

# Alcidamas' *Encomia*: a reassessment of the sources

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## Introduction

Alcidamas was a key figure in the Greek cultural landscape of the fifth and fourth century BC<sup>1</sup>. Tradition reports that he interacted with some of the most famous and important intellectuals of Classical Athens. He was a pupil of the Sophist Gorgias and even succeeded him as the head of his school<sup>2</sup>. Notably, he developed an intense rivalry with Isocrates, another famous pupil of Gorgias, which was based mainly on their contrasting opinions about written and oral speech<sup>3</sup>. Some ancient writers suggest that he was teacher of Aeschines<sup>4</sup> and that Demosthenes read his works<sup>5</sup>. But despite the fame that he seems to have enjoyed during his lifetime, he soon started to be heavily criticised: Aristotle, for instance, uses quotes from Alcidamas to give examples of 'frigidity of style' (τὰ δὲ ψυχρά) on the basis of his excessive use of compound words, strange words, epithets, and metaphors<sup>6</sup>. Judgements like this may perhaps have had an impact on

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to Alcidamas see Edwards 2007 and most recently Alexiou 2020, 43-51.

<sup>2</sup> Suda s.v. *Gorgias*: διδάσκαλος [...] Ἀλκιδάμαντος τοῦ Ἐλεάτου, ὃς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν σχολὴν διεδέξατο, «teacher of [...] Alcidamas of Elea, who succeeded him as head of his school». Text and translation from Suda On Line, <https://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-html/index.html>, accessed 19-06-2020. All other texts and translation are taken from the relevant and most recent Loeb editions, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> Against Isocrates, Alcidamas supported the importance of καιρός («the critical moment») and the ability to improvise and modify one's speech depending on the audience's needs, which cannot be done if one relies completely on a previously written version of the speech. On the concept of καιρός in Alcidamas, see Vallozza 1985 with further bibliography at p. 119 n. 2. On the debate written vs oral speech, and Alcidamas vs Isocrates, see also O'Sullivan 1992, 23-62 and McCoy 2009, 46-7.

<sup>4</sup> See the disputed Plu. *Mor.* 840b, but also Photius *Bibl. cod.* 61, p. 20a, 40 ss. and Suda s.v. *Aeschines*. Discussion in Porter 2016, 308-10.

<sup>5</sup> Plu. *Dem.* 6 and *Mor.* 844c.

<sup>6</sup> *Rh.* 1406ab. See also Dion. Hal. *Is.* 19: Ἀλκιδάμαντα δὲ τὸν ἀκουστὴν αὐτοῦ παχύτερον ὄντα τὴν λέξιν καὶ κενότερον, «the diction of Alcidamas ... is at once rather heavy and lacking in content».

the fortune of Alcidas and, consequently, on the transmission of his works. We know that Alcidas was a prolific writer, and indeed in the twelfth century Tzetzes could still claim to know ‘many speeches’<sup>7</sup> by Alcidas. But today, we can only read his *On Sophists or On Those who Write Written Speeches* (1 Avezzù), the treatise where Alcidas collected his rhetorical theories, and the *Odysseus or Against the Treachery of Palamedes* (2 Avezzù), the imagined speech through which Odysseus accused Palamedes of having betrayed Greece to the barbarians<sup>8</sup>. To these works, we can add a few scant fragments from the *Messenian Speech*, which refers to the successful rebellion of the Messenians against the Spartans in 369 BC (fr. 3-4 Avezzù)<sup>9</sup>, and the mysterious *Museum* (fr. 5-7 Avezzù), which will be discussed further below.

We also know that Alcidas wrote encomia, a type of epideictic speech which flourished both before and during his lifetime. Epideictic speeches were performed on public occasions, with the funerary eulogy (ἐπιτάφιος λόγος) being one of the prominent types. It was also quite fashionable to write speeches and encomia on mythological characters<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, we have information about encomia on unusual or paradoxical subjects. A few words of context about this peculiar strand of epi-

<sup>7</sup> πολλοὺς λόγους, *Ch.* 11,385,743; the passage is quoted more extensively below.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of the story and sources about Palamedes see Woodford 1994. The authorship of the *Odysseus* has been questioned by O’Sullivan 2008. This work responds to Gorgias’ *Apology of Palamedes* (on which see Ioli 2013); both works are to be seen more generally as products of the Sophistic interest in epic myths: see Morgan 2000, 89-131 and Knudsen 2012.

<sup>9</sup> This work is important not only because it offers the only chronological clue to date Alcidas, but also because it sheds light on an aspect of Alcidas’ interests that is not represented in other works of his, namely slavery and natural law. A fragment preserved in a scholium to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (Anon. in *Rh.* CAG 21,2) claims that the god has made everyone equal, and nobody was born a slave. It «contains the only recorded condemnation of the institution of slavery from the ancient world», as noted by O’Sullivan 2005, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of famous funerary speeches from the Classical age include Thucydides’ version of Pericles’ speech for the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian war (2,35-46), Hyperides’ *Epitaph*, Lysias’ oration 2, and Demosthenes’ oration 60. Speeches on mythical characters include Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen* and *Apology of Palamedes*, and Antisthenes’ *Ajax* and *Odysseus* (on which see Prince 2015), as well as Alcidas’ *Odysseus*. Overview in Russell-Wilson 1981, xiii-xv.

deictic oratory are necessary because, as we will see, Alcidas' encomiastic production seems to fall mainly within it. Plato mentions as an example an encomium of salt, complaining that people spend time and energy on writing about such topics but not on praising the god Eros<sup>11</sup>. Isocrates claims that it is easier to compose encomia on unusual topics than on grand subjects, and offers an extensive list of topics for such encomia – «no one», he claims, «who has chosen to praise bumble-bees and salt and kindred topics has ever been at a loss for words», because «it is easy by eloquence to overdo the trivial themes» and «on trifling and insignificant topics whatever the speaker may chance to say is entirely original»<sup>12</sup>. These comments by Plato and Isocrates suggest that the genre was practised quite commonly, although its reception was mixed. We have but a few names of authors and titles of such works from the Classical age<sup>13</sup>, but it seems that these works were not just literary games. Rhetorical exercises of this kind were part of the education that the Sophists would impart to their students, and their students would go on to use their rhetorical skills in the assembly or in the lawcourts<sup>14</sup>. More general-

<sup>11</sup> Plat. *Symp.* 177b.

<sup>12</sup> Isoc. *Hel.* 12-13: τῶν μὲν γὰρ τοὺς βομβυλιοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἄλας καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα βουληθέντων ἐπαιεῖν οὐδεὶς πώποτε λόγων ἠπόρησεν [...] ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν μικρὰ ῥάδιον τοῖς λόγοις ὑπερβαλέσθαι [...] περὶ δὲ τῶν φαύλων καὶ ταπεινῶν ὅ τι ἂν τις τύχη φθεγξάμενος ἅπαν ἴδιόν ἐστιν.

<sup>13</sup> One is the Sophist Polycrates. Aristotle (*Rh.* 1401b) reports that Polycrates said of the mice «that they rendered great service by gnawing the bowstrings» (ὅτι ἐβοήθησαν διατραγόντες τὰς νευράς). Criticism of Polycrates is found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Isaeus* 20) who says he is «frigid and vulgar in his display-speeches and lacking in charm when charm is required» (ψυχρὸς δὲ καὶ φορτικὸς ἐν τοῖς ἐπιδεικτικοῖς, ἄχαρις δὲ ἐν τοῖς χαριεντισμοῦ δεομένοις ἐστί). On Polycrates see Freese 1926, 331 n. a, and O'Sullivan 1992, 83-84. Later mentions of paradoxical encomia include Plu. *Mor.* 44f, which talks about a (hypothetical?) «panegyric upon vomiting or fever, nay I vow, even upon a kitchen-pot, not without a certain amount of plausibility» (ἐγκώμια καὶ πυρετοῦ καὶ νῆ Δία χύτρας ἐπιδεικνύμενοι πιθανότητος). See also Quintilian 3,7,28, Polyb. 12,26bc. For still later examples, see e.g. Lucian's *Encomium of the Fly*, Dio Chrysostom's *Encomium of the Hair*, and Synesius of Cyrene's *Encomium of Baldness*. Discussion in Miller 1956, 145-149; Pease 1926, 27-42; Pernot 1993; Russell-Wilson 1981, 229-230; Tomarken 1990, 19-20 and 525-546.

<sup>14</sup> Nightingale 1993, 114: «As remote as they may seem from political discourse, then, the eulogies of the sophists played an important role in teaching students of rhetoric to manipulate the discourse of praise in public fora».

ly, these praises of paradoxical subjects «implicitly assert the relativity of all values»<sup>15</sup> and as such are a good exemplification of the influence that the Sophists exerted on the intellectual life of Classical Greece. It is therefore clear that these encomia, despite their light-hearted appearance, are an important part of education and rhetoric of the Classical age. Starting from these premises, the present article aims to shed light on Alcidas' encomiastic production by reassessing some overlooked or disputed ancient sources and addressing some of the most recent scholarly interpretations.

Alcidas' *Encomia* are lost, and the extant sources on them give pieces of information that have been interpreted differently by different scholars, with the result that there is no agreement even about how many or which encomia he actually wrote. The tradition mentions the *Encomium of Death* and the *Encomium of Nais*, but not much is known about these works. Furthermore, a textually disputed source<sup>16</sup> suggests that he might have written an *Encomium of Poverty*; the same source also seems to mention an *Encomium of Proteus the Dog* which has been variously seen as an alternative title for the *Encomium of Poverty*, as a separate work, or as a mere textual mistake (with the text actually referring to the Cynic philosopher Proteus). Editors of Alcidas have only recently started to try and disentangle this complicated situation. Blass<sup>17</sup> did not consider the *Encomia* at all; Radermacher<sup>18</sup> considered only the *Encomium of Death*; the two most recent editors, Avezzù<sup>19</sup> and Muir<sup>20</sup>, offer the most comprehensive studies of the topic to date, but propose different interpretations. The following questions thus are still unanswered: how many encomia did Alcidas write? And what can be safely reconstructed of those works, based on the few extant witnesses? This article will argue that the only works that can be safely attributed to Alcidas are the *Encomium of Death* and the *Encomium of Nais*, and it will put forward some suggestions concerning the possible argument and contents of the *Encomium of Death*. Furthermore, it will show that the idea that he wrote an *Encomium of Poverty* or an *Encomium of Proteus the Dog* is based on a misunderstanding of the source.

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<sup>15</sup> Nightingale 1995, 102.

<sup>16</sup> Menander Rhetor 3,346,9-18 Spengel, discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> Blass 1881.

<sup>18</sup> Radermacher 1951.

<sup>19</sup> Avezzù 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Muir 2001.

### The *Encomium of Nais*

Alcidamas' *Encomium of Nais* was a work in praise of a courtesan who seems to have enjoyed some fame in antiquity, as she was mentioned also by other authors such as Lysias<sup>21</sup> and Aristophanes<sup>22</sup>. That Alcidamas wrote a work on her is testified by Athenaeus (13,592c-d):

ἦττητο δὲ καὶ ὁ Λυσίας Λαγίδος τῆς ἐταίρας, ἥς ἔγραψεν ἐγκώμιον Κέφαλος ὁ ῥήτωρ, καθάπερ καὶ Ἀλκιδάμας ὁ Ἐλαίτης ὁ Γοργίου μαθητῆς ἔγραψεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγκώμιον Ναΐδος τῆς ἐταίρας.

Lysias was also smitten with the courtesan Lagis, about whom the orator Cephalus wrote a praisespeech, just as Gorgias' student Alcidamas of Elis wrote one about the courtesan Naïs.

Even though this work is mentioned only by one source, and we do not have any information about its contents or any quotes from it, there is no reason to doubt that Alcidamas engaged with this topic. Book 13 of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, within which mention of Alcidamas' *Encomium of Nais* occurs, offers the most extensive treatment of hetaerae in antiquity. The fact that Alcidamas' eulogy of Nais is mentioned together with others such as that of Lagis by Cephalus shows just how important and common hetaerae were as subjects of epideictic oratory<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, as noted by McClure<sup>24</sup>, the fourth century BC in Athens represents the «heyday» of courtesans, who feature as prominent characters in several literary genres. In comedy, the hetaera becomes an important character type and helps the development of plots involving mistaken identity and romantic intrigue<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, hetaerae feature conspicuously in judicial oratory. As shown by Lape and Glazebrook, in the middle of the fourth century BC it was common to think that the sexual habits of the people involved in trials – including their association with hetaerae – could have an impact on the polis as a whole and its morality; ultimately,

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<sup>21</sup> *Against Philonides* fr. 140 Carey.

<sup>22</sup> *Gerytoides* fr. 179 Henderson. Another, doubtful, mention of Nais is in Aristophanes' *Wealth* (179), but the manuscripts transmit the reading Λαΐς.

<sup>23</sup> McClure 2003a, 41. See also McClure 2003b on Athenaeus' book 13 and the courtesans' sayings in it.

<sup>24</sup> McClure 2003a, 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Faraone 2006 on this.

orators tended to use and shape the image of the hetaerae in order to discredit the men who associated with them<sup>26</sup>.

Hetaerae played an important role in the life and literature of Classical Athens, but their characters could be – and were – presented in unfavourable ways for various purposes. This offers some context to Alcidas' choice to compose an encomium of a hetaera: in many ways, the *Encomium of Nais* fits within, and confirms, the wider cultural and literary trends in which it was written, and presents the author with the opportunity for an exciting rhetorical challenge: praising a subject that was elsewhere heavily blamed<sup>27</sup>.

### The *Encomium of Death*

A few sources report that Alcidas composed an *Encomium of Death*. The Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes names this work among Alcidas' «many speeches» in his *Chiliades*, where he writes (11,385,738-744):

- 738 ὡς Ἀλκιδάμας ἔγραψεν ἐγκώμιον θανάτου, ὁ Ἐλαίτης,  
 σύγχρονος ὑπάρχων Ἴσοκράτει.  
 743 πολλοὺς τοῦ Ἀλκιδάμαντος ἀνεγνωκῶς μὲν λόγους,  
 αὐτοῦ τῷ ἐγκωμίῳ δε μὴ ἐντυχῶν θανάτου.

Alcidas of Elea, contemporary of Isocrates, wrote the *Encomium of Death* [...] I have read many speeches by Alcidas but never chanced upon his *Encomium of Death*<sup>28</sup>.

Tzetzes claims he has not read the *Encomium of Death*, which perhaps indicates that it was already lost by his time, but the fact that he singles it out means that he must have considered it as an important text.

The topic is not Alcidas' own original invention – the idea that death is better than a life in slavery or shame, and that it is an honour to

<sup>26</sup> Lape 2006 focuses on Aeschines' *Against Timarchus*. Glazebrook 2006 takes into account a wider range of orations, including [Demosthenes] 59 and 48, and Isaeus 3 and 6. In all these cases, the speaker sheds a negative light on the person under accusation by emphasising their acquaintance with a hetaera, who is depicted, in opposition to the ideal wife, as a woman who is extravagant, excessive, and promiscuous in her behaviour.

<sup>27</sup> McClure 2003a, 32-33 claims, rightly, that «their [the hetaerae's] marginal social status also appealed to the aesthetics of sophistic paradox».

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

die for one's country, is common in Greek literature<sup>29</sup>. Once again, therefore, we see how Alcidamas' literary production fits within the trends of his times and of Classical literature more generally. The earliest witness of Alcidamas' *Encomium of Death* is Cicero, who claims (*Tusculan Disputations* 1,116)<sup>30</sup>:

Alcidamas quidem, rhetor antiquus in primis nobilis, scripsit etiam laudationem mortis, quae constat ex enumeratione humanorum malorum; cui rationes eae, quae exquisitius a philosophis colliguntur, defuerunt, ubertas orationis non defuit.

Alcidamas, for instance, an ancient rhetorician of the first distinction, actually wrote an encomium on death which consists of a list of the evils to which mankind are exposed; he has failed to give those deeper arguments which the philosophers bring together, but he has not failed in wealth of eloquence.

The level of knowledge of the work that Cicero shows, as well as the type of comments he makes, suggests that he had read the *Encomium* or at least part of it<sup>31</sup>. Cicero, indeed, seems to be aware of some of the main features of this work, in particular with regards to its structure, and expresses an opinion about both its style and the depth of its argumentation. What can we make of Cicero's testimony? What does it tell us about the lost work by Alcidamas? Firstly, Cicero seems to praise the wealth of Alcidamas' eloquence (*ubertas orationis non defuit*). This, in itself, is an

<sup>29</sup> The most relevant example is Thucydides' version of Pericles' funerary oration for the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian war. See especially 2,43,6: ἀλγεινότερα γὰρ ἀνδρὶ γε φρόνημα ἔχοντι ἢ μετὰ τοῦ μαλακισθῆναι κάκωσις ἢ ὁ μετὰ ῥώμης καὶ κοινῆς ἐλπίδος ἅμα γιγνόμενος ἀναίσθητος θάνατος. («For to a manly spirit more bitter is humiliation associated with cowardice than death when it comes unperceived in close company with stalwart deeds and public hopes»). Interestingly, the scholium to the Thucydidean passage portrays the speech precisely as an *Encomium of Death*. The scholium states: ἐποίησεν ἐγκώμιον καὶ ἔπαινον τοῦ θανάτου, «he makes an encomium and praise of death» (my transl.). The success of the topic in oratory is also testified by a later tradition according to which an orator performed such a persuasive praise of death that many people committed suicide (Anon. *Problemata rhetorica in status* n. 28 = Walz 8, 407). See Russell-Wilson 1981, 249.

<sup>30</sup> This, together with Tzetzes' witness above, does indicate that the treatise «enjoyed something of a *succès d'estime*» as stated by Dillon 2003, 294.

<sup>31</sup> O'Sullivan 1992, 81 n. 114 also notes that there is no reason to think that Cicero was giving second-hand information.

important remark, as Alcidamas was often criticised in antiquity for his excessively elaborate style. As we have seen above, it was precisely this *ubertas orationis*, which Cicero highlights as a positive aspect of the work, that led Aristotle to consider Alcidamas' style as frigid. But there are also other remarks in the passage from the *Tusculan Disputations* that might contribute to our reconstruction of Alcidamas' lost *Encomium of Death*. Cicero suggests that it was written (at least in part) in a catalogic form, and that the depth of its argumentation was unsatisfactory. If, as it seems, Alcidamas included a list of the evils which affect the life of human beings in his work in praise of death, the argument that might have resulted from it (and that admittedly is not particularly complex from a philosophical point of view) is that it is better to die than to live a life of pain. This is precisely the gist of a famous couplet that was associated with Alcidamas among others:

ἀρχὴν μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον,  
φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι.

Not to be born at all is the best thing for people on earth, and once born, to pass through the doors of Hades as soon as possible<sup>32</sup>.

The couplet is quoted by Stobaeus in his *Anthology* under the lemma «Encomium of death» (ἔπαινος θανάτου)<sup>33</sup>. It is a traditional couplet that is found already in Theognis<sup>34</sup> and other sources; more generally, the idea it represents is common in Classical Greece<sup>35</sup>. Interestingly for us, Stobaeus quotes it as coming «from Alcidamas' *Museum*» (ἐκ Ἀλκιδάμαντος Μουσείου). Stobaeus proves that Alcidamas knew and used these verses, but his testimony also opens up complex questions about the relationship between Alcidamas' *Encomium of Death* and his equally mysterious *Museum*. The *Museum* too is lost, but it seems to have been one of the

<sup>32</sup> My translation.

<sup>33</sup> Stob. 4,52,22.

<sup>34</sup> Theogn. 425 and 427, where each of the two verses of the couplet is followed by a pentameter: πάντων μὲν μὴ φῦναι ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἄριστον / μηδ' ἐσιδεῖν αὐγάς ὀξέος ἡελίου / φύντα δ' ὅπως ὤκιστα πύλας Αἴδαο περῆσαι καὶ / κείσθαι πολλὴν γῆν ἐπαμησάμενον. «It is best of all for mortals not to be born and not to look upon the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth».

<sup>35</sup> A full list of occurrences of the couplet in Greek literature in West 1971, 194. The general feeling of the passage is also echoed by Bacchylides (5,160-162) and Sophocles (OC 1225-1227).



sources for the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, an anonymous Greek text from the Imperial age about the lives of Homer and Hesiod and their legendary poetic contest. Indeed, the *Museum* is mentioned as the source for one of the two versions of the story of Hesiod's death given in the *Certamen*<sup>36</sup>. The relevance of the *Museum*, source of the *Certamen*, to our reassessment of Alcidamas' *Encomia* becomes clear when we consider that our couplet is transmitted also by the *Certamen* itself, more specifically in the context of a competitive exchange of verses between Homer and Hesiod (lines 78-79). On this basis, scholars from Nietzsche onwards have suggested that Alcidamas' *Museum* was the source for the agonistic part of the *Certamen*, as well as the death of Hesiod. Nietzsche's insight found confirmation later when a papyrus was discovered (P.Petr. I 25 (1)) that dates from the third century BC and reports the couplet in the same agonistic context as the *Certamen*, with minimal variations<sup>37</sup>.

What has emerged so far, therefore, is that Alcidamas did use this couplet in the *Museum* (Stobaeus) and specifically within the contest of Homer and Hesiod (Nietzsche and P.Petr. I 25 (1)). But can this couplet, attributed to Alcidamas' *Museum* by Stobaeus and listed under the lemma «Encomium of death», be related to Alcidamas' *Encomium of Death*? And does the *Encomium of Death* have anything to do with the *Museum*, which according to Stobaeus contained the couplet? The very few scholars who have dealt with this issue have reached contrasting conclusions. Dillon, following Sauppe, claims that «possibly this [the *Encomium of Death*] was included in his *Mouseion*»<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, according to Radermacher there is no reason to ascribe these verses to the *Encomium of Death*, but only to the work to which Stobaeus attributes them, i.e. the *Museum*<sup>39</sup>. Avezzi even suggests that Alcidamas might not have written

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<sup>36</sup> *Certamen* 239-240: ὡς φησιν Ἀλκιδάμας ἐν Μουσεῖῳ, «as Alcidamas says in his *Museum*».

<sup>37</sup> LDAB 178. See Mahaffy 1891 for the *editio princeps*; most recently Bassino 2018, 60-67. Nietzsche 1870 and 1873; Nietzsche edited the text of the *Certamen* (Nietzsche 1871). Another papyrus finding (P.Mich. 2754 = LDAB 177) suggests that Alcidamas might have been the source for the episode of the death of Homer in the *Certamen* (lines 327-338), but this does not mean that Alcidamas invented the story of the contest in the first place as suggested by West 1967. See Bassino 2018, 67-75 on this papyrus and 115 on the sources of the *Certamen*.

<sup>38</sup> Dillon 2003, 288.

<sup>39</sup> Radermacher 1951. Also available with translation at <https://www.sfu.ca/anewradermacher/alcidamas.html>, accessed 22-06-2020.

an *Encomium of Death* at all, and that the attribution derives from a misunderstanding of the couplet read in isolation<sup>40</sup>. Firstly, it is important to remark that no piece of evidence indicates that the *Encomium of Death* might have been part of the *Museum*, as suggested by Sauppe and Dillon. The *Museum*, as far as we can reasonably reconstruct, dealt with the biography of Homer and Hesiod, and the couplet quoted by Stobaeus and attributed to Alcidamas' *Museum* may, as shown, have been included in that work as part of the poetic competition between the two poets. Therefore, the fact that a couplet in praise of death was included in the *Museum* is not sufficient ground to suggest that the *Encomium of Death* was part of that work. What seems more likely is that Alcidamas may have used the couplet in both works<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, as we have seen, the couplet was quoted extensively in antiquity, and used in different contexts. This indicates that it was part of the repertoire of writers and orators, who could use it when relevant to their argumentation. More specifically, if Cicero's testimony is safe to believe, the couplet seems to express what might have been the general argument and the expected conclusion of a work that lists a number of evils while praising death: it is better not to be born at all or to die as soon as possible, rather than living through all those evils. It seems therefore plausible to suggest that this couplet did have a place in the *Encomium of Death*.

*An Encomium of Poverty and/or of Proteus the Dog?*

Menander Rhetor (3,346,9-18 Spengel) is an important witness for our understanding of Alcidamas' encomiastic production. Based on this passage, some editors suggested that Alcidamas composed an *Encomium of Poverty* or *Encomium of Proteus the Dog*, but the passage is textually dis-

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<sup>40</sup> Avezzù 1982, 68-69. He suggests that that the couplet circulated in connection with Alcidamas' name in an anthology similar to Stobaeus', and that someone, reading it out of the agonistic context in which Alcidamas originally put it in his *Museum*, thought that Alcidamas wrote an *Encomium of Death*. The couplet may have reached Menander through the same anthological source. However, the degree of familiarity Cicero shows with this work seems to suggest that it did exist, and he did have access to it (or at least to detailed information about it). The only extant source explicitly claiming to be unable to read the work is Tzetzes.

<sup>41</sup> See also O'Sullivan 1992, 82 who claims that Homer in the *Certamen* is represented as, at the very least, supporting what Alcidamas himself will have maintained elsewhere.

puted. The following discussion aims to show that he did not write those works.

I start by presenting the text of Menander in the most recent and thorough critical edition, curated by Russell and Wilson<sup>42</sup> – which gives the reading I will support. I quote the passage extensively in order to give some context to Menander's mention of Alcidas' *Encomia*. I also report the relevant section of the apparatus criticus in order to give the necessary information about the textual problem that will be discussed below.

Ἐκεῖνό γε μὴν ἰστέον, ὅτι τῶν ἐγκωμίων τὰ μὲν ἐστὶν ἔνδοξα, [τὰ δὲ ἄδοξα] τὰ δὲ ἀμφίδοξα, τὰ δὲ παράδοξα. ἔνδοξα μὲν τὰ περὶ ἀγαθῶν ὁμολογουμένων, οἷον θεοῦ ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς ἀγαθοῦ φανεροῦ· [ἄδοξα δὲ τὰ περὶ δαιμόνων καὶ κακοῦ φανεροῦ·] ἀμφίδοξα δὲ ὅσα πῆ μὲν ἔνδοξά ἐστι, πῆ δὲ ἄδοξα, ὃ ἐν τοῖς Παναθηναϊκοῖς εὐρίσκεται καὶ Ἰσοκράτους καὶ Ἀριστείδου· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐπαινετά, τὰ δὲ ψεκτά, ὑπὲρ ὧν ἀπολογοῦνται· παράδοξα δὲ οἷον Ἄλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον, ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός. Ἐνέταξα δὲ τὸ θεώρημα, ἐπειδὴ ἀφόρους καὶ δυσφόρους χώρας, καὶ τὰς ἀνύδρους καὶ ψαμμώδεις, ὅπως ἐπαινεῖν χρή ὑπέδειξα. ὅτι γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων [καὶ] παραδόξων καὶ ἀπολογίαν ἐξευρίσκειν ἔστιν, εἰς ἐγκώμιον ἔξαρκεῖ.

Πενίας] Πενίας ἢ τοῦ *MmW*.

It is also to be noted that some encomia are 'of good repute' [some 'of no repute'], some ambivalent and some paradoxical. 'Of good repute' are those of acknowledged goods, e.g. a god or some other manifestly good subject. ['Of no repute' are those relating to daemons and manifest evil.] 'Ambivalent' are those that are in some sense 'of good repute' and in some sense 'of no repute', such as what we find in the Panathenaic speeches of Isocrates and Aristides; some points attract praise, others blame, and for those they offer a defence. 'Paradoxical' are, e.g. Alcidas' encomium of Death or the Cynic Proteus' encomium of Poverty. I have inserted this proposition here, because I have indicated how barren, sterile, waterless, or sandy countries should be praised. It is sufficient for the purposes of encomium that it is possible to discover a defence for such 'paradoxical' subjects<sup>43</sup>.

The editors print Ἄλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός. According to this edition, Menander's text mentions the *Encomium of Death* attributed to Alcidas and the *Enco-*

<sup>42</sup> Russell-Wilson 1981.

<sup>43</sup> Translation from Russell-Wilson 1981.

*mium of Poverty* attributed to Proteus the Cynic (a text that unfortunately has not survived, just like Alcidas' and is nowhere else attested)<sup>44</sup>. Race, in the recent Loeb edition of Menander, agrees with Russell and Wilson:

παράδοξα δὲ οἶον Ἀλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον, ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός.

Paradoxical is, for example, Alcidas' encomium of Death or the Cynic Proteus' praise of Poverty<sup>45</sup>.

But as indicated in the apparatus, there is a branch of the manuscript tradition that adds ἢ τοῦ after Πενίας. The text in those manuscripts runs as follows:

παράδοξα δὲ οἶον Ἀλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον, ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας ἢ τοῦ Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός.

'Paradoxical' are, e.g. Alcidas' encomium of Death, or that of Poverty or of Proteus the Dog.

That is the text accepted in the standard modern edition of Alcidas by Avezzù and followed by Muir: while the editors of Menander read the text as attributing to Alcidas only the *Encomium of Death*, the editors of Alcidas suggest that the passage credits him with two, or even three encomia (in addition to that on Nais). Avezzù suggests that ἢ τοῦ intro-

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<sup>44</sup> Russell-Wilson 1981, 249 say that «*MmW*'s addition of ἢ τοῦ is clearly wrong». According to them, κυνός refers to a Cynic philosopher, Proteus, and not to a dog. The confusion could occur easily enough. As remarked by Grimaldi 1988, 340, κύων was a nickname by which the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope was known. Diogenes Laertius (6,33) reports in relation to Diogenes: ἔλεγεν ἑαυτὸν κύνα εἶναι τῶν ἐπαινουμένων, ἀλλὰ μηδένα τολμᾶν τῶν ἐπαινούτων συνεξίεναι ἐπὶ τὴν θήραν, «He described himself as a hound of the sort which all men praise, but no one, he added, of his admirers dared go out hunting along with him». See also Plut. *Mor.* 88b. In reference to Proteus in particular, Suda s.v. *Philostratus* reports a work by the elder Philostratus called Πρωτεύς κύων ἢ σοφιστής, as noted by Russell-Wilson 1981, 249. Peregrinus Proteus was a Cynic philosopher from Parium, who burnt himself alive at Olympia 167 AD. The main sources on him are Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* and Philostr. *VS* 2,1,13. There is no extant mention of his written works, except for this disputed passage by Menander.

<sup>45</sup> Race 2019, 73 with n. 17.

duces an alternative title for the *Encomium of Poverty*, making effectively the encomium of poverty and that of Proteus the dog the same work (which the editor calls *Encomio della povertà, ovvero di Proteo il cane*); this is based on the fact that no work has ever been attributed to Peregrinus Proteus (so that κυνός may well refer to an actual dog, rather than to a Cynic philosopher as suggested by Russell and Wilson), and that Alcidas is called κυνικός in Lucian *Symp.* 12<sup>46</sup>. Muir accepts, on the same grounds as Avezzù, that Alcidas composed a praise of a dog; but he considers it as a separate work, thus listing four titles: *On Death, On Poverty, On Nais, and On Proteus the Dog*<sup>47</sup>. Dillon translates Menander's testimony as follows: «the encomium of Alcidas *On Death*, or that *On Poverty*, or that on *Proteus the Cynic*»<sup>48</sup>.

To start with, the language of the text does not seem to allow for Muir's interpretation of the text. In order to indicate that the *Encomium of Poverty* and the *Encomium of Proteus the Dog* are two separate works, the text should read παράδοξα δὲ οἷον Ἀλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον, ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας ἢ τὸ τοῦ Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός. Furthermore, commenting on the encomium of the dog and noting, with Avezzù, that Alcidas was called κυνικός by Lucian, Muir claims that «Avezzù is right to accept the text of Menander which identifies two speeches rather than one»<sup>49</sup>. However, although Avezzù did remove the Cynic Proteus Peregrinus from the picture and include a dog, he proposed that the *Encomium of Poverty* and the *Encomium of Proteus the Dog* are two alternative titles for the same speech – not two separate speeches. Muir's proposal of a total of four titles for Alcidas seems therefore based on a misunderstanding of the proposal by Avezzù which he claims to follow. Dillon on the other hand, acknowledges that «it is not clear whether [...] the object of a praise is a Cynic or a real dog»<sup>50</sup>, but his translation of Menander's text according to which Alcidas would have written «on *Proteus the Cynic*» cannot stand for chronological reasons, as Alcidas lived centuries before the philosopher.

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<sup>46</sup> His text (T14) runs: παράδοξα δὲ οἷον Ἀλκιδάμαντος τὸ τοῦ Θανάτου ἐγκώμιον, ἢ τὸ τῆς Πενίας, ἢ τοῦ Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός.

<sup>47</sup> Muir 2001: xii and xviii.

<sup>48</sup> Dillon 2003, 284.

<sup>49</sup> Muir 2001, xxviii n. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Dillon 2003: 284 with n. 7.

Furthermore, under a strictly philological point of view, the reading ἡ τὸ τῆς Πενίας ἢ τοῦ Πρωτέως τοῦ κυνός is transmitted by only three out of more than ten manuscripts that have handed down Menander's work, and they all belong to the same branch<sup>51</sup>. It is plausible that the insertion of ἡ τοῦ was a mistake due to the presence of several articles and particles in a passage that reports a list of examples. Philological arguments therefore support the view that Menander referenced an *Encomium of Poverty* by Proteus the Cynic, and not an *Encomium of Poverty or of Proteus the Dog* by Alcidas.

It should also be noted that while an encomium of poverty would fit the context in which Menander mentions these works, i.e. that of paradoxical encomia, an encomium of a dog would not. The passage occurs within Menander's discussion of how to praise a country, more specifically in the section where he claims that it is possible to find a way to praise all countries, even the less hospitable ones. The now lost *Encomia* are mentioned as examples of subjects that are «paradoxical» (παράδοξα) – which according to Menander means that they are not «of good repute» (ἔνδοξα) and not even «ambivalent» (ἀμφίδοξα) – and have been the object of a successful encomium nonetheless. They are thus used as evidence that even the countries that are «barren, sterile, waterless, or sandy» can be praised. We can understand how death and poverty could be subjects of paradoxical encomia. But would it be the same for an encomium of a dog? The extant sources that reference praises written for dogs suggest that this might not have been too unusual as a subject, and not a paradoxical one<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> On the manuscripts see Russell-Wilson 1981, xl-xliv, where the editors present the ten main manuscript witnesses, excluding those written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and divide them into three branches. The manuscripts that transmit the reading belong to the second branch, discussed at xli-xliii, and are: *M* (*Laur. Plut.* 56,1; second half of the twelfth century); *m* (*Laur. Plut.* 81,8; second quarter of the fourteenth century); *W* (*Vat. gr.* 306; ca 1300).

<sup>52</sup> See *Ar. Rh.* 2,1401a2, and for a more extensive treatment of how to praise a dog see *Luc. Pr. Im.* 19: Οἶον εἴ τις κύνα ἐπαιῶν εἴποι ἀλώπεκος εἶναι μείζω αὐτὸν ἢ αἰλούρου, ἄρα σοι δοκεῖ ὁ τοιοῦτος ἐπαινεῖν εἰδέναι; οὐκ ἂν εἴποις, ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ' εἰ λύκῳ φαίη ἴσον αὐτὸν ὑπάρχειν, οὐδὲ οὕτως μεγαλωστί ἐπήρσεν. ἀλλὰ ποῦ τὸ ἴδιον τοῦ ἐπαίνου ἀποτελεῖται; ἦν ὁ κύων τῷ λέοντι εὐοικέαι λέγηται καὶ μέγεθος καὶ ἀλκήν. ὡς ὁ τὸν Ἰβρίωνος κύνα ἐπαιῶν ἔφη ποιητῆς λεοντοδάμαν αὐτόν· οὗτος γὰρ δὴ κυνός ἐντελής ἔπαινος, «For example, if in praising a dog someone were to say that it was larger than a fox or a cat, does it seem to you

It seems therefore that the reading of the text according to which Menander attributed to Alcidamas an *Encomium of Proteus the Dog*, perhaps an alternative title for the *Encomium of Poverty*, does not stand, both because of philological reasons and because it would not fit the type of speech that Menander is discussing in that passage. We must therefore accept that Menander is referring to an otherwise unknown *Encomium of Poverty* by Proteus the Cynic, as suggested by Russell and Wilson. Poverty as a subject for encomia was common<sup>53</sup>, but Menander is not suggesting that Alcidamas wrote one. On the other hand, the praise of poverty is strictly connected to Cynic philosophy<sup>54</sup>, and as such would make a suitable topic for a work by Proteus.

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Alcidamas was one of the most prominent intellectual figures of his times, and the encomium – even when dealing with unusual or paradoxical subjects – was a key part of Classical oratory. And yet, Alcidamas' *Encomia* were, at some point, forgotten. This article has aimed to offer a fresh study of the extant witnesses related to those lost works; it has done so by discussing textual problems, by considering other relevant works by Alcidamas, and by situating Alcidamas' works within the literary trends of the time. Scarce and controversial though the witnesses may be, it is still possible to try and piece them together in order to gain a fuller appreciation of Alcidamas' *Encomia*, works that must have had an impact on the literature, oratory, and education of the Greek Classical age.

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that he knows how to praise? You will not say so! But even if he should say it was as large as a wolf, he has not praised it generously. Well, at what point will the special end of praise be achieved? When the dog is said to resemble a lion in size and in strength. So the poet who praised Orion's dog called him "lion-daunting." That, of course, in the case of a dog is perfect praise».

<sup>53</sup> See for example Stob. 3,780 for an anthology on the subject.

<sup>54</sup> On this subject see the comprehensive study by Desmond 2006.

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*Abstract:* Alcidamas' *Encomia* are now lost. All we know about them comes from a few ancient sources that scholars have interpreted in various contrasting ways – there is disagreement even about how many and which *encomia* Alcidamas actually wrote. But the prominent role played by Alcidamas in the intellectual landscape of Classical Greece, and of the encomium within epideictic oratory, indicate their importance to our understanding of Classical rhetoric and the need for a new assessment of the sources. This study suggests that the only *encomia*, among those mentioned in the sources, that can be safely attributed to Alcidamas

are the *Encomium of Nais* and the *Encomium of Death*. Based on a testimony by Cicero, this study proposes a reconstruction of the general argument and structure of the *Encomium of Death* and suggests that a couplet attributed to another work by Alcidas (the *Museum*) might have featured in the *Encomium of Death* as well. Furthermore, the study considers a textually disputed passage by Menander Rhetor, and suggests, against some editors, that it should not be taken as evidence for further works by Alcidas (*Encomium of Poverty* and/or *Encomium of Proteus the Dog*).

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