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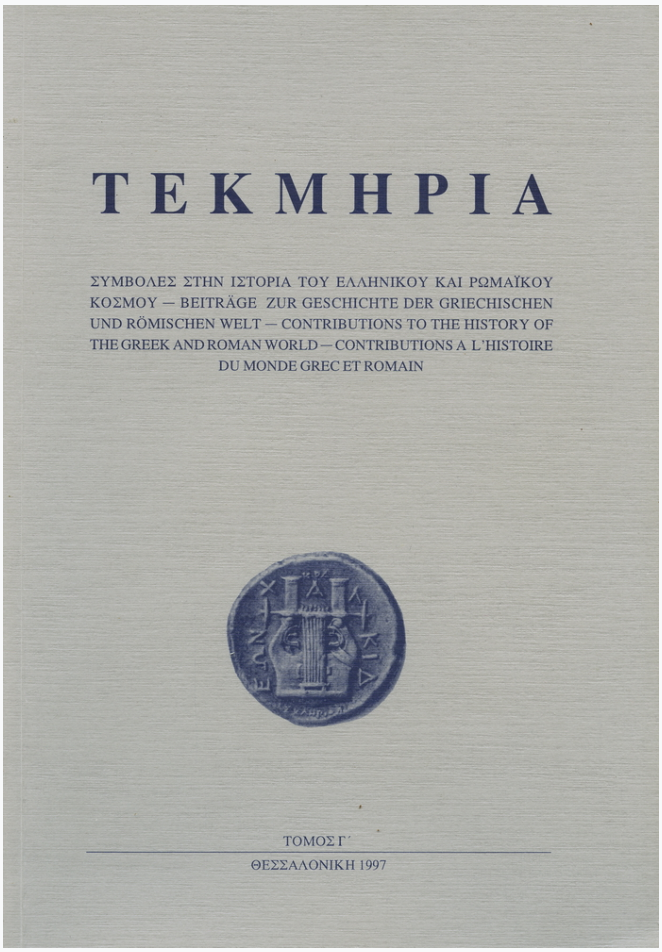

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THEOPHANES AND MYTILENE'S FREEDOM RECONSIDERED: A POSTSCRIPT

In a recent article ("Pompey ad Parthos?", *Klio* 78 (1996) 380-99) T. P. Hillman challenged the credibility of the most crucial fact on which historians have hitherto based their conviction that Theophanes exerted an enormous influence on his patron, Pompeius Magnus. This is the passage in Plutarch attesting that Theophanes intervened in Pompey's decision about where he should reside after the Battle of Pharsala and persuaded him not to go to the land of the Parthians. The direct consequence of this change of mind was Pompey's eventual, fatal, decision to seek refuge in Egypt. Hillman strikes a blow at the accuracy of Plutarch's account (as also of other sources), accusing the historian of exaggerating the role of Pompey's loyal advisers in his desire to extol his dedication to the ideal of friendship (φιλία). At the same time, Hillman sums up the image of Theophanes presented in Plutarch (*Pomp.* 37, 4; 49, 13–14) in the harsh word "scoundrel" (pp. 384, 385).

As a matter of fact, Theophanes and his influence were first assessed as long ago as 1739, in the Abbé Sévin's ground-breaking "Recherches sur la vie et sur les ouvrages de Théophane", *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres* 14 (1743) 143ff. Sévin discerningly examined the sources and rejected Strabo's favourable account (11, 2, 2) as exaggerated and tendentious, citing Plutarch (p. 144: "la manière peu avantageuse dont en parle Plutarque, les [*sc.* les éloges que donne Strabon] rend très justement suspects") and, more specifically, Theophanes' κακοήθευμα against Rutilius Rufus and the part he played in the Ptolemy Auletes affair (p. 144: "deux endroits qui chargent terriblement la mémoire de notre Mytilénien"; p. 146: "voilà, si je ne me trompe, Théophane pleinement convaincu de mensonge et de calomnie"; cf. p. 152). Sévin also underlined the strong disapproval that lay behind Cicero's designation of the Mitylenian historian as a *Graecus* (*ad Att.* 5, 11, 30; p. 145: "il se pourroit bien faire que Cicéron n'eût guères une

idée plus avantageuse de la probité de Théophane"), and went so far as to accuse Theophanes of thwarting all attempts at reconciliation between Pompey and Caesar (p. 149). By and large, the image of Theophanes in the sources (as Sévin read them) was that of an unprincipled flatterer, whose abilities and benefactions towards Greece (which, according to Tacitus (1, 6, 18), the *adulatio graeca* rewarded with his deification) made it impossible for the well-meaning Plutarch to denigrate him openly; yet equally they could not stifle the historian's veracity, which is precisely why his inclusion of Theophanes' more discreditable actions was seen to carry considerable weight (pp. 143–4).

If this image has subsequently been turned around, it is largely due to the views of de la Ville de Mirmont and, above all, Robert and the publication of the honorary inscription from Constantinople (*CRAI* 1969, pp. 42–64). This inscription is also connected with Pompey's granting Mytilene the status of a *civitas libera* in 62 BC, the political dimension of which I have already examined in an earlier article ("Theophanes and Mytilene's Freedom Reconsidered", *Τεκμήρια* 1 (1995) 1–13). In my opinion, this is a similar case to the one studied by Hillman, in which the sources have overplayed Theophanes' influence. I hasten to add, however, that this relates more to the political aspect of Pompey's actions than to an appraisal of Theophanes' personality; though it is true that it does bear some relationship to the rather exaggerated picture painted by Robert.

By contrast, Guy Labarre reinstated and defended the notion of an entirely positive assessment of Theophanes in his critique in the last issue of *Τεκμήρια*, referring to the whole matter as a "tradition . . . cohérente" (p. 53). He offers a similar debate and substantiation in the relevant chapter of his recently published *Les Cités de Lesbos aux époques hellénistique et impériale* (Lyon 1996), pp. 93–4, which bears as its motto — though the connotation is a little hard to grasp — precisely that excerpt from the letter to Atticus that Sévin cited to illustrate Cicero's low opinion of Theophanes. Labarre's argument regarding Theophanes' personality is not an original one: it explicitly dovetails with Robert's assertion that Tacitus was completely mistaken in his estimation. It would perhaps be unnecessary to attach disarming importance to this, particularly if one bears in mind that, when he

published the Constantinople inscription, Robert at the same time refuted the hitherto diametrically opposite opinion upheld by historians of the calibre of Syme, if not of Mommsen too. No less widely accepted is Labarre's conclusion that "Théophane avait joué un rôle important auprès de Pompée"; like all other historians, I share it completely (pp. 4 and 9). But I fail to understand how this can automatically enlighten us about specific facts, such as, in this particular instance, the extent of his personal contribution to the making of a political decision.

On the other hand, of course, a large part of the "tradition cohérente" relates to Cicero: the reader will find the relevant data assembled in Müller's *FHG* of 1849, as also in Salzmann's prosopographical study of 1980. It is pointless, therefore, simply to reproduce these data, especially when there is a risk of shifting the discussion to an irrelevant place and time: Cicero is referring to Theophanes and Pompey's relationship in Rome after 59 BC at the earliest (*Pro Arch.* 24 excepted), and research has already disputed whether the Mytilenean historian exerted any influence at all before a specific later date, such as 51 BC (see the relevant references: p. 4 n. 11). Plutarch's information about Theophanes' influence at the time of the civil war is even further removed from the Mytilene of 62 BC.

In the end, Labarre does not seem to be entirely at ease with one of the principles of source criticism, namely that information such as "διὰ Θεοφάνη" or "in unius Theophanis gratiam" does not relate to facts, but to interpretations of facts, and should thus be subjected to a rational examination. The same applies, needless to say, to honorary inscriptions: official recognition of an individual's contribution to some achievement simply reflects a perception of reality in specific circumstances and by specific historical subjects. In any case, to replace the fact with interpretations of it could be just an error of method. The epigraphical and literary traditions are *cohérentes* only inasmuch as they both relate to the activity of a politician of doubtless importance, and they (particularly the epigraphical tradition) consequently produce a somewhat emphatic record of his activities. But this does not mean that we must credulously accept Plutarch's information or ignore the negative tone of Velleius Paterculus' account. The latter in particular cannot be viewed in isolation from the circumstances of his time, his close relationship with

Tiberius, the necessity of falling into line with the Emperor's negative attitude towards the enfranchisement of subject cities, as also the paradoxical assertion that Theophanes' deification constituted a reproach to his descendants.

Furthermore, the interpretation of Mytilene's new status as a *civitas libera* in 62 BC has already been challenged before — even though Dr Labarre charges me with "des vues nouvelles". Apart from P. S. Paraskevaïdis's monograph, I have since learnt of I. D. Kondis's monograph titled *Lesbos and the Area of Asia Minor in its Vicinity* (Athens, 1978; reprinted in 1995; in Greek), (No. 24 in the Athenian Centre for Oecistics' series *Ancient Greek Cities).* Kondis, an archaeologist (b. Moskhonissia 1909 – d. London 1975) who served, *inter alia*, as Superintendent of Antiquities in the Aegean Islands, supplemented his monograph with a brief history of the island, which Dr Labarre refers to (p. 7). The relevant passage translates as follows (p. 199):

There can be no doubt about the part Theophanes played in the favourable settlement of Mytilene's unresolved affairs. Yet, in fact, the way Pompey dealt with Mytilene was well within the scope of the general policy which the Roman statesman had decided to follow in order to place Roman dominion in the East on a firm footing. He had realised that if the difficult Asian regions were to be held in check, the most suitable cohesive force was the Hellenistic tradition that had pervaded them. So he reduced the pressure of Roman rule over the Greek cities, which were still useful centres of Hellenistic culture and indeed, like Mytilene, were closely linked by their geographical position to the continent of Asia.

(The same passage is used, with minimal variations in phraseology, in *Lesbian Polyptych* (Athens, 1973), p. 104.)

So two Greek-language monographs, both more or less unexploited in the literature relating to Lesbos, had already presented various arguments challenging the validity of the widely accepted topos so closely connected with the accounts of Plutarch and Velleius Paterculus. Furthermore, both Paraskevaïdis and Kondis thus came into conflict on this particular issue not only with some of the most authoritative non-Greek studies, but also with the

modern local historiographical tradition regarding Lesbos in the Roman period, as represented notably by D. G. Vernardakis, a loyal follower in this respect of Cichorius (see p. 4 n. 11; p. 2 n. 6).

A topos like the one I have been trying to verify will naturally make its way into a variety of works with a greater or lesser range. Furthermore, it is not to be expected that all opinions will be supported by equal in number scholars. In some cases, alternative or intermediate views will be put forward, though this seems to come as quite a surprise to Dr Labarre. At all events, a more circumspect attitude towards Theophanes seems to have been gaining ground in recent years. The general feeling is succinctly expressed by Barbara Scardigli's comment on B. K. Gold's article on the subject: "the influence of Theophanes as Pompey's adviser is perhaps exaggerated" (Introduction to *Plutarch's Lives* (Oxford, 1995), p. 24 n. 169). Nonetheless, all arguments to the contrary are very welcome; after all, the validity of a topos depends on how its supporters can argue for it as self-evident.

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Mytilene

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ὁ Θεοφάνης καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία τῆς Μυτιλήνης: Ὑστερόγραφο

Στὴν κριτικὴ παλιότερου ἄρθρου (*Τεκμήρια* 1 (1995) 1-13) ὁ Guy Labarre ὑποστήριξε ὅτι οἱ διαθέσιμες πηγὲς φωτίζουν ἱκανοποιητικὰ τὴν πρωτοβουλία τοῦ Πομπήιου νὰ ἀποδώσει στὴ Μυτιλήνη τὸ καθεστὼς ἐλεύθερης πόλης, τὸ 62 π.Χ., καὶ ἐπαληθεύουν τὴ γενικότερη καὶ συνεκτικὴ εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοφάνη ὡς πολιτικοῦ συμβούλου μὲ μεγάλη ἐπιρροὴ στὸν πάτρωνά του, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀδιαμφισβήτητα βαθιὰ αἰσθήματα φιλοπατρίας (*Τεκμήρια* 2 (1996) 44-53). Ὁρισμένα ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπιχειρήματα ποὺ ἀφοροῦν σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν εἰκόνα ἐπανεξετάζονται ἀπὸ τὴν ἄποψη τῆς μεθόδου καὶ ἐλέγχεται ἡ ἐπάρκειά τους γιὰ τὴν ἑρμηνεία τοῦ συγκεκριμένου γεγονότος.