Roman present: he says that the comparison between Nero and Neoptolemus "sets in parallel the two cultural temporalities, "in the past" and "among the sons of Aeneas," thus directly associating Rome with political and military currency and Greece with a distant, mythical world."[30] Although I think it is in essence true that the currency is placed here by Rome, while the Greeks are associated with the past — as is already made clear by πρόσθε ("once, in the past") — I believe that Whitmarsh's interpretation skips over some important aspects of the poem. In this poem, Rome is also connected to the Trojan war and thus to the same "mythical world". After establishing the theme of the Trojan War in the first two lines by speaking about Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy, the first thing we hear about the Romans is in the third line: ἐν Αἰνεάδηισι ("amid the sons of Aeneas"). This directly connects the Romans through Aeneas with the Trojan past.

In this manner, the poem reflects on the link between Troy's fall and Rome's founding and the transmission from the past of Troy to the present Rome. When Troy falls, Aeneas leaves and journeys to Italy to take the first steps in the founding of Rome. This is echoed in the poem: the first two lines allude, through the voyage of Neoptolemus, to the fall of Troy, while the second two lines seem to symbolize Aeneas' journey to Italy. The connection between Nero's and Aeneas' voyages to Rome is clearly established by saying that Nero is "the leader amid the sons of Aeneas" (ἐν Αἰνεάδηισι Νέρων ἀγὸς). This statement strongly evokes Aeneas himself as well: it could even be translated as Nero being "as the leader amid the companions of Aeneas", referring to Aeneas himself.[31] The remainder of these lines can also refer to Aeneas: that he "changes his ground to the city of Remus" (ἄστυ Ῥέμοιο (…) ἀμειψάμενος) fits well with the idea that he changes his Trojan home to (the predecessor of) Rome; it is maybe even more suitable than Nero "changing his ground" after a short stay abroad. Furthermore, he "goes to the swift-flowing Tiber"[32] (νεῖται ἐπ'ὠκυρόην Θύμβριν), which is at least in the *Aeneid* an important goal to reach for Aeneas.[33]

[30] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 144.
[31] The Latin plural patronym of Aeneas, *Aeneadae*, is often used for the companions of Aeneas, besides meaning Aeneas' descendants, i.e. the Romans. Cf. e.g. Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.157. The Greek word is rare: there is one possible earlier attestation of the singular form in the *Anthologia Graeca* (9.307.4). The only place the plural is used is in the later Oppian (*Halieutica* 2.675). Αἰνεάδηισι seems here thus to be mostly a translation of the Latin word and therefore it is likely that it can also have the connotation of "companions of Aeneas", like the Latin word.
[32] νέομαι often has a connotation of "return (home)", but can also just mean "go" or "come" (see LSJ).
[33] E.g. Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.782.

This poem is hence also about the origin of Rome, which can be found in the destruction of Troy — induced by Neoptolemus' journey to Troy. In this way, it reflects on the by Greeks and Romans shared past of the Trojan war. Roman authors themselves often portray Rome as descended from Troy as well, but Diodorus' Greek poem invites us to look at this Trojan past from a *Greek* perspective. From that point of view, the poem may reflect on a Greek victory on the proto-Romans, induced by Neoptolemus' arrival. In this way, Greece seems to negotiate with Rome's authority: the poem suggests that the Greeks have once defeated Rome and in that way resists to yield completely to Rome's current superiority over Greece.

### 3.4. In War and Wisdom

The epigram closes with further parallels and differences between Nero and Neoptolemus in the last two lines. Both have only their first beards and are thus young when undertaking their journeys, but while Neoptolemus rages with the spear, Nero rages with both the spear and in wisdom. These lines are seemingly praising Nero: after all, he excels not only with the spear, but also in wisdom. However, the use of the word θύω ("to rage") is problematic, as Whitmarsh also notices.[34] Although "raging" with a spear, that is in war, is probably mostly positive, it still can have some more unpleasant undertones. It evokes a feeling of uncontrolled and rash warfare, and Whitmarsh remarks additionally that it could remind us of the other word θύω, which means "to sacrifice" or "to slaughter".[35] The combination of rash warfare and sacrifice can also remind us of Neoptolemus' slaughtering of Priam before the altar, which I have discussed above.

Furthermore, θύω brings us to greater problems when it is not just connected to war, but also to wisdom. Whitmarsh discusses this: he says that it is strange to rage in wisdom and unclear what that would actually mean. He interprets "with the spear and in wisdom" as the division that was made between war and arts: in this distinction, "war" was ascribed to Rome and "arts", including poetry, literature and philosophy, to Greece. He concludes that "the attempt to neatly match up 'both' sides of the cultural division of labour (…) results in a palpable grinding of gears."[36] We could, however, bring this interpretation further by including the Greek and Roman identities that play a role here. It is remarkable that here the side of arts is connected to the Roman Nero, while it naturally is the object of the cultural Greeks. By linking σοφία then to a warlike word as θύω, the poem could make clear that the Roman Nero is not fit for the Greek activity of art. Apparently, he cannot treat art as it should be treated, but instead "rages" in it, as he does in war — the side of the division he should do, being Roman.[37]

## 4. Resisting Rome

[34] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 148.
[35] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 148 n.33.
[36] Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic*, 140–141, 148. Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265, also seem to interpret "wisdom" as referring to literature and arts. See about this division also e.g. Whitmarsh, "Greece and Rome," 114–115, 121–122.
[37] Although Tiberius is interested in culture as well (Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 265, and e.g. Rutledge, "Tiberius' Philhellenism"), the emperor Nero is especially known for his extravagant interest in the arts and Greek culture. His philhellenistic tendencies where already present in his youth and at the beginning of his principate (Griffin, *Nero*, 208). He would thus be more likely than Tiberius to be described as "raging in wisdom."

Diodorus' poem thus has an extensive troubling and subversive layer, although it appears to be a praising poem at first sight. Not only can part of this be interpretated as indirect criticism against Nero, but the important role Greek and Roman identities play also invites us to look at it from a broader perspective and to see it as a reaction to Roman power. The combination of praise and criticism in Diodorus' epigram is in keeping with other Greek literature written under the Roman Empire: these texts often do not display outright criticism of or resistance to Rome. One of the reasons for this is that Greek authors were often themselves Roman citizens, sometimes even active in Roman political life, or otherwise dependent on Rome.[38] However, Whitmarsh has shown in another article that there can still be resistance in these works, albeit in different forms. He argues that, even though Greek literature does not show direct political opposition, they do take on strategies "for adapting and refiguring the linguistic and cultural *representation* of Empire." They change the way the Roman Empire is perceived by for instance focusing on the local or the cosmic scale, in that way creating places where the Roman Empire doesn't reach. By doing that, the texts portray the power of Rome as something not unlimited.[39]

Although the examples of resistance Whitmarsh discusses do not present themselves in Diodorus' epigram, his article does show that there are other forms of resistance possible besides direct political opposition and thus helps us to understand in what way there could be resistance in our poem. Here, the representation of Rome and its imperium is changed as well. There is a constant comparing and negotiating between Greek and Roman identities in the poem, in which Greece does not turn out to be inferior to Rome. This idea returns in almost all the aspects discussed above. The comparison between a Greek and a Roman already invites us to compare Greece and Rome themselves as well, and the choice of Neoptolemus as exemplum for Nero affirms the cultural tension in the poem: as an important, but also dubious, figure in the fall of Troy, he can be looked upon positively from a Greek perspective, while negatively from a Roman one. The suggested superiority of Greece is strengthened by the story of the origin of Rome that runs throughout the poem: by linking Rome to Troy and by alluding to the fall of Troy through Neoptolemus, we also find the idea that the Greeks have once defeated the proto-Romans. In this way, the Romans are portrayed as conquerable, while the Greeks are the vanquishers. At the same time, Rome is shown in a negative light by the theme of the recurring civil wars. Rome is, moreover, kept "small" by the way Diodorus refers to it: ἄστυ Ῥέμοιο ("the city of Remus") and ὠκυρόην Θύμβριν ("the swift-flowing Tiber"). This does not seem to indicate Rome as the imperial centrum of the world, but rather evokes a small Rome, close to its founding. Finally, even the last lines in which Nero is associated with war as well as arts, while to Neoptolemus only war is given, are undermined by the verb θύω, which suggests that the Roman Nero is, and possibly the Romans in general are, not able to perform the typically Greek activity of arts and poetry in a good manner. In this way, the poem resists Rome by not yielding to Roman superiority over Greece.

This interpretation does not have to contradict Whitmarsh's analysis of how this poem could be a product of patronage between a Greek poet and a Roman patron, as discussed above. Although the troubling layer is extensive in Diodorus 1 and can be seen as a form of resistance, the poem still has another side, too, and is presented as a praising poem. Furthermore, the resistance in the poem can also be seen in regard to Whitmarsh's argument. As discussed above, he argued that providing patronal poetry can be seen as a form of gift giving. Especially, when it is a gift from Greece to Rome, and thus "freighted with cultural self-definition," these gifts are not merely flattery, but rather a place where the voice of the Greek poet can be heard as well and where he can "impose power or at least (…) limit the other's."[40] The form of resistance we

[38] Whitmarsh, "Resistance is Futile?" 61–62.
[39] Whitmarsh "Resistance is Futile?"
40 Whitmarsh, Beyond the Second Sophistic, 137–153.

saw in Diodorus' epigram is mostly a way to negotiate Greece's power with that of Rome and could therefore fit well in Whitmarsh's argument. Hence, the poem could still be written in a patronal relationship.

## Conclusion

Diodorus 1 is not a straightforwardly praising "welcome to Nero on his return to Rome," but shows instead an abundance of troubling, subversive and critical elements. The central comparison between Nero and Neoptolemus could already be seen as subversive: not only is Neoptolemus himself an ambiguous exemplum as the son of a more famous father and as murderer of Priam, but comparing Neoptolemus' voyage to Troy to Nero's return to Rome also places Nero in the role as aggressor against Rome. This evokes the idea of civil war. The theme of civil war is further strengthened by calling Rome "the city of Remus". Moreover, the poem alludes to the origin of Rome out of Troy's fall, in that way linking Rome to Troy and inviting us to see the Greek victory on Troy as a victory on Rome. Finally, the poem ends with saying that Nero rages in war and in wisdom. This evokes the cultural division of war and arts between Rome and Greece. By saying that Nero "rages" in arts, the poem seems to indicate that he, being a Roman, cannot perform the Greek sphere of arts in the right way. This subversive layer does not only seem to criticize Nero, but, taking all these elements together, even a form of resistance against Rome becomes visible. Throughout the poem, there is a constant comparing and contrasting of Greece and Rome and in this, Greece is portrayed as being superior to Rome. The poem refuses to yield to the dominance of Rome and in that way resists the Roman authority.

**Acknowledgements:** This article was originally written as a paper for the course *Greek Literature in the Roman World: Past, Present, Politics*. An earlier version has been presented as part of this course. I'm indebted to the feedback I received on this presentation and to Prof. Dr. C.C. de Jonge for his comments on the presentation as well as the paper. In addition, I'm grateful for the anonymous reviewer, whose remarks greatly helped to improve this article.

## References

### Editions

*The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams. Volume I.* Edited by Gow, Andrew S.F., and Denys L. Page. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Strabo, *Geography, Volume VI. Books 13–14*. Edited by Horace L. Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.

### Secondary Literature

Argentieri, Lorenzo. “Meleager and Philip as Epigram Collectors.” In *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram. Down to Philip*, edited by Peter Bing, and John Steffen Bruss, 147–164. Leiden: Brill, 2007. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047419402_009.

Bowie, Ewen L. “Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic.” *Past and Present* 46 (1970): 3–41. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/past/46.1.3.

Bowie, Ewen L. “Luxury Cruisers? Philip’s Epigrammatists between Greece and Rome.” *Aevum Antiquum* 8 (2008): 223–258.

Cameron, Alan. “The Garland of Philip.” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21, no. 1 (1980): 43–63. Available at: https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/garland-philip/docview/1301503033/se-2.

Cichorius, Conrad. Römische Studien. *Historisches epigraphisches Literargeschichtliches aus vier Jahrhunderten Roms*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1922.

Goldhill, Simon, ed., *Being Greek under Rome. Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511627323.

Gow, Andrew S.F., and Denys L. Page. *The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams. Volume II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Griffin, Miriam. *Nero: the End of a Dynasty*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Hartigan, Karelisa. *The Poets and the Cities: Selections from the Anthology about Greek Cities*. Meisenheim: Verlag Anton Hain, 1979.

Höschele, Regina. “Greek Epigram in Rome in the First Century CE.” In *A Companion to Ancient Epigram*, edited by Christer Henriksén, 475–490. Hoboken: Wiley, 2019.

Jonge, Casper C. de. “Greek Migrant Literature in the Early Roman Empire.” *Mnemosyne* 75, no. 1 (2022): 10–36. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1163/1568525X-bja10132.

Rutledge, Steven H. “Tiberius' Philhellenism.” *The Classical World* 101, no. 4 (2008): 453–467. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25471968.

Scherf, Johannes. “Neoptolemus.” In *Brill’s New Pauly*, edited by Hubert Cancik, and Helmuth Schneider. Online edition, first published online in 2006. Accessed September 29, 2022. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e820040.

Swain, Simon. *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Whitmarsh, Tim. *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The Politics of Imitation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Whitmarsh, Tim. “Greece and Rome.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenistic Studies*, edited by George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vasunia, 114–128. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2009. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286140.001.0001.

Whitmarsh, Tim. “Resistance is Futile? Greek Literary Tactics in the Face of Rome.” *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* 59 (2013): 57–85.

Whitmarsh, Tim. *Beyond the Second Sophistic. Adventures in the Greek Postclassicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.