THEMISTOCLES IN FIFTH CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

BY

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The inscription of Troizen published by M. H. Jameson 1) once more draws attention to the ancient controversy on the Persian Wars, attested in documents both literary and epigraphical: Who saved Greece from the barbarians? One of the few points of agreement between modern scholars, whose opinions differ widely, is that the inscription bears testimony to a tradition according to which Athens and Greece owed their salvation to the great statesman Themistocles, son of Neocles from the deme Phrearrhoi. This tradition was not completely ignored, it is true, by Herodotus and his Athenian friends of the forties 2). Without Thucydides, however, we should have been largely in the dark. This historian with (moderate) oligarchic views and convictions is fair to Themistocles and proves his own greatness by acknowledging the extraordinary talents, diplomatic skill and military insight of the man who started as a democratic party-leader, but who developed into the real national statesman who in his finest hour saved Athens and Hellas (I 138). Not all historians have been so fair as this impartial judge. Long before the fourth century the debate was hot and the facts were distorted. What the inscription reveals is not necessarily a product of fourth century political strife, but it reflects the bitter controversy which already originated shortly after the great conflict.


2) Ed. Meyer, Forschungen, II (1899), 196 ff. One of the latest adherents of Ed. Meyer, in this respect, is A. E. Raubitschek who deprecates the Herodotolatry of modern historians: “The nature of the Athenian tradition, which has so long been obscured by an otherwise justified admiration for Herodotus and an unjustified belief in the exclusiveness of his account” (The Covenant of Plataea, TAPA 91 (1960), 178).
It is, of course, quite a different matter whether this early date for the origin of the conflicting views on the Persian invasion and the miracle of the Greek victory, should lead to the conclusion that as to its contents the inscription of Troizen dates from the fifth century. I should like, however, to state in advance that in my belief those scholars leap to unfounded or ill-founded conclusions who, sometimes lead by arguments from silence and by false analogy \(^1\), stigmatize the inscription as a fake also in regard to its contents. If I am not mistaken, the majority of modern scholars tends to date the historical frame for the evacuation of Athens, for the fleet of Themistocles and the other historical facts enumerated in this document, to the fourth century (or later) on the strength of the fact that the inscription on the stone dates from the beginning of the third century, and the fact that embellishments of the Persian wars were a favourite pastime among fourth century demagogues and rhetoricians. In my opinion this procedure is not to be recommended. There are no cogent and convincing reasons for combining the date of the stone with that of its contents.

First of all we have to find an answer to a preliminary question. Did there exist any historiography of Athens during the fifth century (of course apart from Herodotus and Thucydides and their

\(^1\) The best critical treatment of Chr. Habicht's article, in which arguments from silence lavishly occur (Hermes 89 (1961), r ff.), is to be found in H. Berve's masterly study Zur Themistokles' Inschrift von Troizen, Sitz.-Ber. der bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.-hist. Klasse, Jahrg. 1961, Heft 3. How much false analogy influenced scholars may be illustrated by L. Robert who starts his mostly unfounded criticisms (for instance "elle (l'inscription) comporte une série d'anachronismes patents") with introducing himself as "l'éditeur de la stèle d'Acharnes" (REG 74 (1961), 167/8). The column of Acharnae has nothing to do with the stèle of Troizen. We should bear in mind the words of G. Klaffenbach, Bemerkungen zum griechischen Urkundenwesen, Sitz.-Ber. Akad. Berlin, Klasse f. Sprachen etc., 1960, no. 6, p. 34.: "Letzte und eigentliche Authentizität besitzt für uns ausschliesslich das Original... Für (die Griechen) kam es allein auf den Inhalt an, und die Form trat hinter ihm zurück. Der Wortlaut brauchte durchaus nicht in allen Einzelheiten identisch zu sein, vorausgesetzt, dass alles Wesentliche gesagt war". I agree with Robert that the Oath of Plataea is inauthentic (see my article Greeks and the Greeks, in Intern. Rev. of Social History 4 (1959), 106), but I cannot follow him on the Troizen inscription. This does not mean, however, that I would defend the historicity of all decrees which have been treated in recent studies of the Troizen text. In this respect Berve, in my opinion, goes too far.