

III. The Date of Theophrastus' *Characters*

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For over sixty years now scholars have been assigning to Theophrastus' *Characters* the date 319 B.C. That date was settled upon by C. Cichorius in the edition prepared jointly by the members of the Philologische Gesellschaft zu Leipzig (*Theophrasts Charaktere* [Leipzig 1897] lvii-lxii), and has generally been accepted since. J. E. Sandys in his revision of R. C. Jebb's *The Characters of Theophrastus* (London 1909) 4 ff. followed Cichorius, as did G. Pasquali in *Gnomon* 2 (1926) 83, W. von Christ in *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* 2¹ (Munich 1920) 64, J. M. Edmonds in the Loeb edition (London & New York 1953) 10, and most recently W. Schmid in connection with his discussion of Menander's *Dyskolos* (*RhMus* 102 [1959] 172). To say, however, that the "aureolus libellus" (as Casaubon called the work) was written in 319 is misleading, because such a statement made without qualification invites the inference that the thirty sketches of which the work is composed were all written in the same year. O. Navarre avoided this difficulty. In a separately printed commentary to his edition of the work he accepted the date 319 but added, "sinon en cette année-la . . . du moins dans les années avoisinantes" (*Caractères de Théophraste* [Paris 1924] xiii). Similarly O. Regenbogen in his article, "Theophrastos" (*RE* Suppl. 7 [1940] 1510-11) regards Cichorius' date as no more than a possible *terminus post quem* for the composition of those sketches in which the relevant evidence is found. The results of the present investigation agree generally with the views of Navarre and Regenbogen, but more specifically it is proposed here that Theophrastus began writing his character sketches some time before 322/1 and did not finish with them until 317 or after.

Cichorius reasoned that only in 319 could the Boastful Man boast credibly that he had received three invitations by letter from Antipater to come and visit in Macedon (23.4),¹ and only in 319

¹ Citations in arabic numbers not otherwise qualified will refer in this paper to the text of the *Characters* edited by H. Diels (Oxford 1909).

could the Newsmaker circulate the story of Cassander's capture by the forces of Polyperchon and the king, viz. Philip Arrhidaeus (8.6–10). He could find no hint of a later date in the work and so fixed 319 as the year in which the book was written. To this subsequently canonical date one objection was raised. F. Rühl remonstrated that Athens in 319 was no democracy, yet in several sketches unmistakable allusions to a democratic *mise-en-scène* occur. The Evil-Speaker calls his malicious gossip *παρρησίαν καὶ δημοκρατίαν καὶ ἐλευθερίαν* (28.6), and both the conduct of the Patron of Rascals (29) and the complaints of the Oligarch (26) would be impossible under Phocion's regime (*RhMus* 53 [1898] 324–27). Rühl's remonstrance, however, has since been largely disregarded.²

The point that Rühl brought up, i.e. that there are clear references to a democratic regime in some of the sketches, can be developed. Along with the *ekklēsia*, the *dikastēria* formed at Athens the very foundation of democratic government, and the oligarchs emptied them. The property qualification for citizenship that disfranchised over half the citizen body would suffice by itself to neutralize the power of the courts, for the democratic Athenian dicastic system depended above all on an abundance of eligible dicasts, all of whom had to be citizens in good standing. Thus in the *Suda Lexicon*, s.v. "Demades," we find this statement: *οὗτος κατέλυσε τὰ δικαστήρια καὶ τοὺς ῥητορικοὺς ἀγῶνας*.³

It is consequently surprising to find in a work that is supposed to have been written in Athens in 319 abundant evidence of regular dicastic activity. The Unseasonable Man is described as one who approaches an acquaintance just made liable for another's debts in a *dikē engyēs* and asks him to be surety for himself (12.4), and who, when he is to give evidence at a trial, does not arrive until the case has been decided (12.5). The Reckless Man is ready to be defendant or prosecutor in a lawsuit. Sometimes he excuses himself on oath, sometimes he comes into court with the *echinus* in the bosom of his cloak, and sometimes with stacks of notebooks in his hands (6.8). The Loquacious Man's constant chattering hinders the deliberations of his fellow dicasts (7.9), and

² See e.g. J. M. Edmonds, *CQ* 4(1910) 139; W. von Christ, *op. cit.* 64, note 7; O. Regenbogen, *loc. cit.* Edmonds notes the article as one Sandys missed in his bibliography.

³ See W. S. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens* (London 1911) 22.

similar allusions to dicastic business as usual, anachronistic in the years 322/1–319/8, occur in the sketches of the Oligarch and the Patron of Rascals.⁴

Theophrastus would scarcely have written these sketches during the brief months of the democratic restoration, when he was prosecuted by Hagnonides of Pergase for impiety. The natural and easy allusions to the *dikastéria* are those that a man would make who accepted them as an unchanging and pervasive part of life in the city, and Theophrastus could not have regarded them so during the three years following 322/1. Evidence for the scope and functions of the Athenian *dikastéria* after 317 is meagre, and it cannot be proved that Theophrastus' references to dicastic activity do not stem out of the years following 317. Still, it can be said that the *dikastéria* never again were the force in Athenian life they had been before 322/1,⁵ and it seems reasonable, in view of the citations discussed by Rühl, to think of Theophrastus as having drawn material from incidents in the law courts before rather than after 322/1. That year then would mark the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of sketches 6, 7, 12, 26, 29, and perhaps others.

In proposing 317 as a *terminus post quem* for the composition of at least one sketch, I have accepted the conclusion of K. J. Beloch (*GG*² 4.2 436 ff.) that the year in which Cassander met Polyperchon in battle was 317, and not 319 as Cichorius had thought. The sketch of the Newsmaker (8) consequently was written no earlier than 317, and the thirty sketches that make up the *Characters* were written over a period of at least five years. That so prolific an author spent five years or more composing so slim a book argues that he only worked at it sporadically and tends to substantiate T. Gomperz' characterization of the work as "eine Schrift hypomnematischen Charakters, eine Materialiensammlung" (*SBWien* 117 [1888] Abh. 10, 10).

More recently M. Brožek has expressed the belief that Theophrastus "singulis in schedis multos per annos singulos sibi conscripsisse *Characteras* atque ita argumenta eorum nonnumquam

⁴ Sketches 26 and 29 have been identified, without particular reference to the law courts, as products of a democratic era. See Rühl, *op. cit.*, and J. Ilberg in the *Philologische Gesellschaft* edition, 219.

⁵ See W. S. Ferguson, *HA*, 43–46; H. Hommel, "Hêliaia" in *Philologus*, Supplbd. 19, Heft 2, 134 f.

novis novisque auxisse notis.”⁶ In connection with Brožek’s observation a possible anachronism within the context of a single sketch may be noted. The Oligarch clearly lives in a city whose affairs are determined by the *dēmos*. He complains of being mistreated in the courts and he complains of the low types who sit next to him in the *ekklēsia*. But the first instance given of his humor involves what appears to be an oligarchic measure. “The oligarch is the sort of man who, when the people are deliberating whom to elect joint directors of the procession, comes forth and proposes that the directors have plenary powers” (26.2). The procession should be that of the Greater Dionysia,⁷ and the fact that the people are deliberating whom to elect (*prosairēsontai*) joint directors invites comment. Meidias, around the middle of the fourth century, was trying to get himself elected *epimelētēs* (Dem. 21.15), but by ca. 326/5, the date of the Aristotelian *Athēnaion politeia*, the directors of the procession were being selected by lot and had been for an undetermined length of time (*Ath. pol.* 56.4). The method of selecting these *epimelētai*, we must infer, was changed again at some time between ca. 326/5, when the *Ath. pol.* was written, and the years during which the *Characters* were being written, for the joint directors were once again being elected to their posts. Whether the election of these officials in 282/1 (*IG* II² 668, *SIG*³ 388) represents a resumption or a continuation of the practice alluded to by Theophrastus is not known.

A change from sortition to election did not occur casually at Athens, and the event that probably caused this particular change was the accession of the oligarchs, who discontinued the practice of allotting citizens to magistracies during the years 322/1–319/8 (W. S. Ferguson, *HA* 22 f.). The selection by lot of the joint directors of the procession was doubtless one of the abolished sortitions.⁸ Theophrastus, student of Aristotle and author of the

⁶ M. Brožek, “De Theophrasti *Characterum* veritate ac fide observatiuncula,” *Charisteria Thaddaeo Sinko* (Warsaw 1951) 70.

⁷ See the commentaries of Sandys and Navarre *ad loc.*, but G. Busolt-H. Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde* 1066, do not note the citation from Theophrastus, nor does U. Kahrstedt, *Untersuchungen zur Magistratur in Athen* (Stuttgart 1936) 30, 50 f. (to be read with W. S. Ferguson’s review in *AJP* 59 [1938] 237).

⁸ The fact that the people are deliberating (*dēmou bouleuomenou*) at 26.2 reveals nothing about the form of government in Athens at the time the sentence was written. Absence of reference to the *dēmos* in a decree may mean oligarchy (M. N. Tod

Peri nomôn, would not have confused the processes of election and sortition. He may, however, have started writing notes toward his sketch of the oligarch in a democratic Athens. Later he added the illustrative line that carried with it a reference to the immediately contemporary practice of electing the joint directors of the procession.

SGHI 1^a.202), but reference to the *dêmos* does not necessarily mean democracy. *IG* II^a.380 from the year 320/19 has in line 6 *ed[ox]en tói [d]êmôi*; similarly *IG* II^a.381 from the same year.