DÉMOCRATIE MANQUÉE: ATHENS IN THE 4th C. B.C.

The study of ancient history, no less than of modern history, has been plagued by men of undoubted high intent who have had an unflinching loyalty to a preconception. Thus, for instance, Toynbee in making the Graeco-Roman 'civilization' the key to the understanding of twenty other civilizations did violence to the facts about Greek and Roman political developments. The influence of preconceptions is most noticeable in studies of 4th Century and Hellenistic era history: for men like Beloch, the unifying strength of Prussia and Savoy was honourable and its success inevitable, hence their conclusion that the opposition of Demosthenes and his like to Philip and his son Alexander the Great of Macedon was both futile and inane. Other scholars fell under the spell of the humanitarian interests of 19th century British scholarship, and followed Grote in depicting Demosthenes as a pillar of sanity in a decaying world, and an heroic protagonist against the encroachments of Macedonian totalitarianism.

Clearing away the débris of preconceptions is comparatively easy: one's colleagues' peculiar biases are always patently more obvious than one's own. There is, however, another greater weakness in many historical studies and that is the slack and often uncritical use of conceptional terms. In the field of modern history it will be sufficient to quote Hexter as an exponent of a more critical approach to historical terminology. The dilemma, as he sees it, is that terms such as 'class', 'party', 'race', etc., are instruments of current speech and in using them to apply to different concepts in the past we cannot rid these terms of all vestiges of contemporary meaning. Ancient historians have been no less alive to this problem, albeit the problem is less acute for us, in that we have recourse to Latin and Greek Terms which have a different complex of connotations from their modern counterparts. Our problem is rather to relate ancient terms, such as *clementia, moderatio, libertas,* to their contemporary historical events and thus to determine their political, historical force; and tied to this is our need to determine the semantic force of these terms for any particular ancient author.

In the last century of the Roman Republic, say from 133 B.C. to 31 B.C., the political scene was occupied by the tussle between Optimates and Populares, relieved, of course, by a series of *coups d' état.* According to men's preconceptions the *populares* have been viewed as either 'rabble rousers', or the people's party in the sense of advocates of genuine reforms, and the *optimates* have been viewed either as the champions of constitutional government or as criminal reactionaries. Wirzubski gave the study of this period a new look when he tackled the term 'libertas', a constant slogan of the *populares.* In the name of 'libertas', the *populares* campaigned for equitable distribution of newly acquired land, the preservation of the sovereign right of the individual to appeal against summary conviction, and the sovereign right of the people to control admission to the

magistracies. Whilst these issues were quite fair and reasonable, Wirzubski, in analysing accounts of debates on certain *populares* issues, found them guilty of distortion of fact and violation of the legally respectable principles of the constitution, and concluded that ulterior motives in time quite outweighed humanitarian issues with the *populares*. On the Optimate side the slogan *otium cum dignitate* (peace with dignity) is superficially an excellent maxim, but note its two edges: to the people it was to convey the meaning that they could and should enjoy peace (i.e. within the state), ceding administrative power (*dignitas* meant both the office held and the honour, dignity that attended its holder) to the Establishment; to the patricians it was a promise of hope that they would be able to maintain administrative control of the state without civil strife raising its head.

The context of a coin legend, such as CLEMENTIA, is very restricted but given the date of a coin one can interpret its significance in the light of known contemporary events. Thus we may say that the definition of ideograms found on coins depends, more than does the definition of ideograms in literary sources, upon an analysis of their contemporary political events. The task is made easy by the natural conclusion that the celebration of a virtue e.g. *justitia* (justice) by a Roman emperor, either veils the absence of that quality in his administration, or enhances the conspicuous presence of that virtue.

It is sometimes said that ancient history and the Classics have no place in Africa, for, research workers are too far away from archaeological sites and the sources of fresh material, and that the subjects are of little relevance to local needs. Readers of this journal will not need the second point answered, but the first argument needs tackling. The earlier paragraphs of this article provide the basis for an answer: we may be rather slow in getting up to date with fresh material and we can enjoy only a second hand knowledge of manuscripts and inscriptions, but we can endeavour to make some contribution to the science of history by working upon the definition of conceptual terms for the periods of history under discussion, and by studying the historiographical principles of the ancient sources. Much is being done in South Africa in these fields for several reasons, not the least of which are the inspiration of the Dutch school of historiography and the interest aroused by the examination modern historians are conducting into the problems of historical argument and definition.

To illustrate the sort of work that can be tackled one may cite the topic of democracy and the city state in fourth century Greece. At the outset the pro-Bismarckian denigration of Macedon's opponents may be set aside, along with the naïvely sympathetic account of Grote of fourth century Athens. Grote characterised the Demosthenic Athenian of 360 B.C. as 'a quiet, home-keeping, refined citizen, *attached to the democratic constitution*, and executing with cheerful pride his ordinary city — duties under it . . .' (vol. xi, 251) (my italics). Immediately the query arises whether this reference to 'democracy' means anything, for, Grote used it

in writing before universal adult suffrage was realized in Britain, and his definition would agree neither with the modern British definition nor yet with the American ideal. Further, the connotations of none of these terms are the same as the connotations of the Greek word. Even then, we shall need to narrow it down to fourth century Athens.

In the fifth century, 'democracy', as distinct from the term we use to describe the Periclean régime, was a political slogan of imperial reference, or rather was used to justify imperialism. Look first at Athens' treatment of Carystus in 472 B.C., after Athens had established the Delian Confederacy in 478 B.C. as a defensive pact amongst a number of Greek states against Persia. Presumably Carystus was not attacked as a punitive measure because of her surrender to the Persians in the Persian Wars, for whilst one aim of the League's precursor — the Hellenic League — was the punishment of traitors, yet the earlier Greek alliance in 481 B.C. swore to punish Medizers 'except those who had given in to the Persians under compulsion',[1] and Carystus had not given in till virtually everything was lost. It seems that Carystus was attacked rather because she had refused to join the Confederacy, and that this was carried out under the terms of the Confederacy's aim to make every city 'autonomous'.[2] The Anthenians must have argued that if a city did not join this defensive pact, then its government was not acting in the interests of the people and therefore that it was not 'autonomous'. This is to be remembered when one looks at Athens' policy towards her allies later when the Delian Confederacy had become *de facto* the Athenian Empire. In the 440's Athens' policy was to impose democracy on federal cities. This became, if you like, an ideological issue, and oligarchic governments were forced to look for support either to Sparta, the leading power in the Peloponnese, or, more seriously, to Persia. Thus, for instance, the Island of Samos had an oligarchic government, which Athens deposed when it refused to acknowledge Athens' arbitration in a dispute with Miletus; the exiled oligarchs planned a coup d'état in collaboration with Pissuthres, a Persian satrap. The sympathy of oligarchs in the Greek world was nothing new in the 440's, for, the Athenian tyrant Hippias, for instance, had sought asylum in Persia in the sixth century.

If the oligarchs were treacherous to the Greek cause and were ready to deal ruthlessly with popular uprisings, as happened at Miletus c. 450/449 B.C., this is not to say that Athenian 'democracy' was utopia actualized. A striking illustration of the operation of democracy in the Athenian empire is provided by the decrees relating to the settlement of Erythrae in the period 452-449 B.C.[3] The main decree i.a. regulates the administration of the boulê (Upper House, probouleutic council) which is initially to be appointed by the *constitutional commission* and the *garrison com-*

1. Hdt. vii, 132.
2. Thuc. i, 96; iii, 10. 2-3.
3. Highby, *The Erythrae Decree*, Tod. *Gk. Historical Inscriptions*, vol. 1, No. 29, 1936.

mander. Thereafter the list of members of the boulê was to be drawn up by the retiring boulê and the *garrison commander.* Many other cities in the same period are recorded as having garrison commanders and the same source of evidence (i.e. inscriptions) also testifies to constitutional commissioners being a permanent feature of Athenian imperial administration.

The conclusion must be that 'democracy' was virtually equated with 'autonomy' as a propaganda slogan, and that it was exploited as a means of furthering Athens' strategic and imperial plans. Of course it is true that the oligarchs played into Athens' hands by aligning themselves with the Persians.

We have noted the equation democracy equals autonomy — and how conveniently for the Athenians, the Persians planted oligarchies in cities that came under their rule — now can be noted a corroborative equation from fifth century political jargons: 'subjection to an opposite political party' equals slavery.[4]

With the Peloponnesian War (431-404), in which the Peloponnesians eventually gained the ascendancy over the Athenians, we have to deal with 'democracy' in quite a different way. The writer of the tract *The Constitution of Athens* has this to say:

'Now as long as the fortune in the war was equally balanced, they retained the democracy. But when, after the disaster in Sicily (late 413 B.C.), the Lacedaemonian side became stronger through the alliance with the Persian king, they were compelled to abolish the democracy and to establish the constitution of the Four Hundred . . . The resolution itself was drafted by Pythodorus of the deme Anaphystus . . . The text of the resolution . . . was as follows: that the people should elect, in addition to the already existing emergency committee of ten, twenty others over forty years of age, and that these men together, after having sworn an oath to draft such measures as they considered best for the state, should then put down in writing proposals for the salvation of the country . . . Cleitophon supported the motion of Pythodorus in all respects, but added the proposal that the elected committee should also investigate the ancient laws which Cleisthenes had enacted when he established the democracy, so that, after having acquainted themselves with these measures, they might then deliberate as to what the best course would be. *The implication was that the constitution of Cleisthenes was not really democratic but similar to that of Solon.*'[5] (my italics).

This decree was passed in 411 B.C. Cleitophon, as a member of the Moderates (oligarchs), was trying to curb democracy not by a direct assault, as the extreme oligarchs tried to, but by casting doubt on the democratic nature of the Cleisthenic reforms which, introduced in the

4. De Ste Croix, The Character of the Athenian Empire, *Hist.* iii, '54.
Plut *Cimon* ii, 3; Isocrates xii, 97 and iv, 109, late admittedly, but justified by Thucydides usage of the word re Naxos.
5. *Ath Pol.* 29, 1-3: translated von Fritz and Kapp, New York '50.

decade 510-500 B.C., and with later modifications, formed the basis of Periclean democracy. His method was to glorify the earlier reforms of Solon, who perhaps in the 570's,[6] had replaced aristocracy in Athens by a timocracy, including at the same time genuine democratic reforms, such as the introduction of the popular law-courts. Clearly this was sheer double-talk: pre-Cleistenic democracy was much more attractive to the moderate oligarchs, and the great thing was that no-one knew precisely the terms of the Solonian reforms, hence the 'investigation' suggested in the rider; with so little known there was plenty of scope for convenient reconstruction of Solonian principles. Certainly the 'ancestral constitution' became the subject of prolonged political propaganda warfare: the reactionaries, for instance, emphasized Solon's anarchism, for example, in passing a law cancelling all debts; the moderates retaliated by showing that the debt-cancellation was no more than a reduction in interest rates. Thus, as A. Fuks says concerning the fourth century of the latter party: 'A picture is evolved and impressed on the mind of the Athenian public of Solon the paragon of all democratic virtue, the democratic lawgiver to whom the law-courts owe their status and the people in general their power, Solon the founder of the democratic state.'[7]

The nature of this dispute suggests that it was not a popular issue; indeed, only the moderates even wished to gain some show of popular support for their designs. One suspects that Athens was effectively governed by an 'establishment'. This hypothesis is confirmed by the historical fact that in the early fourth century the professional mercenary army came into existence. Their military significance can be estimated from the fact that, when Alexander the Great challenged Darius, the issue rested on who should gain control of the Greek mercenaries: Darius fell because he lost his mercenaries. As for their political significance, just as liberalisation of the constitution occurred in Sparta as wars were decided by hoplites, and in Athens as hoplites and then oarsmen for the navy grew in importance, so the people lost their power in Athens after the capture of 3,000 oarsmen at Aegospotami, and the realisation that warfare was going to be the preserve of professional mercenaries. It is significant that in the 390's Persian subsidies found their way into Athenian coffers in return for an agreement against Sparta; secondly that an Athenian, Conon, built up a powerful fleet for the Persians and with money found by the Persians and this fleet became an arm of Athens' military reserve, and thirdly, in 390 B.C. that the superiority of professional troops was demonstrated by Iphicrates and his band of mercenaries when they wiped out a brigade (250 men) of Sparta's crack hoplite force.

Confirmation of the hypothesis that democracy was not particularly alive in the fourth century is given by material of a very different kind, Plato's famous treatise, *The Republic*. It can be conceded that one

6. Hignett, *Hist. of Ath. Constitution*, '52, pp. 86 sq. and Appendix 3; pace Hammond, *History of Greece to* 322 *B.C.* '59, pp. 160 sq.
7. *The Ancestral Constitution*, London, '52, 15.

purpose of this tract was to arouse in men concern for the affairs of their state. It is, no less than Vergil's patriotic writings, an attack upon political quietism,[8] an attack upon the 'intellectuals' who sit on the touch line and criticize. It is also to be repeated that the ordinary man of average ability is to have no part in the government of the ideal state. Thus Plato's view of his contemporary society may be described as concern at the lack of active interest in public affairs by the most capable men and a tacit assumption that government must effectively be in the hands of a minority. The latter principle underlay the fifth century Athenian democratic constitution, for, as the chief magistracies were awarded partly by lot, ten new posts were created — the generalships — to which admittance was by election alone, and which, unlike the other top civil offices, could be held by the same man for consecutive years.

Another literary source, the fragments that survive of the historian Theopompus, provides a complementary picture of fourth century Athens. The impression that one gains in reading the fragments is of a narrow-minded, well meaning gentleman who has climbed in society by dint of hard work and, like many such people, holds political views of markedly reactionary nature.[9] We may readily agree with Jaeger that he was a moralist.[10] Thus, for example, Pharax of Sparta, according to Theopompus, abandoned himself to luxury and the Thracian Chalcidians 'as it happened were overlooking the best habits, and had started on the path to heavy-drinking, idleness and a serious lack of restraint', whilst of Timolaus of Thebes he said that in a society where men had lost self-control in their daily conduct and drinking habits, no one was a greater slave to pleasure than Timolaus.[11] Then, he describes Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, as encouraging 'those who were throwing away their possessions on drink and gambling and such like intemperate behaviour', and in his account of the year 343-2 B.C., after describing the mode of life of the Athenian general Chares as given to luxury, he takes the Athenians as a people to task for their lack of proportion and moderation in the pleasures of life.[12] Theopompus' moralist purpose and his position vis-à-vis the Isocratean school of historiography may help to explain the number of comments he makes upon these lines, but the fact seems inescapable that he saw irresponsibility as a prevalent social and political evil. In addition to the abandonment to luxury, he notes cases of treachery, love of Persia — i.e. being a 'fellow-traveller' — and the foolish reprisals taken against successful men by jealous fellow countrymen.[13] One must correlate his

8. Cf. P. G. Walsh, Plato and the Philosophy of History, *History and Theory* 2, '62, pp. 3-16 with Jaeger *Demosthenes*, p. 15.
9. Cf. K. von Fritz, The Historian Theopompus, A H R 46, '41.
10. W. Jaeger: *Demosthenes* 1938, p. 76.
11. Jacoby: *Fragmente der Griech. Hist.* 11B, 115 Frags. 192; 139; 210.
12. Jacoby: *F G H ibid.* 134; 213.
13. Ibid, 111; 124; 105. On the jealousy felt towards successful men cf. Nepos *Life of Chabrias* 3.

criticisms of the leading politicians of his day with Plato's implied criticism. One notes, incidentally, that Theopompus took the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius to task, one whom Plato had tried to guide with little success.[14]

For a counter to this decay Theopompus turned first to Sparta, and, after her collapse, to Philip of Macedon, thinking that military discipline and then a 'patriarchal monarchy' might preserve the ideals of an aristocracy, or rather the class distinctions of a meritocracy. It was this preoccupation with the internal difficulties of society that apparently caused him to ignore the significance of the spread of federalism.[15] It is inevitable that we should take the Second Athenian Confederacy as an example of what federation meant to the idea of the city-state democracy. Its charter, drawn up in 377 B.C., declares that one aim is to ensure 'that the Spartans allow the Greeks to live in peace free and autonomous' — the term *autonomous* is an ominous echo of the charter of the Delian Confederacy of 478 B.C. The Charter goes on to guarantee that confederate members would not be troubled with garrisons, garrison commanders nor tribute.[16] As we have noted, 'autonomous' carried the connotation 'democratic' and popular assemblies were a feature of the federal states. How little this meant can be seen, for example, by the ironical decree of the Senate and People's Assembly of Arcesine in 357-6 B.C., honouring the *garrison commander* Androtion for the generous way in which he had paid the *garrison force's* wages when the city was in financial straits.[17] Incidentally other inscriptions show that tribute was collected, albeit under another name, and that Athens used her federal powers to secure certain trade monopolies.[18] Of more basic importance was the case that under the Second Athenian Confederacy constitution, Athens had no seat in the federal assembly, and that the federal and Athenian courts were kept as distinct entities which meant that whilst any proposal against the letter of the constitution was punishable by disfranchisement and outlawry, the federal assembly could not extradite an Athenian citizen on such a charge but could only ratify an Athenian court decision and confirm an outlawry penalty for the whole of the federal area.[19] The

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14. Plato went there at Dion's instigation. In 360 B.C. he escaped from Syracuse with his life. Note: "Plato's object was not as has been fancied, the ridiculous one of setting up in the most luxurious of Gk. cities a pinchbeck imitation of the imaginary city of the Republic. It was the practical and statesmanlike object of trying to fit the young Dionysius for the immediate duty of checking the Carthaginians . . . by making Syracuse the centre of a strong constitutional monarchy to embrace the whole body of Greek communities in the west of the island." A. E. Taylor: *Plato*, '26, p. 7.
15. Von Fritz, K.: art cit., has convincingly argued against A. Momigliano's view that Theopompus was panhellenist in outlook (*RFIC* n. s. 9, '31).
16. Tod. *Gk. Historical Inscriptions*, Vol. II, No. 123.
17. Tod. *ibid* 152, cf. No. 156.
18. Tod. No. 162, on the Athenian monopoly in the trade of ruddle from the island of Ceos.
19. Tod. No. 123; J.A.O. Larsen *Representative Government in Greek and Roman History*, 1955, pp. 58 and 63.

effect of the constitutional — if not of the judicial — stipulation was to strengthen Athens' hold over her allies. The constitution and administration of this Confederacy certainly was not destined to strengthen and promote the ideals of democracy.

The fourth century leagues and talk of Panhellenic unity to be cemented by a united invasion of Asia Minor to smash the Persian Empire, led to the Greek League (the 'Corinthian' League) founded by Philip of Macedon and taken over by Alexander the Great.[20] The freedom of democracy was signed away when the members of the Corinthian League made Philip 'general with full powers for the conduct of the war against Philip.'[21]

To return to Athenian internal matters — Theopompus, we have seen, was critical of the Athenian people as a whole for their irresponsibility, and a similar but more detailed picture appears on the surface of Demosthenes' speeches. Demosthenes, you will remember, criticized the people for their unwillingness to pay extra taxes, reluctant to serve in the army and their love of pleasure which caused them to oppose his proposals to transfer the theatre dole to military funds. These points have been adequately answered by A. H. M. Jones[22] who shows, for example, that whilst income tax was only 5 cents in the pound yet that was a constant rate irrespective of income, and there were no allowances; the people at the bottom of the income bracket thus bore proportionately the heaviest burden and were most hard-put to meet special war levies of 2s.-4s. in the pound. Demosthenes himself was in league with the moneyed group[23] and to protect the interests of the wealthy in the early days he presented their case through the mouths of unknown men of negligible means who pleaded their hardships before the people. The reluctance to serve in the army or fleet was understandable when the recompense for separation from one's farm or business was pay for a limited period to be supplemented by the proceeds of rapine. As for Demosthenes' proposal to transfer the theatre (theoric) funds into the war treasury, that was a clumsy move for whilst it would cause resentment amongst the people, the amount involved was negligible. Jones has estimated that not more than 15 talents per annum could have passed through the 'theoric' amounts,[24] but the maintenance of a siege at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, for example, cost 1,000 talents per annum.

The question arises how could Demosthenes get away with such palpable misrepresentations in the assembly and courts. The answer simply is that he was preaching to the converted. The popular assembly

20. Larsen: *op. cit.* pp. 48-9; cf. 1. Calabi: *Antecedenti della lega di Corinto*, 1953, c. 5 ad loc.
21. Oxyrrhynci Papyri ed Grenfell & Hunt 1, p. 27, Col. 3, 9. cf. A Heuss: Antigonos Monophthalmos und die griech. Städte *Hermes* 73, 1938, pp. 179 sq.
22. *Athenian Democracy*, 1960, esp. c. 2.
23. Jaeger: *op. cit.* p. 57.
24. Jones, A. H. M.: *op. cit.* p. 34.

was somewhat crippled by the presence on the statute book of a law against illegal proceedings, which meant that anyone not well-versed in the law who introduced a proposal that was unpopular with the well-to-do could be arraigned on any minor technicality and his proposal thus quashed. Politics had become a professional matter. On the other hand the courts had a preponderance of middle and upper-class citizens[25] as jurors, no doubt in part because the daily wage of 3 obols was too low to induce a family man without means to spend working hours sitting on a jury.

Perhaps this series of illustrations of the way fourth century Athenian democracy worked and the views of contemporaries on it furnishes a fair basis for a study of the meaning of democracy at Athens before the dawn of the Hellenistic era. At least it must be plain that the opinion of the man-in-the-street counted for very little.

J. E. Atkinson.

25. Implied e.g. by Demosthenes xxi, 83, 95; Jones *op. cit.* pp. 123-4.