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THE QUALIFIED PRAISE DECREE OF KEPHISODOROS AND HISTORIOGRAPHY*

The inscription uncovered in the spring of 1933 (*Hesperia* 5, 1936, no. 15), although far from intact, clearly recounts the deeds which had made Kephisodoros worthy of Athens' greatest rewards. The vote for this inscribed decree had been taken by the Athenians some time in the early spring of 195 B.C.¹ On that occasion Kephisodoros was granted a golden crown, a bronze image of his likeness erected in the *agora* of the *asty* and another in the Peiraeus in the harbour's market place, the privilege of dining at the Prytaneion, a front seat in all the festivals to be held by the polis and other tokens of appreciation. Among the considerations which had brought the citizen assembly to ratify the praise proposals submitted by the *boule*, one may distinguish two groups of arguments. We are told that Kephisodoros was active in the politics of Athens for thirty years.² The major part emphasized his personal characteristics which had become even more prominent in the years when Kephisodoros performed active services to the polis.³ They underlined his equity and his honesty, as well as the wisdom he had demonstrated while acting as legislator thus contributing to the concord of all Athenians (ll. 15/16); nor did they forget the generosity that he displayed from his own means by donating money, grain and other gifts to his polis.

However, all these are almost the necessary devoirs to justify any decree of praise. The other reasons noted in the inscription, although veiled in a thick layer of rhetoric, are more specific and are of the historiographic genre. Without calling Macedon or the king, Philip V, by name, the rest of the clauses point at the success of Kephisodoros' political preference, the nexus with Rome. True, the name of Rome is also not been mentioned in the decree.⁴

The timing chosen for this decree, only a few months after the famous Isthmus Declaration made by the Roman general T. Quinctius Flamininus⁵, was not accidental. Flamininus' public promise to leave Greece free from Roman garrisons was for Kephisodoros' political faction in Athens the triumphant proof and ultimate argument to show before the eyes of hesitating and traditionally pro-Macedonian citizens of Athens (as well as the rest of Mainland Greece) the wisdom of the policy they had launched a decade or so earlier⁶ by calling for Rome. We read that the supreme target of Kephisodoros' policy had been "the preservation by the demos of its autonomy" (l. 30), while the method adopted for its implementation was to "keep firm in their faith existing friends and also gain others in addition" (l. 18–9). Thus we are led to infer that Kephisodoros since 229 B.C. followed the path of his political forerunners. The epoch-making novelty, the turning of Athens to Rome, had not been given any prominence in the

* Helmondo Freis Saravipontano doctissimo.

¹ Cf. Benjamin D. Meritt, *Hesperia* 5, 1936, p. 427.

² The wording of the inscription states that Kephisodoros at that time had already been engaged "honestly and incorruptibly", in the political life of Athens "for nearly thirty years" (l. 9). That means that Eurykleides, one of the leading statesmen in Athens at that time, 225 B.C., had drawn young Kephisodoros near to Athens' politics in making. One may suppose that he had passed Eurykleides' political scrutiny and been found acceptable to the inner circle of its younger cadre.

³ The inscription mentions explicitly his office as "treasurer of the military funds" (204/203 B.C.), and his stewardship of the grain fund in the years of Apollodoros and Proxenides respectively (ll. 12–15).

⁴ Even this time, as in the Chremonides Psephisma (*Sylloge*³ 434/5) Macedon has not been mentioned by name. Perhaps the formulators of the inscription would not transgress an unwritten law of not naming the present enemy, well aware that in the larger Greek political realm enmities might in due time change into friendship, while *inscripta manet* would remain unchanged.

⁵ Calculated as approximately July 196 B.C. Cf. *RE*, s.v. Isthmia, cols. 2248 ff.

⁶ No direct evidence, inscribed or written, of Roman formal and informal embassies, which had at that time visited Athens, are traceable. However, when it was in the Roman interest, their men knew the way to Athens (and not only to Athens) already in 229 B.C., after the so-called First Illyrian War (Polyb. 2.12.8). More so after the Peace of Phoinike. Some echoes and allusions, perhaps, one can distinguish in the annalistic version, according to which Athens figured under the *foederi adscripti* of the Roman side in the Peace of Phoinike (Liv. 29.12.14).

decree, as if it were a routine political move in unison with the glorious tradition of Eurykleides and Mikion, thus not calling for any unusual attention. At first sight this would leave an impression of an ordinary manoeuvre carried out by the authorities of the polis for the benefit of its citizens. In a generalizing tune it said that Kephisodoros “has recommended good alliances advantageous to the demos; and that he has gone on embassies of the greatest importance for the safety of the poleis and the countryside” (l. 21–3). One may credit Kephisodoros and his followers with the belief that their present reliance upon Rome would not be of perennial duration, not for themselves and not for the rest of Greece. These politicians of Athens, in the frame of their accustomed political mind, considered Rome on their indirect geographical West as just another entity of their political manipulations as, say, Pergamon on their more distant and indirect geographical East. Kephisodoros and his supporters, trained for analogy by their Macedonian experience, felt now, after the Isthmian Declaration, that their prophecy had entirely come true. Indeed, contrary to predictions widely accepted in Greece of ‘clouds that loom in the west’ (cf. Polyb. V 104.1),⁷ Athens not excluded, the Romans began after the Declaration of Flamininus with arrangements for the withdrawal of their armies from Greece.

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On the whole, the inscription appears as the tip of an iceberg concealing more than revealing of the occurrences which had brought Athens to the Roman camp. Although the ultimate result is clear cut.

The extant fragments of Polybios’ book 16, complemented with segments of his Histories derived from Livius, not only provide some puzzling details, but also throw light on the formal version, which had channelled Athens to join the Roman cause in the Second Macedonian War. This version was based on a selection of events originating, no doubt, in pro-Rome orientated circles within the polis of Athens. Accordingly, it responded to their own expectations and those of their new benefactors, the Romans. Philip V, King of Macedon, had thus to be presented as the blameworthy aggressor⁸ and the cause of the breach of an idyllic peace which had then, as it were, prevailed over the whole theatre east of the Adriatic sea. On the other hand, Athens had been depicted as the one left without any alternative when she appealed to Rome, whereas Rome had made a chivalrous gesture and responded to a call for help. However, a closer observation would not take for granted this historiographical version, though it may be compatible with the tendency of the inscription.

It was not among the vital interests of Polybios to reformulate the truth put out by the pro-Roman authorities of Athens. This was especially true because such an interpretation also suited Polybios’ own protectors, the Romans of the ‘Pydna-Corinth-Carthage’ generation (168–146 B.C.). Nevertheless, Polybios the historian had not left it without a penetrating elucidation. More than a century later, Livius, the author of a history of Rome *ab urbe condita* up to his own time, had for his own aims compiled a chain of events preceding the Second Macedonian War.⁹ He carried out this task in an eclectic manner borrowing freely from Roman annalists and from Polybios alike, but without the scholarly desired historical meticulousness and precision. Fortunately, he copied Polybios’ critical and summarizing remark on Athens’ war proclamation against Macedon. We read that according to Polybios “the Athenians had undertaken the war against Philip V for no sufficient reason” (*haudquaquam digna causa*, Liv.(P) 31.14.6). Polybios, within the limits of the liberty he had taken, did not dare to say more than this. The Greek reader with whom Polybios wanted to share his thoughts would not be allowed by the

⁷ Athenians, as well as Greeks, became indoctrinated, relying upon their experience from Macedonian overlordship, that only garrisons left in the area could assure the control of the stronger. Cf. P. Oliva, *Gymnasium* 100, 1993, 1 ff. and bibliography; D. Golan, *The Res Graeciae in Polybius*, *Athenaeum Suppl.* 27, 1995, 55 ff.

⁸ Note, as an example only, how the Romans were moved by the prayers of the Athenians (*preces Atheniensium*) for help; Liv. 31.1.10. And how the Romans declared war “upon King Philip V and the Macedonians over whom he ruled, on account of the injuries he had inflicted and the war he had made on the allies of the Roman people” (ib. 6.1).

⁹ Livius saw as his mission to show that the war that Rome had launched against Macedon in the year 200 B.C. was legally and even ethically justified. Cf. E. Bickermann, *RPh* 9, 1935, 59 ff.; 161 ff.

historian to overlook this ponderous statement. The opening of the passage said bluntly that not the Macedonian king but rather the Athenians had undertaken the war [*Contraxerant . . . sibi cum Philippo bellum Athenienses*, *ibid.*]. Greeks even before the days of Polybios knew to ask the “*cui bono?*” question. Their unspelled answers were not always preserved by the formal historiography, as in the case under scrutiny. It was in the interest of the pro-Roman faction in Athens to accelerate Athens’ shift to Rome. The stand that Athens had reacquired in Greek political life during the previous thirty years (229–201 B.C.) especially, made this city-state an object for emulation by many poleis and the other Greek polities.¹⁰ To win over Athens before waging war on Macedon, was therefore for Roman diplomacy a challenge worth every effort imaginable. The pro-Roman faction in Athens had become its chosen target and ideal tool for achieving this aim.¹¹

The Peace of Phoinike (205 B.C.) had not left even an illusion of lasting tranquillity.¹² Whether one is a believer in the *foederi adscripti* clauses or not,¹³ one has to admit that the very articulation of the Phoinike Peace had made clear to all concerned that victorious Rome would henceforth play a leading role in the Greek arena. This became throughout the Balkan a new and shocking experience. King Philip V of Macedon refused to comply with this gross intrusion into what he deemed to be Macedon’s traditional and exclusive field of political activity.¹⁴ On the other hand, various politicians in Mainland Greece, Athens included, started to reconsider the eventual place reserved for themselves and their poleis on the changing political map of the area. Theory soon turned into practice in Greek quarters under the growing exertions of the major powers. Philip V decided to consolidate his positions in Greece, and even to extend them, in view of the unavoidable confrontation with Rome.¹⁵ Even Rome, at this stage, had not reduced her various diplomatic efforts in order to strengthen and widen her ties east of the Adriatic Sea. As a result, Kephisodoros and his followers felt that their generation, which had long practised neutrality, had been collapsing under the heavy pressure of both antagonists, Rome and Macedon, and their satellites. Kephisodoros and his friends clearly foresaw the upper hand of Rome in

¹⁰ Athens at that time continued to figure as a centre of cultural activity and philosophical thought. Even politically Athens had been viewed thanks to the policy maintained and practised by Eurykleides – of the forerunners of Kephisodoros – as a source of inspiration. Athens in the last quarter of the third century B.C. preferred a common yet freely and better coordinated Eastern Mediterranean political theatre. Without naming it in today’s terminology, it had sought a balance of power (cf. David Hume, *Essays VII, On the Balance of Power*, London 1777, I 353 ff.) in the Eastern Mediterranean (cf. H. H. Schmitt, in *Fondation Hardt* 1974, 82 ff.). This was the sort of concept which had won much attention even in the courts of the Hellenistic kingdoms. Though in different wording and accentuations these views were voiced on different occasions at political gatherings of Greeks. Note, e.g., the speech of Agelaos the Aetolian at the Congress of Naupactus (Pol. 5.104.1 ff.) in 217 B.C.

¹¹ We learn from Polybios (16.7–25) that Roman ambassadors stayed in Athens when King of Pergamon, Attalos, and the Rhodians encouraged Athens to “make war on Philip” (*ibid.* 26.9). The Roman ambassadors for their part contributed an ultimatum to Philip V, King of Macedon, to forge the will of the Athenians to fight Macedon. Modern scholarship has met with difficulties not easily solved even at this point. How was it that Roman ambassadors delivered an ultimatum to King Philip V months before the *comitia tributa* had taken the war decision? The answers suggested are far from satisfactory. Cf. F. W. Walbank, *A Commentary on Polybius*, vol. II, 1967, 533f.

¹² “Der Friede von Phoinike beendete den langen Krieg, . . . ohne doch etwas zu entscheiden . . . die alten Feindschaften bestanden weiter oder waren noch verschärft” (B. Niese, *G.G.M.S.*, vol. II, 1899 [1963], 562 ff.).

¹³ See a list of scholars referring to the problem in H. H. Schmitt, *Die Staatsverträge des Altertums*, vol. III, 1969, 283 f.

¹⁴ At least since the year 337/6 B.C., when King Philip II, son of Amyntas, after the battle of Chaeroneia (338 B.C.) “conceived of the ambition to become the leader of all Greece” (ἐφιλοτιμεῖτο γενέσθαι πάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἡγεμών); Diodor. 16.89.1.

¹⁵ In order to be well prepared for the confrontation with Rome, King Philip started to consolidate a sort of defence line comprising islands in the Aegean, selected positions on the Anatolian continent, and friendly Macedon governments throughout Mainland Greece. Philip felt correctly that not much time had been left. He therefore tried to gain positive results quickly, and was thus compelled to abandon the method of sophisticated diplomacy and to rely on the power of the sword. However, the implementation of this plan met with the resistance of many poleis, kings and tribes. Worse than that: when the Romans had ended their war with Carthage, Philip was still coping with great difficulties in establishing a solid base for his strategy on the Hellespont. See: F. W. Walbank, *Philip V of Macedon*, 1967, 108 ff. D. Golan, *Athenaeum* 73, 1985, 389 ff.

the oncoming war between Rome and Macedon.¹⁶ Sticking to their objective – the safety (σωτηρία) of the poleis and countryside (l. 22), and the preservation of autonomy (αὐτονομία, l. 30) – they decided to be on the right side at the right time. Accordingly, the lot had been cast: Rome.¹⁷

It was much easier to adopt such a decision in a small circle of friends than to turn it into the official starting-point of Athens' new policy-making. Not many in Athens would see a justifiable reason for such a sudden and radical political somersault. The political relations between Athens and the Kingdom of Macedon over the previous hundred years had witnessed ebbs and tides. Sometimes Athens named two *phylai* after Macedonian kings¹⁸ as a token of gratitude, and sometimes it would join a war coalition against Macedon.¹⁹ Yet even on those occasions Athenian politicians had never brought the relations with Macedon to a schism down to abyss. This time Kephisodoros and his men gave the events a radically different direction. We learn from Polybios how Kephisodoros and his men succeeded in turning a trivial incident²⁰ into the beginning of an exploding chain-reaction leading to the Romans' desideratum: the Athenian war declaration against Macedon.

However, Kephisodoros and his partisans were not gifted with prophecy, and their political schooling ended before they had read the chapters dealing with political dictate by remote control.

The Athenians behind the praising clauses of Kephisodoros' pro-Roman policy, immediately after the Isthmos Declaration of Flamininus, would not have believed what Polybios had experienced as a Greek, only thirty years later, from the political heirs of T. Quinctius Flamininus; and what the whole of Greece had to endure for fifty years and more from this Isthmos Declaration and for many generations to come.

The Kephisodoros inscription turned out to be a strong indication of the opportunism which had befallen too many of the political leaders in Athens, and elsewhere in Greece, in those epoch-making days of Greek history.

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¹⁶ Note the political forecast voiced by a Rhodian ambassador at a Congress of Aetolians in the year 207 B.C. as brought down by Polybios: “. . . For it is only evident, I think, that the Romans if they get the war in Italy off their hands – and this will be very shortly, as Hannibal is now confined in quite a small district of Bruttium – will next throw themselves with their whole strength on Grecian lands on the pretext that they are helping the Aetolians against Philip, but really with the intention of conquering the whole country” (11.6.1–2). More so after the Peace of Phoinike.

¹⁷ See N. G. L. Hammond and F. W. Walbank, *A History of Macedonia*, vol. III, 1988, 414.

¹⁸ These two tribes were named after Antigonos Monophthalmos and his son Demetrios in the year 307/6 B.C. Cf. W. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens*, 64, 96. The Athenians abolished these two names later, in 201/200 B.C.

¹⁹ In the year 268/7 B.C. Athens issued a proclamation to take up arms against Macedon. Cf. Sylloge³ 434/5, the so-called Chremonidean War. Indeed, the two Macedonian kingly names of the Athenian tribes survived several periods of enmity between Athens and Macedon, because Athenian authorities tended to view them as passing and temporary circumstances only.

²⁰ Two young men from Akarnania, though not initiated, entered the temple of Eleusis (Liv. 31.14.7 ff.). Instead of solving this religious violation in a moderate manner, even because these two lads “were ignorant that they were committing a sacrilege” (ibid. 7), some politicians were interested in turning it into a world-shaking case, leading to a verdict of death. Note: the Akarnanians were allies of Macedon. They figured in the list of the *adscripti* of the Peace of Phoinike on the side of Philip V (Liv. 29.12.14).