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Persaeus of Citium: A Lapsed Stoic?

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Abstract:

This article examines the historical evidence on the life of Persaeus of Citium, a Stoic philosopher and immediate student of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. It also considers the anecdotal accounts of Persaeus' actions with regard to Stoic philosophy as it was understood to apply during his lifetime. Persaeus was one of an elite group of scholars present at the court of Antigonus II Gonatus, King of Macedon and appears to have had a direct involvement in the political affairs of Macedonia. His activities, as recounted in the surviving sources, seem to run contrary to established Stoic customs, in particular the preference for *praxis* over *theoria*.¹ However, there is also some indication that he may have been vilified by his scholarly and political enemies. This article provides a brief glimpse into the life and times of Persaeus as well as the turbulent fourth/third centuries in Greece.

Introduction:

Persaeus (ca. 306-243 BCE), of Citium, son of Demetrius, was a Stoic philosopher. He was also a student and close acquaintance of Zeno of Citium (ca. 334-262 BCE), the founder of Stoicism. It is difficult to obtain a clear picture of his life and philosophy since none of his own works survive and most of the sources that deal with him come from late antiquity and provide relatively little, albeit potentially quite significant, information. By far the most detailed account comes from Diogenes Laertius (ca. first half of the third century CE), who, like most of Persaeus' biographers, was relying on earlier

¹ For the early Stoics, *theoria* was the norm. There was no official, doctrinal mandate to this end, but it is clear that Persaeus' preference for political *praxis* went against the standards established by Zeno, the founder of Stoicism.

sources no longer extant. Plutarch (46-120 CE) provides some biographical information on him and Cicero (106-43 BCE), who is possibly the earliest source on Persaeus, gives some further details on his philosophical views. Other writers such as Aulus Gellius (ca. 125-180 CE), Pausanias (second century CE) and Athenaeus (end of the second and beginning of the third century CE) provide minor, and sometimes misleading, anecdotes. The tenth century, Byzantine *Suda* gives only the briefest of entries on him indicating, “[Persaeus] of Citium: Stoic philosopher; he was also called Dorotheos; he was, in the time of Antigonus Gonatus, son of Demetrius, a pupil and protégé of Zeno the philosopher”.²

Piecing together these fragmentary sources, a picture emerges of an individual seemingly at odds with his own professed philosophy. He openly engaged in political *praxis* at a time when Stoics preferred only *theoria*. His ethical attitudes also appear contrary to the standards of his peers. Was he a lapsed Stoic or the victim of a smear campaign by his enemies? We may never know the whole truth of the matter but this article will presently consider some of the evidence as we have it. Persaeus’ life may be briefly summarised as follows. He was probably a native of Citium (present-day Larnaka) on Cyprus, born around 306 BCE. He came to Athens late in Zeno’s life, becoming his student and probably his housemate as well. Whether Persaeus went to Athens specifically to become Zeno’s student, perhaps having a predisposition towards Stoicism early on in his life, or whether he went there for other reasons remains unknown. It appears clear that Persaeus was wealthy as there is a reference to a not insubstantial private estate (see below) presumably on the Greek mainland. Whether he inherited this estate from his father, Demetrius, or obtained it in some other way is not known. Based on some of the accounts that survive, he seems to have lived a lifestyle commensurate with his wealth.

² Adler number: pi, 1368. None of the other sources refer to him as Dorotheos. The *Suda* also indicates that he wrote a history; but, Persaeus the historian may have been a different person, see *FGrH* 584.

Zeno sent Persaeus to the court of Antigonus II Gonatus (the “knock-knee’d” 319-239 BCE), King of Macedon, at Pella as an advisor. He flourished there probably from around 276, becoming a valued advisor, confidant and tutor to the king’s son. His role in Antigonus’ regime went beyond the theoretical. He was made military commander of the citadel at Corinth around 244. In 243, when Corinth fell to Aratus of Sicyon and the Achaean League, Persaeus fled to Kenchreae (contemporary Kechries), about 7 km southwest of Corinth, where he appears to have lived out the remainder of his days at leisure. This may have been where his private estate was situated but there is no evidence to confirm it. He is reported to have died at Kenchreae that same year although, again, detailed information is lacking in the sources. Between the time that he met Zeno and the time of his death, Persaeus produced a number of treatises on a range of subjects, none of which survive today. A closer look at his life as we have it reveals a complex and extraordinary individual living in very interesting times. This article examines his life and character as well as considering the anecdotes about him with regard to his engagement with Stoic philosophy.

Life and Character

Diogenes Laertius reports that Persaeus flourished about the hundred and thirtieth Olympiad (260-256 BCE), when Zeno was an old man. His year of birth is usually given as *circa* 306 BCE, but this is highly speculative as is virtually any information about his early life prior to his arrival at Athens. There is in fact nothing to connect Persaeus directly with Citium or Cyprus apart from the designation “of Citium” employed primarily in Diogenes Laertius, albeit attributed to Zeno himself as referring to Persaeus as “Cittiaean by birth”³. His association with Zeno need not have been contingent on their having a common homeland. The fact that his father’s given name, Demetrius, is the same as that of the father of Antigonus II Gonatus, King of Macedon, allows for the tantalising hypothesis that the two may have been somehow related. Given the sexual proclivities of Macedonian monarchs, it is

³ Diogenes Laertius VII.1-5.

certainly plausible that Persaeus might have been a scion of the royal house, possibly even growing up on Cyprus, who would never inherit the throne but who was sent to study philosophy as befitted a noble-born non-heir. This would seem to be supported by the not insignificant amount of trust and responsibility that Antigonus later afforded him. It might also have been a factor, apart from his professed love of philosophy and fascination with Zeno, in Antigonus' frequent visits to their house in Athens.⁴ This is, however, not supported by any ancient source and none ever makes such an assertion. It is not the intention of the author of this article to make it either, merely to air the possibility for consideration.

Diogenes Laertius (VII.36) wrote that Persaeus was a pupil of Zeno and a member of his household. Diogenes here indicates that the sources differ regarding their actual relationship but he is confident that Zeno shared a house in Athens with his student, Persaeus. He is described by Diogenes Laertius as one of Zeno's most intimate friends. When he dispatched Persaeus and Philonides the Theban to the court of Macedon at Pella, Zeno reportedly wrote in his letter to Antigonus:

I send to you some of those who have studied with me, who in that learning which has reference to the soul, are in no respect inferior to me and in their bodily vigour are greatly my superiors. And if you associate with them you will want nothing that can bear upon perfect happiness (DL VII.35-37).

It is difficult to reconcile this image of Persaeus with that painted by the ancient writers. As will be considered below, they generally describe him as characteristically other than Stoic, albeit familiar with Stoic ideas. One might be tempted to call him 'anti-Stoic' at times. He comes across from these accounts as being given to the passions associated with luxury, material wealth and political ambition as well as readily embracing the *praxis* of public

⁴ In his *Life of Zeno*, Diogenes Laertius reported that Antigonus II Gonatus was especially fond of Zeno and regularly visited him in Athens (VII.6-9).

life rather than quietly contemplating the *theoria* of philosophical Virtue. He seems to have been anything other than in a state of Stoic *apatheia*.

Zeno tended to keep to himself, eschewing most forms of pleasure and company that his wealth might otherwise procure whereas Persaeus did not. Some later writers asserted that Persaeus had been Zeno's slave,⁵ who had perhaps originally been sent to him by King Antigonus. While this apparent Macedonian connection may bolster the hypothesis that Persaeus and Antigonus could have been related, the source of the story seems to be due to a sarcastic remark made about Persaeus by Bion of Borysthenes (ca. 325-ca. 250 BCE)⁶ who, upon seeing a statue of him inscribed "Persaeus the pupil of Zeno", sarcastically remarked that it should say "Persaeus the Servant of Zeno".⁷ This is clearly an instance of slander and there is every indication that Persaeus was in no way a servant or slave of Zeno, rather a student and colleague of comparable socioeconomic standing. Bion perhaps had other reasons, as shall presently be considered, in making such a remark.

Persaeus allegedly enjoyed the pleasures afforded by his status somewhat more than his teacher, Zeno, and, if true, this behaviour ran contrary to Stoic teachings. In his *Convivial Remembrances*, Persaeus reported that Zeno declined most invitations to dinner (DL VII.1). Given the title and subject of this treatise, it is reasonable to assume that Persaeus did indeed take up such invitations when they arose. Persaeus is also reported to have regularly tried to draw out his reclusive teacher, without success, by tempting him into partaking of similar activities. According to Diogenes Laertius, whenever he would send in flute-players (prostitutes) to Zeno, the latter "lost no time in leading them straight back to Persaeus" (DL VII.13). So, Persaeus enjoyed the symposium, the dinner party and such carnal delights as were typically part and parcel of upper-class, Athenian society. That he was a person of property, and was fond of his possessions, is further indicated by another

⁵ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, II.18. 8.

⁶ See Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Bion*, IV.46-47.

⁷ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, IV.162.

anecdote found in Diogenes Laertius. While at the court of Antigonus, the latter reportedly made trial of Persaeus by sending him some false news to the effect that his estate had been ravaged by the enemy (VII.36). When Persaeus seemed upset by this intelligence, Antigonus said to him: “Do you now see that wealth is not a matter for *apatheia*?”. The anecdote seems to highlight an instance of Persaeus’ lack of the appropriate Stoic *apatheia* with regard to material matters; however, its veracity remains suspect as shall be considered below.

At the Macedonian Court

There is rather more detail in the sources about Persaeus’ time in Macedonia and his political involvements there. A little background on circumstances that led to Antigonus’ sovereignty is informative here. His kingdom had been in a state of chaos from 281–276 BCE. In order to achieve supremacy, Antigonus had to resolve the many issues resulting from his father’s mis-reign. He had to reassert control over Thessaly and reconstruct Macedonia’s hegemony on the mainland. He defeated the Celts, who had invaded Macedonia in 279 and made marriage alliances with the Seleucid kingdom (becoming Antiochus I’s brother-in-law twice over). He had firmly established his reign by 276 which is illustrated by the ease with which he defeated his challenger, Pyrrhus, who invaded in 275, who was vying for power at that time. In all cases of martial conflict, Antigonus showed himself to be a thoughtful leader who was magnanimous in victory and merciful to his defeated enemies. The mid-270s, then, were a time of relative stability and appropriately coincide with Antigonus’ active interests in philosophy and philosophers.⁸ Persaeus was part of a group of notable individuals at the Macedonian court whom Antigonus had gathered as a retinue, carefully choosing them according to character and merit. This included the poet and historian Euphantus of Olynthus, the philosopher Menedemus of Eretria, the poet Aratus of Soli who

⁸ See Ager 2003: 35-37.

was the author of the *Phaenomena* (a text bound to appeal to Persaeus' Stoic sensibilities), Philonides the Theban, and Bion of Borysthenes, the Cynic.⁹

Antigonus had invited Zeno to his court numerous times but the latter patently refused and eventually dispatched Persaeus and Philonides the Theban in his stead.¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius (VII.36) wrote that Zeno sent Persaeus to Antigonus as a kind of secretary but that he became more of a confidant and, following in the footsteps of Aristotle, tutored Antigonus' child Halcyoneus. This would have been around 276, probably about a decade before Zeno's death, but the exact date is not known.¹¹ It is difficult to tell if Persaeus was the favourite of the king's academic retinue as the accounts in Diogenes Laertius indicated his fondness in particular for Bion and Menedemus. However, it is clear that Persaeus remained closely attached to Antigonus, evidently influencing policy and attaining military and political titles. We hear of none of the others undertaking military command. After Antigonus captured Corinth around 244 BCE, Persaeus was given control of the city as Archon where he remained in charge until 243 when he was defeated by Aratus and the Achaean League.

In his Life of *Menedemus*, Diogenes Laertius relates the following story about Persaeus' influence over the King of Macedonia as well as revealing some of the conflict between him and the Menedemus. The latter was a philosopher of Phaedo's school from Eretria and of humble origins. An ardent democrat, he had been made a councillor of the Eretrians and negotiated with the likes of Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Demetrius and the latter's son Antigonus II Gonatus, whom he later joined as a companion at court. He was reportedly suspected of betraying Eretria to Antigonus and was forced to flee his home city.

⁹ See Chamoux 2003: 89.

¹⁰ DL VII.6-9; both of whom are mentioned by Epicurus, in his letter to his brother Aristobulus, as being companions of Antigonus.

¹¹ There was a dispute about Zeno's age when he died. Poseidippus asserted he was ninety-eight, but Persaeus, in his *Ethical School*, said that he was seventy-two (DL VII.28).

Accounts differ and some indicate that he went on a hunger strike in order to persuade Antigonus to be merciful to Eretria.¹² Menedemus, who was said to have been inconsistent in his philosophical views, appears to have carried out open verbal warfare with Persaeus “for it was thought”, as Diogenes Laertius wrote, “that, when Antigonus was willing for Menedemus’ sake to restore democracy to the Eretrians, Persaeus prevented him”. As a consequence of this, Persaeus appears to have been the only individual with whom Menedemus had an implacable dispute. He repeatedly refuted Persaeus in argument and declared, evidently amongst other things too unpleasant to be recorded, “such he is as a philosopher but, as a man, the worst of all that are alive or to be born hereafter” (DL II.143-44). It is, however, perhaps worth noting that, democracy or otherwise, Eretria thrived under Antigonid rule.¹³ Whether this reflects Persaeus’ involvement in their political affairs remains unknown. Antigonus was exceedingly fond of Menedemus and, being an ‘enlightened monarch’ of his time, was also renowned for his generosity to the defeated.¹⁴

¹² This probably derives from the accounts of Antigonus of Carystus (flourished third century BCE) and Heraclides Lembus (second century BCE). The latter likely obtained his information from the former, being an earlier source. Antigonus of Carystus spent some time at Athens and was later summoned to the court of Attalus I (241-197 BCE) of Pergamum. His main work is the *Successions of Philosophers*, drawn from personal knowledge, with many fragments surviving in Athenaeus and Diogenes Laertius. Heraclides Lembus was an Egyptian civil servant who lived during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (second century BCE), he wrote a series of epitomes on the lives of ancient philosophers, including Aristotle, some of whose lost fragments were brought to light in 1847 as *Heraclidis politiarum quae extant*, by F. G. Schneidewin. His own extant material is found only in Diogenes Laertius and the *Suda*.

¹³ See Chamoux 2003: 176.

¹⁴ See Chamoux 2003: 89.

Bion is another character who figured prominently in the court dynamic at Macedonia. He was also closely associated with Menedemus. Bion's above-mentioned comment as to Persaeus' status as Zeno's servant may be in keeping with his 'jovial candor' which appealed so much to Antigonus and which others might have found abrasive.¹⁵ However, there was an ongoing conflict entailing Bion and Menedemus. These two joined together against Persaeus, in particular, and Philonides as well to an apparently lesser extent. The source of this conflict appears to have been as much concerned with social class and political attitudes as with philosophical ideas. According to Diogenes Laertius (IV.46-58) Bion was a Scythian whose mother was a prostitute and father a freedman fishmonger. When his father went into debt, he was sold as a slave to a rhetorician who later left him his wealth and freedom as an inheritance. After the death of his master, Bion travelled to Athens to study philosophy. Diogenes Laertius has him recounting the story of his origins to Antigonus after which Bion pointedly remarks:

This is all that I can tell you of myself, so that Persaeus and Philonides may now cease from making up stories about me and you may judge me on my own merits (DL IV.47).

We are never told precisely what kind of stories Persaeus and Philonides were telling about him; but the indication is clearly negative. Bion certainly accrues a great deal of negativity in Diogenes account. Like Menedemus, he seems to have been inconsistent in his views. He was a professed atheist but apparently recanted on his deathbed, to his later discredit in the view of his biographers. He was also said to have partaken of excessive pleasures with other men and boys whom he kept as his own sort of coterie of followers; though, he is reported to have refused to countenance any "disciples" as such, in name if not in fact. One of them was Menedemus who was said to have spent the night with him on a regular basis (DL IV. 55-57). This affiliation, along with their comparable socioeconomic origins and philosophical inclinations, seems to have made them comrades in arms

¹⁵ Chamoux 2003: 89.

against the more upper-class Stoics such as Persaeus and Philonides, who readily took up their role in opposition. Antigonus' court must have replete with a lively atmosphere of intellectual debate. It obviously had its share of personal conflict and backstabbing as well. It is difficult to tell whether the negative reports of Persaeus' behaviour have not been in some ways biased by those favourable to Bion and Menedemus. Persaeus plainly had the ear of his patron and king and this alone might have sparked jealousy in some.

Plutarch provides further details on the affairs at Corinth along with some additional insight, if the story is accurate, on Persaeus thinking. In his biography of Aratus of Sicyon, a statesman and general involved in the political and military mayhem that followed the death of Alexander the Great, Plutarch tells us that, when Antigonus had seized the *Acrocorinthus* (the Corinthian citadel), he "kept it under guard, putting men there whom he most trusted, and making Persaeus the philosopher their commander".¹⁶ When Aratus, leading the Achaean forces, re-captured Corinth, Persaeus is said to have made his escape to Kenchreae, where he spent the remainder of his life. There, someone is said to have remarked that, in his opinion, only a wise man could be a good general. Persaeus allegedly responded saying, "Yes, by god, there was a time when I too especially favoured that teaching of Zeno's; however now, since the lesson I received at the hands of that young man from Sicyon, I am otherwise minded". Plutarch adds that this story is recounted by many writers.¹⁷ However, Plutarch also maintained that a philosopher ought to engage in political *praxis* and he may have been projecting his own agenda into this tale.¹⁸

Apart from the instance of purportedly preventing the restoration of democracy to Eretria, there is virtually no information on whether Persaeus

¹⁶ *Life of Aratus* XVIII.1.

¹⁷ *Life of Aratus* XXIII.5.

¹⁸ See Forschner 2002: 288. Plutarch, in his essay on Stoic self-contradiction, notably does not mention either Persaeus or Sphaerus (who advised Cleomenes III). See Schofield 1999: 740.

tried to encourage Antigonus' regime along the lines of Stoic philosophy. Neither do we know anything about the sort of policies that Persaeus may have implemented during the time that he was in charge of Corinth. None of the sources indicate whether or not his administration was especially Stoic in any way but one assumes that he may have had recourse to some of his philosophical ideas in governing the *polis*. Having only a year to undertake his role as archon, Persaeus would likely not have had sufficient time to reap any fruits from his labours.

If the dates of his life are correct, then he would have been sixty three at the time of his death and sixty two when placed in charge of Corinth, making him rather senior in years to be leading troops into battle, albeit a respectable age for an archon. The fact that he escaped when Aratus recaptured the city suggests that his military role may have been more administrative than proactive; else, one might expect him to have died in battle or to have been captured leading his men. The circumstances of his death are shrouded in a comparable mystery as the details of his life. We do not know whether he really died in 243 BCE. He might have been mortally wounded in the battle for the Corinthian citadel or he may have eventually been hunted down and slain by the Achaean League. It is possible too that he lived beyond 243 and that is merely the last reference that we have on him. There is no information available in the sources to clarify these issues with any certainty.

Philosophy

As previously indicated, none of Persaeus' works survive. He was no less a respectable writer and composed on a variety of subjects which included biographies, politics, ethics, literary and philosophical criticisms. Diogenes Laertius attributes the following texts, some of which recollect those of Zeno and Chrysippus, to Persaeus:

*On Kingship*¹⁹
*The Spartan Constitution*²⁰
On Marriage
On Impiety
Thyestes
On Erotic Matters
Exhortations
Interludes
Four books of Anecdotes
Memorabilia
A Reply to Plato's Laws in seven books (VII.36)

Diogenes Laertius also mentions a *Convivial Remembrances* (VII.1), which was possibly one of his books of anecdotes, along with his *Ethical School* (VII.28) which may be another of these. Some brief samples of his philosophical ideas and interests survive in the sources.

In his *Life of Aeschines*, Diogenes Laertius tells us about an ancient debate on whether or not several dialogues attributed to Aeschines were actually written by Socrates and afterwards obtained by Aeschines from the other's widow, Xanthippe. A number of Aeschines' enemies claimed this to be the case; however, Persaeus attributed "the majority of the seven to Pasiphon of the School of Eretria, who inserted them amongst the dialogues of Aeschines"

¹⁹ It appears likely that most of the Hellenistic *On Kingship* treatises, of which there are many amongst both the Stoics and Epicureans, were addressed to specific monarchs. There were likely "not the place to look for major or distinctive statements on issues of philosophical importance, but only for variations on stock themes inherited from *To Nicocles* and similar writings", Schofield 1999: 743. Therefore, Persaeus' *On Kingship* was probably composed specifically for Antigonus II Gonatus.

²⁰ Both Persaeus and Sphaerus also illustrate the Stoic preoccupation with the Spartan constitution. This was inherited from Plato and the Academy who may have themselves been the heirs to a Pythagorean interest in the subject.

(II.61). He does not indicate in which text Persaeus made this claim. This reveals Persaeus as being interested in the historiography and epistemology of philosophy as well as its *theoria*. It also may have provided more reason for Menedemus and his supporters to abhor Persaeus for disrespecting a fellow Eretrian.

In addition to his literary and historical pursuits, there are three major areas of Stoic philosophy that we can consider with regard to Persaeus, given the information available on him. These are religion (or divine matters), ethics and politics. The sources that survive, if accurate, reveal brief but telling glimpses into his attitudes toward these issues. To begin with religion, in his *Life of Zeno*, Diogenes Laertius discusses the Stoic tenet of honouring parents and immediate family in second-place only to the gods, indicating that Persaeus stated the same belief in his works (VII.120). One expects this either to have derived from his *On Impiety* or his *Exhortations*. On divine matters, Cicero, in *de Natura Deorum*, wrote:

Persaeus, a student of Zeno, said that men have deified those persons who have made some discovery of specific utility for civilisation, and that the names of divinities were also bestowed on actual material objects of use and profit, so that he is not even content to describe these as the creations of the gods, but speaks of them as actually being divine.²¹

If correct, and it appears to be the earliest surviving source that we have on Persaeus, then it possibly came from his *On Impiety*. Cicero, consequently, maintained that these assertions about divine matters were patently absurd. He goes on to describe Chrysippus' views, from his *Nature of the Gods*, in which he "musters an enormous mob of unknown gods", including the air, the earth, aether and Necessity. Cicero, in recounting Stoic approaches to

²¹ *de Natura Deorum*, I.xv.38.

divinity, wrote that they are “more like the dreams of madmen rather than the opinions of philosophers”.²²

The views here attributed to Persaeus seem to be effectively in keeping with Stoic attitudes on the corporeal nature of divinity. Since the soul is composed of divine *pneuma*, it must be materially a part of body. The Stoics asserted that “if the constituent material of a thing is body, the thing itself is body”.²³ This same argument was used to maintain the corporality of divinity. God acts on matter, introducing *spermatikoi logoi*, with the result that the present cosmos comes into being.²⁴ Simply put, the active principle, *logos*, identified with divinity, is present in matter and therefore material things are, in this sense, divine. God is not separate from the cosmos but a material constituent of it.²⁵ Of course, in the passage paraphrased by Cicero, Persaeus has only indicated that men and material objects were *called* divine. We do not know if he went on to express this notion of divine corporeality that we see in the writings of Chrysippus and other Stoics; though, there is every reason to expect that he did.

Stoic Ethics

The instances that we have of Persaeus’ actual behaviour fall more into the realm of ethics and from these can be drawn some useful comparisons with known Stoic philosophy. Ideally, the “good” Stoic should experience *apatheia*, or freedom from the constraints of the passions (*hormai*). This is sometimes rendered as “indifference” but means something more like being able to make the correct judgements in the face of these passions rather than having a morally defective constitution that is habitually swayed by them. The passions are not mere bodily impulses, though these are invariably called by the same terminology. The impulses for pleasure and pain are directed at certain

²² *de Natura Deorum*, I.xv-xvi.38-42.

²³ Hahm 1977: 4.

²⁴ Hahm 1977: 60-62.

²⁵ See Kenny 2004: 97-98.

changes in the *pneuma* of the soul identified with contraction and expansion. They are what we might today call “affective reactions”.²⁶

As indicated earlier, some sources indicate that Persaeus did not avoid the pleasures that his wealth afforded. He revealed a fondness for *symposia*, dinner parties and flute-players/prostitutes. It is difficult to say whether these assertions are not the work of his enemies; but, if they are even partially true, then they run contrary to some major tenets of early Stoicism. The passions are generally identified as desire (*epithumia*), fear (*phobos*), pleasure (*hēdonē*) and pain (*lupē*). They are associated with an “excessive impulse” (*pleonazousa hormē*) which is potentially damaging to the *psychē*.²⁷ Chrysippus, in his treatise *On the Passions*, wrote that the Stoics, including Zeno himself, linked passion with judgement and therefore the “result is that the passion may be said to be totally in the agent’s control, since the opinion or judgement is the assent given to a proposition embodied in a presentation”.²⁸ In short, giving in to a passion or not is a choice and, to be a ‘good’ Stoic, one should not choose to habitually give in to the passion for pleasure. Zeno’s refusal of dinners and flute-players, then, was consistent with the correct sort of Stoic behaviour, if perhaps to a degree bordering on the excessive. Persaeus’ reported indulgences were not. Again, we do not have a clear picture of the extent to which Persaeus pursued *hēdonē*. The Stoics did identify certain “appropriate pleasures” according to Natural Law²⁹ and his engagement with *hēdonē* may have fallen into this category, although they appear *prima facie* not to have done so.

Consider also the anecdote, mentioned above, in which Antigonus decided to test Persaeus’ moral fibre by passing on to him the false news that his personal estate had been ravaged by the enemy. Persaeus reacted with an, albeit understandable, emotional response. He perhaps experienced fear and

²⁶ Inwood 1985: 145, 173.

²⁷ See Inwood 1985: 144-5.

²⁸ Inwood 1985: 144. On this from Chrysippus, see DL VII.111.

²⁹ See Strange 2004: 40-41 on appropriate *hēdonē* in Stoicism.

pain (*phobos* and *lupē*). Antigonus, a man understandably preoccupied with material things, sought to show him that one ought not to have *apatheia* about one's personal wealth. Persaeus did not appear to be exercising the appropriate degree of self-mastery over his passions on this occasion, making an inappropriate moral judgement. Antigonus' trick was clearly designed to pique the philosopher into acting contrary to what Antigonus understood to be the correct mode of Stoic behaviour, negatively contracting his soul. According to Cicero, possessing Stoic Virtue disposes one to regard as nothing all that which the many would look upon as goods and evils, such as: strength, good health, beauty, wealth, honour, power, poverty, lowliness, humiliation, loneliness, loss of family, bodily pains, lack of health, the defeat of one's country, exile, slavery and death.³⁰ This anecdote underscores a preoccupation on Persaeus' part with his own material goods and their loss. The other anecdote in which he expressed displeasure at his defeat by Aratus reveals a similarly un-Stoic emotional investment in mundane affairs.

In another anecdotal account, Persaeus seems to illustrate the importance of Chrysippus' notion of the "fresh opinion", or *prospatos doxa*, in an instance where he is portrayed as tricking the philosopher Ariston. Diogenes Laertius, in his *Life of Ariston* (VII.162) recounts this story related by Diocles the Magnesian (second or first century BCE). The latter is reported to have said the following:

Ariston, having fallen in with Polemo, passed over to his school at a time when Zeno was lying ill with a long sickness. The Stoic doctrine to which he was most attached was the one that the wise man is never guided by opinions. But Persaeus argued against this, and caused one of two twin brothers to place a deposit in his hands, and then caused the other to reclaim it; and thus he convicted him, as he was in doubt on this point, and therefore forced to act on opinion.

³⁰ Cicero, *Tusc. disp.* V.29-30.

Here Persaeus is depicted as engaging in a kind of sophistic word-play, accompanied by some sleight of hand. The “fresh opinion” is integral to the doctrine of the passions and may be described as “an opinion formed about a good or bad state of affairs which the agent has suddenly and recently become aware of”.³¹ It is a judgement concerning whether a given state of affairs (as in the case of the duplicitous twins above) is the right thing about which it is appropriate to have a contraction or expansion of the soul.³² However, it is difficult to see in this instance how one could come to a correct opinion, “fresh” or otherwise, about which twin ought to pick up the deposit. Persaeus may have been trying to demonstrate that it is not always possible to form a right opinion (i.e. on account of the intervention of Fortune) or, perhaps, this anecdote may have been designed to vilify him as behaving in an apparently contrary manner to established Stoic doctrines, even while Zeno lay dying, in order to score a point of one-upmanship against Ariston.

Persaeus’ political entanglements are another matter. As we saw from the titles of his publications, he was certainly interested in the *theoria* of politics. He reportedly wrote a lengthy monograph in response to Plato’s *Laws*, which is about the founding of a hypothetical *polis*, its governance and philosophical underpinnings. This recollects Zeno’s own treatise on Plato’s *Laws* as well as those of other Stoics. Their interest in political theory is well known. Here, though, the similarity ends. Whereas Zeno preferred to avoid political entanglements with a comparable zeal to that of his avoidance of dinner parties, Persaeus embraced them both with alacrity. His interest in politics transcended the theoretical and made the leap into *praxis*.

Philonides the Theban, the other student of Zeno’s sent to Antigonus, was evidently a “good” Stoic in the sense that he practised the appropriate degree of *apatheia* to the extent that we never hear about him again other than as being a philosophically oriented companion of the king and an opponent of Bion the Cynic. However, according to the accounts discussed above,

³¹ Inwood 1985: 147.

³² From Arius Didymus quoted in Stobaeus *Ecl.* II.90.

Persaeus not only advised a reigning monarch on ethical and other speculative matters, he seems to have directly influenced the king's policies. What's more, he was placed in positions at Corinth of both military command and civil administration. This stands in clear contrast to the dominant attitude of the early Stoics, at least, if not the later ones.³³

When Zeno wrote his *Republic*,³⁴ he outlined a city without coinage, temples, law-courts or *gymnasia*. This amounted to "an assault on the central institutions of political life as ordinarily understood".³⁵ Zeno was describing a city as it ought to be: a place for speculative contemplation and the pursuit of Virtue free from political and religious entanglements.³⁶ This ideal *polis* is both a rejection of the politicality of Plato's *poleis* and a paradigm for the tranquil pursuit of Wisdom which consists of a superior understanding of human and divine things achieved through contemplation rather than mundane *praxis*.

His political involvements markedly distinguish Persaeus from his immediate contemporaries in the Stoa, such as Cleanthes and Chrysippis, and particularly Zeno himself. They all composed treatises on political subjects. In this respect Persaeus does not differ. As indicated, the difference may be seen in terms of political *praxis* vs. contemplation. Throughout the course of the lives of these other prominent Stoics:

...no office of strategist, no passing of law, no membership of the council, no defense before the judges, no campaign for the country, no ambassadorship nor extraordinary donation can be traced.³⁷

³³ Certainly the likes of Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were able to somehow balance their pursuit of *theoria* and Virtue with a political existence.

³⁴ See, in particular, DL VII.3, 33, 131.

³⁵ Schofield 1991: 13.

³⁶ Rowe 2002: 301.

³⁷ Stoic rep. 2, 1033 B-C = SVF 1, 27.

According to the Stoic doctrine of Persaeus' era, "the immediate practical consequences of *theoria* seem to concern the personal and not the political sphere of life".³⁸ Virtue gives one tranquillity (*ataraxia*) and frees one from the terrors of death—a passion to be subdued with *apatheia*.³⁹ Persaeus seems to have rejected this sort of life in favour of being a creature of politics. We cannot know for certain whether he successfully compartmentalised his Stoic philosophy from his political engagements. The accounts that survive suggest that he was primarily interested in the latter.

Conclusion

This article has considered all of the ancient sources that provide any relevant information on Persaeus. As has been stressed, they are by no means comprehensive in their detail nor always accurate. We have no way of knowing their accuracy at all times. However, if he was in fact one of the "most eminent" of Zeno's disciples (DL VII.31), an intimate friend and well versed in "that learning which has reference to the soul", then why does he come across in the sources as a particularly terrible example of a Stoic? One possibility, as has already been discussed above, is that Persaeus was the victim of a smear campaign by his enemies, both by some of his contemporaries as well as by later individuals who sympathised with their views, who resorted to slander and gross exaggerations intended to cast him in a negative light. Bion and Menedemus may have led the vanguard of anti-Persaeus propaganda. That could certainly account for the fact that virtually all of the examples of Persaeus being a bad Stoic tend to specifically focus on his rejection or contradiction of explicitly fundamental tenets of Stoicism. In that respect, they are almost too neat in their presentation of his misbehaviour to be above suspicion. Another possibility is that Persaeus was indeed a

³⁸ Forschner 2002: 270-271.

³⁹ Cicero, *Tusc. disp.* V.6.

proper Stoic while he was with Zeno but, perhaps having tasted the delights of power offered by his close association with the court of Antigonus, he may have become a lapsed Stoic and thereby embraced the 'dark side', as it were, of *praxis*-oriented, material existence and passion. If so, then the efforts by others to denigrate his name and character may have been in some sense justified. We may never be sure.

All that can be known with reasonable certainty is that Persaeus lived with and studied under Zeno of Citium. He was, at one point in his life at any rate, a distinguished Stoic philosopher who produced a decent amount of writing which is no longer extant. He was sent by Zeno to the court of Antigonus II Gonatus as an advisor and there rose to political prominence. He seems to have commanded a garrison at Corinth under Antigonus and was defeated by Aratus of Sicyon in 243, and not long thereafter likely passed away from unknown causes. The rest is mostly speculation and dependent on anecdotes of sometimes suspicious authenticity. Whatever his moral inclinations, Persaeus was certainly a distinctive character, uniquely undertaking both a prominent philosophical and political career. And, appropriate to such a life as his, he lived in very turbulent and interesting times in which he appears to have played more than a minor role. Such is a fitting encomium and epitaph for this extraordinary individual, however we may choose to view him in a moral sense.

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