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978-0-521-03412-8 - An Historical Commentary on the 'Hellenica Oxyrhynchia'

I. A. F. Bruce

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE POPYRI

Two separate papyrus discoveries made at Oxyrhynchus form the portions which we possess of the work of a Greek historian whose identity has not been established and whose history is consequently known as the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*.

The larger of the two papyri was discovered in 1906 and was first published in 1908 by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt as P.Oxy. 842 in volume v of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. It is now housed in the British Museum as papyrus 1843 in the Department of Manuscripts. It originally consisted of about 230 fragments of varying size which were pieced together by the first editors so as to leave only some 57 small fragments unplaced. The papyrus contains some sections of the history dealing in considerable detail with events of the Greek world in 396–395 B.C. The historical work is written on the verso of an official document, a land-survey register of the Arsinoite nome (P.Oxy. 918), which, apart from its own interest, was of great help to the editors in determining the position of the detached fragments of the history. Twenty-one columns of the *Hellenica* can be distinguished. These are not continuous, but are divided into four distinct sections, called by the editors A, B, C, and D. Section A contains columns i–iv and fragments 1 and 2; B contains columns v–viii with fragments 3–7; C, which is very badly mutilated, consists of columns ix and x, and fragments 8–15 were also attributed to this section. D contains the best preserved columns, xi–xxi, which are continuous. Within A, columns i–ii and iii–iv are continuous, and both internal evidence and the text of the land-survey show that column iii follows column ii. Within B, columns v–vi and the beginnings of lines in column vii are on the same piece of papyrus; column viii (all of which is contained in fragment 7) is known to follow column vii both from consideration of its content and since certain white stains on the recto of column vii are also present on the recto of column viii. Between each of the sections A, B, C, and D a number of columns may be lost. The manuscript is the work of two scribes, the first being responsible for columns i–iv, vi, line 27–

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xxi, and all but one or two of the unplaced fragments. The columns measure about 16.7×9 cm., but the number of lines in a column varies from 37 (col. i) to 45 (col. vii) in the first hand, while column v, the only one written entirely in the second hand, which is smaller than the first, contains 60 lines. As regards the date of the manuscript, the land-survey is placed by the handwriting in the second century A.D., but, from internal evidence, before the principate of Commodus. The text of the *Hellenica* is dated to the end of the second century or the early part of the third, the scribe responsible for by far the greater part of it employing a small, sloping uncial which the first editors considered to represent 'a transitional stage between the earlier specimens of this style of the late first or early second century, and the ordinary third century type' (ed.pr. p. 111).

The other papyrus, found at Oxyrhynchus in 1934, was first published by V. Bartoletti as P.S.I. 1304 in *Papiri greci e latini*, vol. XIII (1949),¹ and is kept in Florence in the library of the Istituto Papirologico 'G. Vitelli' della Università di Firenze. The script is on the recto of the papyrus, the verso being unused. There are three quite large fragments, labelled by Bartoletti A (13.7×15.5 cm.), B (10.7×21 cm.), and C (14.5×10.5 cm.), which contain parts of six columns. A smaller fragment, D (2.4×3.2 cm.), is badly mutilated, and a further fragment (2×4.8 cm.), labelled E in the editio princeps, has been seen to belong to the first eleven lines of the second column of A. The columns are 9 cm. in width, and have about 30 letters to a line; the height is not certain as the initial lines of all the columns are missing, but in column ii of B there are as many as 40 lines. The handwriting, a clear uncial, is thought by Bartoletti to belong to the end of the second century A.D. That the text of this papyrus is the work of the author of the London papyrus appears certain. Not only does the Florence papyrus reveal many characteristics already observed in the London papyrus—a lucid, but colourless and unrhetoical style (apart from a general avoidance of hiatus), restricted vocabulary and repetition of favourite words or expressions, wealth of detail in the narrative and absence of subjective comment—but, as is true of the London papyrus for the years 396/5 B.C., the new fragments appear without doubt to have been the main source, entirely independent of Xenophon, used by

¹ On the circumstances of this considerable delay between the discovery and the publication of the papyrus see Bartoletti, ed.pr. p. 61 n. 2, and p. 71.

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Ephorus and, through him, by Diodorus, for the years to which the fragments refer, 410–407 B.C. The content of the Florence papyrus thus helps to substantiate the view of Grenfell and Hunt (ed.pr. p. 122) that the Oxyrhynchus historian intended his work to be a continuation of Thucydides' history, and that his narrative therefore began with the events of 411 B.C.

II. THE 'HELLENICA'

1. *The scope of the history and its date of composition*

If one cannot state with absolute certainty the points at which the narrative of the *Hellenica* began and terminated, one can, at least, make a very reasonable conjecture about the scope of the work from the available evidence. In the London papyrus, at II, 4, the author refers back to his earlier mention of a sea-battle near Amphipolis in which Timolaus, the Corinthian, defeated an Athenian general whose name appears to have been Simichus. The most likely date for this episode is the latter part of 411 B.C., in other words, shortly after the point at which Thucydides' history comes to an end.¹ It seems to have been P's practice, when making a passing reference to a subject he had previously dealt with, to indicate that he had done so by the use of such a phrase as ὡσπερ εἶρηκά που καὶ πρότερον (cf. Lond.pap. II, 2, 4, 5; XII, 1), yet at XII, 4–5, while recalling certain consequences of the Spartan occupation of Decelea, he gives no such notice of a former treatment of these matters, and it has been sensibly suggested² that the narrative to which P's note here is supplementary is not his own, but that of Thucydides. This is not, of course, conclusive proof that P had not given an account of the beginning of the Deceleian War himself, for at XIV, 2, in a note on the inadequacy of Persian financial support to the Spartan fleet at that period, P omits to cite a passage which must surely have been contained in his earlier narrative. A more convincing hint, however, appears in the Florence papyrus, in chapter II of which P actually cites Thucydides, in the course of a digression on the activity of the Spartan, Pedaritus, at Chios in 412 B.C. (cf. Thuc. VIII, 28 ff.). One may thus infer, it seems, that P's own narrative began after 412, and

¹ Cf. ed.pr. p. 206 n. ii, 21–32.

² Cf. Hardy, *CP* XXI (1926), 355 and Bloch, *HSCP*, supp. vol. I (1940), p. 326.

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since it included the exploits of Timolaus at Amphipolis (noted above) and the extant account of the battle of 'The Horns' near Megara in 410 or 409 (Flor.pap. 1) there are good grounds for the assumption that the work was undertaken as a continuation to the history of Thucydides.

The surviving portions of the work seem to indicate that it was written more on the scale of Thucydides' history than of, say, Xenophon's *Hellenica*, and the inference may perhaps be made that it did not cover many more years than Thucydides' work. Of course, it *could* have done, but the detail in which all the extant parts of the narrative and digressions are rich makes this rather improbable; otherwise the work would have been very much longer than either Thucydides' or Xenophon's histories. Two dates which might be suitable closing points for P's work suggest themselves: 394, the year of the battle of Cnidus (with which Theopompus concluded his *Hellenica*), and 386, the Peace of Antalcidas. Of these the latter appears the more probable, for the history of Diodorus, whose main source for the events covered by both the Florence and London papyri was without question the Oxyrhynchus historian, albeit with Ephorus as intermediary, has been demonstrated¹ to rest on such a source for the whole period 411–386, and the assumption may fairly be made that that source for the whole period, entirely independent of the tradition preserved by Xenophon, was the work of P.

The date of composition can be fixed within certain limits from internal evidence. In introducing an excursus on the constitution of Boeotia by the words εἶχεν δὲ τὰ πράγματα τότε κατὰ τὴν Βοιωτίαν οὕτως (Lond.pap. XI, 2), the historian seems to indicate that he was writing later than the dissolution of that constitution in 386. As for the *terminus ad quem*, the passage relating to the disputed territory between Phocis and Locris (Lond.pap. XIII, 3), εἶσσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν τούτοις ἀμφισβητήσιμος χώρα περὶ τὸν Παρνασσόν, suggests that the author was ignorant of the Sacred War, and was therefore writing before its outbreak in 356.² At any

¹ Cf. Accame, *Ricerche intorno alla guerra corinziā*, ch. 1 (also in *Rend. Accad. Lincei* XIV (1938), 433f. and *Riv.Fil.* XXVIII (1950), 30ff.). Grenfell and Hunt (ed.pr. p. 122), however, considered there was no evidence that the work went further than the battle of Cnidus. This would, of course, be an attractive possibility for those who wished to attribute the work to Theopompus.

² Cf. Walker, *Klio* VIII (1908), 361.

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rate it is safe to conclude with the first editors (ed.pr. p. 122) that the composition preceded the conclusion of the Sacred War in 346. A further passage (Lond.pap. XIV, 2), although not of great importance in view of the satisfactory nature of the above argument, reveals that the work was composed before the collapse of the Persian Empire. The remarkable detail of P's narrative makes it highly unlikely that any great lapse of time occurred between the events he describes and his time of writing, and many of his informants would seem to have been eyewitnesses. With this in mind I have suggested¹ a date as early as 374 for the composition of the work, or part of it, but this cannot be claimed as more than speculative, for my argument was based on a conjecture about the constitution of the renewed Boeotian League which cannot be proved correct.

2. *P's sources*

In the extant fragments, P makes mention of only one literary source, Thucydides, and that in connection with the Spartan, Pedaritus, whose death occurred earlier than the date at which I have assumed that P's narrative began. It is quite possible, further, that XII, 5 of the London papyrus reveals knowledge of the parts of Thucydides' work relating to the Archidamian invasions of Attica and those of the Decelean War period.

Supposing P's starting point to have been that at which Thucydides' history ended, did P make use of any literary sources for the period covered by his main narrative? He notes at II, 2 of the London papyrus that certain men (τινές) believed the receipt of Persian gold brought by Timocrates to have been the cause of hostility to Sparta on the part of Epicrates and Cephalus at Athens and the party of Ismenias at Thebes. It is perhaps likely, although not certain, that the persons to whom P refers were writers, but his critical view of their judgement implies only acquaintance with, and not dependence upon, their works.

Indeed, the only literary authorities known to us whom P could have used are those with whom he has been identified from time to time, Cratippus and Daimachus (for P is clearly independent of Xenophon and possibly completed his work before the publication of Xenophon's *Hellenica*,² and certainly did so earlier than the

¹ In *Emerita* xxviii (1960), 86.

² Cf. Grenfell and Hunt, ed.pr. pp. 124-5.

appearance of Theopompus' *Hellenica*), and of these Daimachus cannot be said with certainty to have covered the same period as P.

The nature of P's history, as it appears to me, does not, in fact, suggest much use of literary sources, but rather gives the impression that his choice of source material has much in common with that professed by Thucydides.¹ Nor would it be surprising to find that P had modelled his work on that of Thucydides in this respect, for it is clear that he did so in the matter of chronological organization of the history.

Of the narrative passages, the account of the mutiny of Conon's troops at Caunus (Lond.pap. xv) above all has every indication of having been communicated to P by an eyewitness. The details that Conon, while on his way with the leader of the mutineers to address the Cypriot soldiers, happened to pass through the city gate first, and that the Carpasian happened to be just in the gateway when he was seized by some of the Messenians, are of no special relevance, but are exactly the sort of minutiae which an eyewitness might remember and relate.

P's intimate knowledge of the preparations for the *coup d'état* at Rhodes and its execution by the adherents of Dorimachus suggests that his informant had been in Rhodes at the time and had perhaps actually been in the agora when Dorimachus stood on the pedestal from which the herald was accustomed to make his pronouncements and exhorted his band of assassins with the words ἴωμεν, ὦ ἄνδρες πολῖται, ἐπὶ τοὺς τυράννους τὴν ταχίστην (x, 2). We have not, of course, sufficient evidence to say whether P made use of speeches or not, but this, the only direct speech in the extant fragments, is not at all a speech of the Thucydidean type and must have been inserted either for dramatic effect (which would seem not to accord well with P's general avoidance of sensational writing) or as words reported by someone who had actually heard them.

In general, the passages relating to the naval operations of Conon have appeared to commentators to be based on the

¹ Thuc. 1, 22. 2–3: τὰ δ' ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἠξίωσα γράφειν, οὐδ' ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβεῖα περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπέξελλθῶν. ἐπιπόνως δὲ ἠύρισκετο, διότι οἱ παρόντες τοῖς ἔργοις ἐκάστοις οὐ ταῦτά περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔλεγον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκατέρων τις εὐνοίας ἢ μνήμης ἔχοι.

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accounts of eyewitnesses or on the personal, or official, diaries of participants.¹

On the subject of Agesilaus' campaigns in Asia Minor, P must be credited with having troubled to obtain and record much more detailed information on the movements of the Spartan army than did Xenophon, despite the latter's presence in Asia at the time, a good part of it being spent in the Spartan camp. Some pertinent comments on P's probable sources here have been made by Ch. Dugas (*BCH* xxxiv (1910), 92), and these I quote:

'Quant au récit de P, il est difficile, vu sa précision, de ne pas chercher la source dans les notes d'un témoin oculaire. Or, ce qui étonne un peu chez P, c'est, à côté de sa diligence lorsqu'il décrit des mouvements de troupes, sa brièveté lorsqu'il s'agit de négociations; il semble que l'auteur utilisé par lui ait suivi la campagne de très près, mais n'ait pris ni part ni intérêt aux délibérations des chefs et aux pourparlers avec les alliés. L'hypothèse que P se serait servi d'un journal de route tenu par un officier rendrait compte à la fois de cette exactitude et de ces lacunes.'

It appears from the short surviving fragments of the Florence papyrus which also deal with military affairs (chs. I and v) that P was no less careful there to obtain the most accurate information available, no doubt from a similar source.

It is not so easy, however, to attribute the story of the execution of Tissaphernes (Lond.pap. viii) to such a source; here it is possible that P made use of some other literary work; but it is also probably true that the news of this event and the way in which it was planned would have spread widely in Asia Minor by word of mouth, for it is that sort of news about a notable figure which often arouses public interest. Wherever P got his information, he obviously made sure that he obtained as much detail as was possible, to judge by the length and the intelligible fragments of his account.

P's description of the battle of Notium (Flor.pap. iv) strongly suggests the use of an Athenian source. This, in itself, might go far to explain his differences here from Xenophon on points of detail, for Xenophon's source was most probably Spartan. De Sanctis (*Riv.Fil.* ix (1931), 229) even suggested that P's account (not then

¹ Cf. Judeich, *Rhein.Mus.* LXVI (1911), 98 n. 1; Walker, in Powell-Barber, *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature* (1921), p. 126; Jacoby, *F.Gr.Hist.* II C, 18; Gigante, p. xxxiv.

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discovered, but preserved in part through Diodorus) derived from official reports sent to the Athenian boule by the generals. If not, it assuredly bears every sign of having been based on some report, more probably written at the time than given orally later, from a participant in the battle.

In writing on political history P appears to have been no less diligent in his choice of well informed sources. Although his summary of the Boeotian Constitution could perhaps have been obtained from some documentary source, the passages which discuss the rivalries and policies of the leading factions in both Athens and Thebes can only have derived from information provided by someone who had been in these cities at the time and had taken a keen interest in politics. The bias which appears against the anti-Spartan group in Thebes and the extremist anti-Spartan democrats at Athens could thus be attributed either to P himself or to the political sentiments of his informant, or to both. It is quite possible, of course, that in the case of one of these cities P might himself have been the eyewitness observer of the political scene, at Athens, for instance, if he were in fact Cratippus.

To sum up, this brief discussion of likely sources for particular sections of the history may indicate the probability that P learned much from Thucydides in his choice of source material.

3. *Chronology*

There does not seem to be any doubt (from Lond.pap. IV, 1) that P modelled his chronological system on that of Thucydides, by which events γέγραπται . . . ἐξῆς ὡς ἕκαστα ἐγένετο κατὰ θέρος καὶ χειμῶνα.¹ However, just how closely P followed Thucydides in choosing the point in the year at which his 'summers' and 'winters' began is open to dispute. A number of notable scholars, among them Meyer, Jacoby, Bloch and Bartoletti, have argued forcibly that P, like Thucydides, reckoned his 'summers' as beginning in the spring. Despite the attractiveness of this view and the weight which must be attached to the arguments in its favour, I personally incline to the view of Grenfell and Hunt that the summer from which P reckoned the beginning of the eighth year (after some such event as the restoration of the Athenian democracy)

¹ Thuc. II, 1.

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refers to midsummer; in this the first editors have been supported by De Sanctis, Gigante and Barbieri. The whole question is discussed in some detail in my commentary on chapter IV of the London papyrus.

In order to synchronize the events of different areas of the Greek world P made use of the customary Thucydidean formulae, of which I list a few examples:

(i) ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ[ς αὐτοῦς χρόνο]υς (Lond.pap. I, 1); cf. Thuc. II, 95. I *et passim*.

(ii) κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐ]τὸν χρόνον (Lond.pap. IV, 2); cf. Thuc. IV, 7; 46. I *et passim*.

(iii) τούτου τοῦ θέρους (Lond.pap. XI, 1); cf. the similar use of τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ θέρους in Thuc. II, 80; IV, 42. I *et passim*.

We may further note that P employs the simple form of transition from one scene to another which is well known from Thucydides; cf. Βοιωτοὶ μὲν ο[ῦ]ν τοσαῦτα κακὰ ποιήσαντες [τ]οὺς Φωκέ[α]ς ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἑαυτῶν. Κόνων δέ, . . . (Lond.pap. XIII, 5–XIV, 1) and, e.g., Thuc. I, 93. 8–94. 1: Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἐτειχίσθησαν . . . Πανσανίας δὲ ὁ Κλεομβρότου . . .

P's chronological method is therefore open to all the criticisms which have been directed against Thucydides' method, but whatever the failings of this system the serious historian is likely to feel that they are outweighed by the general reliability of the method in providing secure dates which are seldom matched by ancient writers.

4. P's bias and judgement

P is not much given to offering personal comment, and such bias as appears is found only in the point of view from which he narrates various episodes of political history. Here it is not by any means clear whether the bias which emerges is that of the historian himself or of his informants, but as a fairly consistent pattern seems perceptible there is good reason to suppose that some part of the bias represents P's own standpoint.

The terminology which he uses of the Athenian party opposed to the provocative acts of the extreme democrats in sending assistance to the enemies of Sparta (γνώριμοι καὶ χαρίεντες, οἱ ἐπικεῖς καὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἔχοντες, Lond.pap. I, 2–3), and the motives of personal greed and ambition which he attributes to Epicrates and Cephalus

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who led the group anxious, or at least willing, to engage the city in a war against Sparta (Lond.pap. II, 2), indicate a bias against the popular faction. Further, the impression he gives that the anti-Spartan leaders in Thebes were the sole instigators of the Corinthian War (Lond.pap. XI, 1; XIII), and that the outbreak of the war was engineered by means of a clever stratagem, suggests a fair degree of sympathy with Sparta. Although it is quite possible that P's informants represented the oligarchic viewpoint in the case of Athens and the pro-Spartan attitude in the case of Thebes, one may well ask why P chose to obtain his information from such sources, or to reproduce their views in preference to those of their political opponents if he troubled to learn the opinions of both sides, unless his own sympathies coincided with those he has reproduced. It is, of course, well-nigh impossible to write a history without some bias, be it conscious or unconscious, and to make such observations as I have is far from alleging that P's history is written with a strong bias. On the contrary, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the general fairness of P. Those who suffer most at his hand are Ismenias and his Theban colleagues, yet the historian takes the trouble to absolve them from the charge which their contemporaries made against them, that of atticizing. Again, P appears to have admired at the same time Agesilaus and Conon, despite the latter's leadership of the Great King's navy against the Spartans. Indeed he seems to admire Conon more than Agesilaus, and thus reveals independence from the bias in favour of Sparta which other parts of his work indicate.

The historian's judgement can be assessed in two respects. The first concerns the relative importance which he attaches to the various branches of the history of his period, and on this point he is at great divergence from Xenophon. For P, political history (most notably in the extant fragments concerning Boeotia), military history (the campaigns of Agesilaus, the battle of 'The Horns', the episode in Flor.pap. v) and naval warfare (the battle of Notium, Conon's operations at Rhodes and Caunus) all appear to have been of equal significance, and have consequently been described in equal detail. In particular, in the London papyrus, P seems to have realized that the naval war was as important as, if not more important, for the ultimate conclusion of the struggle against the Spartan supremacy, than the land warfare in Asia. In this his judgement was