

MEROPS THE FOUNDER: *I.OLYMPIA* 53

A decree inscribed at Olympia praises Augustus at florid length; badly worn, it is one of the most illegible of stones found at Olympia.<sup>1</sup> Augustus, who has defeated the Cantabrians in Spain (26–25 B.C.),<sup>2</sup> is praised for his restoration of the cities of Asia after a devastating earthquake (26 B.C.). The date is probably soon after.<sup>3</sup>

Dittenberger attributed the decree to Cos. The reason was the favorable comparison of Augustus to Merops, the founder of Cos. As part of his restoration of the cities of Asia, Augustus took upon himself the founding of the city, such that he surpassed even Merops (lines 21–22):

τὴν τῆς πόλεως κτίσιν ἐφ' ἑατῶ θέμενος, καὶ τοσοῦτον ἢ Μέροπ[α ὑπερέβαλε - - ]

The attribution to Cos has mostly been followed – e.g., by Herzog,<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm,<sup>5</sup> Robert,<sup>6</sup> Sherwin-White,<sup>7</sup> Buraselis.<sup>8</sup> Herzog later decided that the text seems un-Coan and urged first Alexandria in Egypt, then some city in Asia founded by an emperor – Julia Gordos or Caesarea Tralles or Alexandria Augusta Troas;<sup>9</sup> Segre concurred in thinking of Asia.<sup>10</sup> This reattribution was not argued, and to most scholars the invocation of Merops has seemed conclusive.

But arguments against Cos are ready to hand. First, the decree is in Koine; Coan public acts used Doric well into the Imperial period. Second, the proposers of the decree are unparalleled for Cos (lines 1–2):

εἰσανγειλάντων Εὐδήμου τε τοῦ Ἐπικράτου[ς ἱ]ερέως Γαίου Ἰουλίου Καίσαρος κα[ὶ - - - τοῦ - - -  
γ]ραμματέως τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως στρατηγῶν

The many extant Coan inscriptions make no reference to a “secretary of the demos”, and in no other decree do Coan *strategoí* make proposals. Third, Augustus has shown more goodwill to our city than to the other Greeks of Asia, πλήγονα τῶν ἄλλων ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας Ἑλλή[νων] (5–6), and has seen to the restoration of Asia, ἐπ[ὶ τῆς] Ἀσία[ς] ῥ[α]σ[τ]ε<ώ>νης προνοῆσαι (23). Cos was likely in the Roman province of Asia.<sup>11</sup> But we should wonder whether the Coans, in an encomium of this sort (as distinct from some matter of business involving the provincial *koinon*), would have labeled themselves as among the “the Greeks of Asia”.

Moreover, there is an objection based on tone or rhetoric. After saying that Augustus has exceeded even the Olympian gods (4, [ταῖς εἰς πάντας ἀνθρ]ώπους εὐεργεσίας ὑπερτεθεικῶς καὶ τοὺς Ὀλυμπίους θεούς), does one add that as a founder he has exceeded even Merops the founder of Cos? Such an anticlimax would be surprising, even offensive.

<sup>1</sup> Dittenberger, *I.Olympia* 153; p. 110, “deshalb gehört die Inschrift zu den am schwierigsten zu entziffernden”. Herzog’s notes (in the IG archives) from his examination of the stone ca. 1900 suggest that he could not improve the readings; nor could I in 2009.

<sup>2</sup> On chronology and nomenclature see R. Syme, *Roman Papers* II (Oxford 1979) 843–848.

<sup>3</sup> Dittenberger assigned the “priest of Gaius Julius Caesar” (line 2) to young Gaius Caesar and so at least 25 years later, apparently on the assumption that Caesar could only be called “Divus Iulius”; but see e.g. *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 3175, Γαίου Ἰουλίου Καίσαρος θεοῦ.

<sup>4</sup> *Koische Forschungen und Funde* (Leipzig 1899) 145.

<sup>5</sup> *Neue Beitr.* I 58–59 (“decree of the Coans”).

<sup>6</sup> *Hellenica* II (1946) 146 (“a city rebuilt by Augustus”; Cos would be certain if the text really has Merops). Later confident: *BCH* 102, 1978, 401 (= *Documents d’Asie Mineure* 97), “decree of Cos”.

<sup>7</sup> *Ancient Cos* (Göttingen 1978) 146, 148, 207, 222.

<sup>8</sup> *Kos between Hellenism and Rome* (Philadelphia 2000) 134.

<sup>9</sup> *Philologus* 62, 1903, 36 n. 1; *HZ* 125, 1922, 217 n. 6. Above the decree and off-center is written ΑΛΕΞΑΣ, which Herzog thought might represent Ἀλεξ(ανδρέων); that would be unparalleled, while the name Ἀλεξᾶς is common, however it came to be written there.

<sup>10</sup> *Tituli Calymnii* pp. 88–89.

<sup>11</sup> So Sherwin-White 146 n. 345; disputed by Buraselis 134.

In fact there were several Merops in myth; the founder of Cos was only the most famous.<sup>12</sup> Another Merops is far better suited to the tone and substance of our decree: the Merops who “after the flood first founded mankind”, ἀπὸ Μέροπος τοῦ Ὑάντος, ὃς μετὰ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν πρῶτος συνώκισε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους (schol. *Il.* 1.250c; I 80 Erbse).<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Clement of Alexandria means this Merops when he wonders which lawgiver first established temples of the pagan gods: εἴτε Φορωνεὺς ἐκεῖνος ἦν εἴτε Μέρωψ εἴτε ἄλλος τις.<sup>14</sup> I suggest that our decree be added to the references to Merops son of Hyas: the founder of all mankind is the more likely referent, in this extravagant praise of Augustus, than the Merops who founded only Cos.

If that is so, nothing points to Cos as author of the decree. Where to turn? A “secretary of the demos” is almost unknown in the islands, but is frequently met among the cities in mainland Asia. Proposals by *strategoí* introduced with εἰσανγγειλάντων are few: at Pergamum (1st cent. B.C.),<sup>15</sup> Sardes (Augustan),<sup>16</sup> Julia Gordos (1st cent. A.D.),<sup>17</sup> Synnada.<sup>18</sup> Among these four cities, a secretary of the demos is found only at Sardes<sup>19</sup> and Julia Gordos.<sup>20</sup>

I would urge the possibility that Sardes was the author of *I.Olympia* 53. Antiquity has left us no record of a founder of Sardes. The inscriptions show why. Roman Sardes was proud to call itself autochthonous:<sup>21</sup> it had no founder. In praising Augustus as benefactor and “founder” of the cities of Asia, the Sardians especially, lacking a founder of their own, might the more readily evoke the founder of mankind.

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<sup>12</sup> As to Alexandria Troas, sons of Merops settled part of the Troad (Strab. 13.1.7); Ephorus was uncertain whether Arisbe in the Troad was daughter of Makar or Merops (fr. 164; she married Paris, 184), and Apollod. 3.147 has Merops' daughter Arisbe as first wife of Priam. But Merops did not found Alexandria Troas.

<sup>13</sup> Kruse, *RE* 15 (1931) 1067 “Merops (6)”. There were still other versions than the familiar Deucalion; Heraclides Ponticus (fr. 66 Wehrli) knew Prometheus as the founder of mankind.

<sup>14</sup> *Protr.* 3.44.1. The scholiast (p. 310 Stählin) expands this to “the Coan” but has no further information.

<sup>15</sup> *I.Perg.* 260.1, εἰσανγγειλάντων [τῶν στρατηγῶν ἔδοξεν] τῷ δήμῳ.

<sup>16</sup> *I.Sardis* 8.6, 28, 39, 120, 132. The reported Sardian decree at Jos. *AJ* 14.259 offers στρατηγῶν εἰσηγησαμένων.

<sup>17</sup> *TAM* V 687.1, 688.1.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm, *Neue Beitr.* I 55–63.

<sup>19</sup> *I.Sardis* 4.24, 8.132; *SEG* XLVIII 1472.i.6.

<sup>20</sup> *TAM* V 687.6, 688.4.

<sup>21</sup> *I.Sardis* 13 and 63 ff., with P. Herrmann, *Chiron* 23, 1993, 238–243.