SOLON'S
SYSTEM OF PROPERTY-CLASSES ONCE MORE

BY

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As a reasonable explanation of Plut. Sol. XXIII, 3, never had been given, Wilcken proposed to read εἰς μὲν γε τὰ τιμήματα τῶν οὐσίων λογίζεται πρόβατον καὶ δραχμὴν ἀντὶ μεδίμνου instead of the reading of the mss. εἰς μὲν γε τὰ τιμήματα τῶν θυσιῶν κτλ 1). An ingenious and subtle emendation indeed, which, as Thiel remarked, from a paleographic point of view is practically no emendation at all 2). And Thiel too thinks the text of the mss. absolutely unintelligible. But in accepting the emendation, he rejects the conclusions drawn by Wilcken himself from it. And in that he is quite right. For, according to Wilcken, the emended passage implies that Solon’s system of property-classes would not have been based exclusively on landed property, but on mobile capital (i.e. on money) as well. This theory proves to be totally false, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Thiel. The Solonian system of property-classes was based on landed property, not on money as well. The Attic world of Solon’s age was an agrarian community, with some industry and maritime commerce at the stage of very modest beginnings. So far I agree with Thiel. But after rejecting Wilcken’s theory he gives his own explanation of the emended passage, and that explanation I cannot accept. Whereas I cannot see any other suitable interpretation of the emended text, I should have to reject Wilcken’s correction, without being able to suggest a better one myself. Which would be poor work, that would not bring us much farther, if I could not give a reasonable, though hypothetical interpretation of the unaltered text of the mss. And I think I can.

1) Zu Solon’s Schatzungsklassen, Hermes, 63 (1928), 236-238.
First, what is there to be said against Thiel's theory? The first important conclusion he draws from Wilcken's emendation is, that the value of the land could not only be measured in units of medimnoi or metretai, but also in units of sheep and goats and that for this purpose a sheep was reckoned as equivalent to a medimnos. And this measure was reasonable and indispensable, says Thiel, because many landowners in Attica were not tillers of the soil, but stock-breeders, as plenty of land was even too poor to produce barley and sheep (and goats) can practically feed on anything. Sheep and goats as well as grain and oil are to be regarded as products of the soil they feed upon; so a man who owned land enough to feed 500 sheep on was classed as a pentakosiomedimnos just as the man who harvested annually 500 medimnoi of barley from his landed property. Yet there is an important difference between the two cases. The 500 medimnoi of barley are the annual income of the landowner, but the 500 sheep are his capital. Sheep were kept primarily for wool and milk, in the second place for meat. So the annual production of a flock consisted in a quantity of milk, wool and a number of lambs and old sheep. By making the possession of 500 sheep equivalent to the annual production of 500 medimnoi of barley, Solon would have made equivalent two quite different things, and moreover, he would have stimulated stock-breeding too much. That was not his aim: to encourage agriculture was what he wanted. But could not Solon have meant to consider a landowner as pentakosiomedimnos, who possessed a flock, which produced 500 fullgrown sheep every year? Then, however, he would have left out of account the most important production of the flock: the milk and the wool. So this logical sequence of Wilcken's emendation is by no means suited to Solon's system of property-classes, which is built entirely upon the criterion of the annual production. And I do not believe, that this measure to take stock-breeding into account was indispensable, as Thiel says. First, the case of a

1) Thiel's defence of Wilcken's emendation must be rejected, but his views on the economic situation of Attica, as expressed in his paper, are very useful. Moreover I am greatly indebted to him for his elucidating oral comments made to me on the subject of this paper.