

## THE DIONYSIA AND DEMOCRACY AGAIN\*

In a recent contribution to the debate on Athenian drama and democracy,<sup>1</sup> P. Wilson points out that in discussing the civic business transacted at the Dionysia I made too little of the proclamation of honours for Thrasybulus the killer of Phrynichus at the Dionysia of 410/09,<sup>2</sup> and from this he develops an argument to show that that civic business was after all distinctively democratic. In a separate article Wilson and A. Hartwig propose what I am sure is a better restoration of one passage in the decree for Thrasybulus:<sup>3</sup> instead of *καὶ [ἀνειπ]ἐν τὸν κήρυκα Διονυσίων ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι*, ‘and the herald shall proclaim at the contest at the Dionysia’, they suggest *καὶ [ἀνειπ]ἐν Διονυσίων τραγοιδῶν ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι vel sim.*, ‘and there shall be a proclamation at the contest for tragedies at the Dionysia’; and they point out that the days of the tragic performances would be the only days on which there was enough time to include civic business.

I was certainly over-hasty in my treatment of this decree: this is the earliest such proclamation of which we know, and as the killer of the oligarch Phrynichus Thrasybulus was certainly honoured in the first year of the restored democracy as a hero not simply of the *polis* but of the democratic *polis*. But what of the other instances cited by Wilson?

As Wilson remarks, though we know no precedent for Thrasybulus’ proclamation, we do know of three further instances in the next twenty years, after which there is a long gap. In the decree concerning honours for Epicerdes of Cyrene,<sup>4</sup> honours which had been awarded earlier and the further honours awarded by the decree which we have were to be proclaimed *αὐτίκα μάλα*, ‘forthwith’, at the Dionysia of 405/4; the earlier honours were for ransoming prisoners from Sicily, and the more recent were for a gift of money. Wilson comments, ‘with the threat of the destruction of the democracy looming before it’,<sup>5</sup> but that is to prejudge the issue: what was at stake at the beginning of 404 was the terms on which Sparta would accept the capitulation of Athens; we now know that one consequence of that capitulation (though probably not a direct requirement in the peace treaty<sup>6</sup>) was the overthrow of the democracy, but some of Sparta’s allies wanted Athens to be totally destroyed,<sup>7</sup> and I think that at the time Epicerdes will have been seen as helping Athens in its desperate straits, rather than as specifically supporting the democracy.

\* I thank Dr. D.M. Carter and Prof. R.G. Osborne for helpful discussion, and *CQ*’s referee for some suggestions which I have gladly adopted.

<sup>1</sup> P. Wilson, ‘Tragic honours and democracy: neglected evidence for the politics of the Athenian Dionysia’, *CQ* NS 59 (2009), 8–29.

<sup>2</sup> P.J. Rhodes, ‘Nothing to do with democracy: Athenian drama and the *polis*’, *JHS* 123 (2003), 104–19, at 111–13.

<sup>3</sup> P. Wilson and A. Hartwig, ‘*IG* i<sup>3</sup> 102 and the tradition of proclaiming honours at the tragic *agon* of the Athenian City Dionysia’, *ZPE* 169 (2009), 17–27, on lines 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> *IG* i<sup>3</sup> 125.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson (n. 1), 22.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. A. Fuks, *The Ancestral Constitution* (London, 1953), 52–62; P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981), 427.

<sup>7</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19–20.

The next instance is a Boeotian (Arist—, in 403/2, if fragments *a* and *b* of the inscription belong together and Wilhelm's restoration of *a* is to be accepted, as D.M. Lewis believed but M.B. Walbank did not), and we do not know what prompted his honours.<sup>8</sup>

Finally there is Evagoras of Salamis, for his contribution to the defeat of the Spartans by a fleet commanded by Conon for the Persian satrap Pharnabazus, in the battle of Cnidus in 394.<sup>9</sup> Wilson<sup>10</sup> follows J.L. Shear<sup>11</sup> in seeing Evagoras and Conon as 'democratic Athenians who had imitated the earlier Tyrannicides', but that seems to me to place the emphasis in the wrong place. Cnidus was in fact the victory of a Persian fleet, albeit commanded by an Athenian mercenary with the support of a Greek Cypriot dynast (*basileus* in the inscription<sup>12</sup>), over a Spartan fleet, but Conon was said to have 'liberated the Athenians' allies',<sup>13</sup> and Evagoras to have acted as 'a Greek on behalf of Greece'.<sup>14</sup> While Sparta in the 390s had claimed to be fighting against Persia on behalf of the Asiatic Greeks, Athens went to an unprecedented level of extravagance in trying to annexe Cnidus as a triumph for Athens and the freedom of the Greeks, and that, surely, is the most important aspect of these honours.

Wilson sees two other democratic items in the civic business of 410/09. On one he is undoubtedly correct: the oath to uphold the democracy prescribed in the decree of Demophantus<sup>15</sup> was to be sworn 'by all the Athenians ... by tribes and by demes', *πρὸ Διονυσίων*; and, again following Shear, he convincingly argues that the phrase does not merely set a deadline<sup>16</sup> but means 'immediately before the Dionysia'.<sup>17</sup> I think for logistical reasons Shear's oath in the agora shortly before the festival is more likely than Wilson's oath in the theatre immediately before the tragic contest, an occasion attended by others as well as by Athenian citizens: the occasion in the agora could be limited to citizens and as Shear suggests could be organized more conveniently for the oath to be sworn as prescribed.

The other is more doubtful. In 413 the collection of tribute from the member states of the Delian League had been replaced by a harbour tax.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the Athenians later reverted to collecting tribute; and, if so, it is possible that they did that in 410/09, as Wilson and Shear both assume;<sup>19</sup> but those possibilities are not certainties<sup>20</sup> – and, in any case, it was the democratic regime which had

<sup>8</sup> *IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 2, revised *SEG* xxxii 38, b. 11–14. See M.B. Walbank, 'An Athenian decree reconsidered: honours for Aristoxenos and another Boiotian', *EMC* 26 (1982), 259–74; D.M. Lewis, *op. SEG*.

<sup>9</sup> P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne (edd.), *Greek Historical Inscriptions, 404–323 B.C.* (Oxford, 2003), 11, 29 sqq.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson (n. 1), 21.

<sup>11</sup> J.L. Shear in R. Osborne (ed.), *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, 2007), 91–115, at 107–9; quotation from 108.

<sup>12</sup> Rhodes and Osborne (n. 9), 11, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Dem.* 20. *Lept.* 69.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes and Osborne (n. 9), 11, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Andoc.* 1. *Myst.* 96–8 at 98.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. D.M. MacDowell, *Andokides, On the Mysteries* (Oxford, 1962), 136 ad loc.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson (n. 1), 24–5; J.L. Shear, in A.H. Sommerstein and J. Fletcher (edd.), *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society* (Exeter, 2007), 148–60, at 153–8.

<sup>18</sup> *Thuc.* 7.28.4.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson (n. 1), 17; Shear (n. 17), 156.

<sup>20</sup> R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 438–9, considered them probable; and they were accepted by A. Andrewes, *CAH* v<sup>2</sup> (1992), 458, 485. However, H.B. Mattingly, *Ancient*

discontinued the collection of tribute, so a later decision to revert to collecting tribute would not be a distinctively democratic act.

Finally Wilson cites Aristophanes, *Birds* 1074–5, as evidence for the practice, already before 411, of reading out an offer of rewards to anybody who had killed one of the tyrants.<sup>21</sup> He assumes, surely rightly, that the practice ‘had long been in place’; N. Dunbar does not directly discuss how long, but comments that Aristophanes ‘is mocking the absurdity of still proclaiming a price on the heads of the Peisistratidai as if they could still be killed or captured’.<sup>22</sup> Athens was not subsequently threatened with tyranny, at any rate after Hippias’ presence with the Persians in 490, and I imagine that, although this practice was retained at any rate until the late fifth century, it was instituted not long after the overthrow of the Pisistratid tyranny, and therefore (it may be argued<sup>23</sup>) before the concept of democracy in contrast to oligarchy, as opposed to constitutional government in contrast to tyranny, had yet emerged. In the democracy of the late fifth century it was possible to refer to tyranny or to oligarchy as the alternative to the current dispensation, and before 411 tyranny seems more often to have been mentioned;<sup>24</sup> but, while the bogey of tyranny could still be conjured up by the democracy, reciting an ancient proclamation about killing the tyrants would not be distinctively democratic, as democracy was understood in the late fifth century.

Now, of course, nobody would deny that for most of its history from at any rate the time of Ephialtes onwards Athens was democratic: honours awarded by the *polis* of Athens were honours voted by a democratic assembly; the empire had been built up by a democratic Athens which felt no qualms about exercising its power over non-Athenians. The civic business of Athens was the civic business of democratic Athens, and in that weak sense the civic business incorporated in the Dionysia undoubtedly and inevitably was democratic. What has been debated recently, however, is whether the civic business was democratic in a stronger sense, whether advertising the achievements of Athens and the services of the men whom Athens honoured, on an occasion when large numbers of citizens and also significant numbers of non-citizens, resident and non-resident, were present, was seen not just as glorifying an Athens which as everybody knew was democratic but as more specifically and consciously glorifying the fact that Athens was democratic.<sup>25</sup>

*Society and Institutions ... V. Ehrenberg* (Oxford, 1966), 193–223, at 199–200, and ‘Two notes on Athenian financial documents’, *BSA* 62 (1967), 13–17, at 13–14 = his *The Athenian Empire Restored* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 158–9 and 205–8, has suggested that the assessment list tentatively assigned to 410, *IG* i<sup>3</sup> 100, should be assigned to 418; and L. Kallet, *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001), 222–5, judges that the reimposition of tribute in 410/09 is possible, but ‘none of the evidence compels’.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson (n. 1), 26.

<sup>22</sup> N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford, 1995), 583–4 ad loc.

<sup>23</sup> Arguments for and against may conveniently be found in K.A. Raafaub et al., *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Thuc. 6.60.1; 27.3 cf. 28.2 uses ἐπὶ ξυνομοσίᾳ ... δήμου καταλύσεως (‘conspiracy ... for the overthrow of the *demos*’); Aristophanes sometimes uses ‘conspiracy’ (e.g. *Vesp.* 345, 953) and sometimes ‘tyranny’ (e.g. *Vesp.* 417, 464, 487, 495, 498) – and the two together at *Vesp.* 488, 507.

<sup>25</sup> I do not agree with everything that is maintained in L.J. Samons II, *What’s Wrong with Democracy? From Athenian Practice to American Worship* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2004), but I do agree with his claim on pp. 92–5 that their democracy was only one source of the classical Athenians’ pride in their superiority.

In that light, it seems to me, Wilson is right about 410/09, but that was a special occasion and he is not right to extrapolate from that to the Dionysia in general. The Dionysia of that year was the first Dionysia held since the democracy had been restored after the regimes of the Four Hundred and the Five Thousand, and the swearing of the oath immediately before the festival and the unprecedented proclamation of the honours for Thrasybulus at the festival will have made that occasion specifically and consciously democratic. But I see no evidence that the Dionysia was specifically and consciously democratic in other years, and I think the general view which I advanced earlier and which Wilson challenges can stand.

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