

History without Heroes: Theopompus' Treatment of Philip of Macedon

W. Robert Connor

THE fourth century B.C. contains many developments that have influenced the course of subsequent historiography and many problems that have attracted the attention of generations of scholars, but none is more perplexing than the *Philippica* of Theopompus of Chios. This lengthy work recorded the era of Philip II of Macedon, his rise from the ruler of a weak and divided state to the virtual master of the Greek world. Although the history has perished and is known only through some sixty pages of fragments, it is universally agreed that Philip played a large part in it. But little consensus has been reached on just what his rôle was. A small group, the most renowned of whom was Gilbert Murray,¹ has suggested that Theopompus regarded Philip as some sort of poison that infected the age. Others have suggested the *Philippica* presented a carefully balanced evaluation of the man; as J. B. Bury put it, "Theopompus exposed candidly and impartially the king's weaknesses and misdeeds, but he declared his judgment that Europe had never produced so great a man as the son of Amyntas."² Still others, such as Kurt von Fritz,³ have concluded that Theopompus' views were patently contradictory and have endeavored to account for such contradictions. Most fre-

¹ Gilbert Murray's 1928 J. H. Gray lecture, "Theopompus, or the Cynic as Historian," was published in *Greek Studies* (Oxford 1947) 149-70. Although Murray accepts the Oxyrhynchus *Hellenica* as the work of Theopompus (contrast H. Bloch's definitive article, "Historical Literature of the Fourth Century," *HSCP* Suppl. I [1940] 302-76), this is probably the best English treatment of Theopompus.

² J. B. Bury, *A History of Greece*, 3rd ed. rev. Russell Meiggs (London 1959) 736.

³ K. von Fritz, "The Historian Theopompus," *AHR* 46 (1941) 765-87. This article and his essay in the *Political Science Quarterly* 56 (1941) 51-83 suggest that Theopompus' attitude towards Philip evolved from an initial feeling that he might be the "saviour of Europe" to a final hostility.

quent perhaps is the notion that Theopompus in some sense admired Philip, that he made him the “hero” of the *Philippica* and showed what Werner Jaeger called “a tendency to philippize.”⁴

From this dispute arises another: the nature of the *Philippica*, whether it should be seen primarily as a moral essay, or as the statement of a man trying to advance his political views and principles, or as the careful evaluation of a truly objective historian, or as the flattering chronicle of a hero-worshipper. The following pages attempt to deal with both these difficulties. They begin by reviewing the evidence for the view that Theopompus was well disposed towards Philip, and then proceed to the wider question of the nature of the *Philippica* and its place in the development of Greek historiography.

I

The evidence from the fragments themselves can be treated expeditiously. It is clear that most of the fragments that in any way concern Philip are distinctly hostile to him; he is presented as extravagant and financially irresponsible (*FGrHist* 115 F 224), surrounded by flatterers, blackguards and perverts (F 81, 205), honoring these same creatures with commands (F 81, 209, 225) and even building a special city for sycophants, perjurers and the like (F 110). His personal life is marred by a fondness for alcohol (F 282) and debauchery (F 81, 162, 236) that corrupts all those who come into close contact with him (F 224). His policies and military expeditions bring slaughter (F 235) and tyrants (F 210) into Greece.

D. E. W. Wormell, who believes that Theopompus admired Philip, is puzzled by this apparent hostility: “It is amazing how dark a picture he paints even of Philip; he seems incapable of stemming the flood of vituperation once it is flowing strong. In only three passages are favourable accounts given of Philip’s actions. His worse characteristics, on the other hand, are frequently stressed. He is shown as a barbarian gratifying all his physical desires, wholly lacking in self-control.”⁵ Embarrassed that Theopompus should have found so little to say in favor of his “hero,” Wormell attempts to explain

⁴ W. Jaeger, *Demosthenes* (Berkeley 1938) 77, and see also 225 nn. 13 and 14. Perhaps the most articulate representative of this school is A. Momigliano in *Filippo il Macedone* (Florence 1934) and “Studi sulla storiografia greca del IV secolo a.c.,” *RivFC* 9 (1931) 230–42, 335–54.

⁵ D. E. W. Wormell, “Hermias of Atarneus,” *YCS* 5 (1935) 71–2.

the small number of laudatory passages by suggesting that the accidents of preservation have distorted our picture of the original. He quickly realizes, however, that Athenaeus, with his love of the bizarre and fascination with the corrupt, is by no means the only source for our knowledge of the *Philippica*, and that other authors with little motive for distortion also contribute to our impression of a "flood of vituperation." A look at the three fragments which Wormell alleges as favorable to Philip may suggest another, and simpler, explanation of the difficulty.

Of the three fragments, one (F 256) comes not from the *Philippica* but from an otherwise almost unknown work called the *Encomium of Philip*. Doubts have been expressed about the nature of this work—was it, as Murray thought,⁶ ironic? was it a sincere tribute to Philip? or was it simply a rhetorical exercise? The fragment itself *seems* favorable enough:

As Theopompus [says] in the *Encomium of Philip*, if Philip should choose to abide by the same habits, he will rule all of Europe.

Unless one wishes to begin by insisting that Theopompus' tongue was unusually sharp and ironic, the fragment should probably be taken at its face value. For the moment, however, the interpretation of this fragment can be left aside; what is important to note is simply that the fragment is not from the *Philippica* and cannot be used to determine what Theopompus had to say of the Macedonian king in that work. Political exigencies may have dictated the tone of the work, as they apparently did in his *Encomium of Alexander* (F 258, T 8). New occasions teach new duties, and politicians, of whom Theopompus was one (T 9), must prove themselves quick pupils.

The second of Wormell's three passages (F 237) does come from the *Philippica*; it was taken by Athenaeus from the fifty-fourth book:

. . . in Philip's domain near Bisaltia and Amphipolis and Graistonia of Macedon the fig tree brings forth figs in the middle of the spring, and the grapevines their clusters, and the olives get ripe at the time you'd expect them to swell; Philip was fortunate in everything (εὐτυχήσαι πάντα Φίλιππον).

No one would doubt Philip's good fortune. He ruled a wealthy kingdom at a time when several generations of struggles for hegemony

⁶ G. Murray, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 162.

had embittered and weakened the Greek city states. And he was fortunate in almost all his attempts to turn this situation to his advantage. But to point out his good fortune is a small tribute. Any good ancient rhetorician knew that he should praise a man's virtues and not his good luck. The author of the rhetorical handbook addressed to Alexander sets down the rule in this way:

. . . one should make a distinction between the goods external to virtue and those actually inherent in virtue. . . Those belonging to virtue are justly eulogized, but those external to it are kept in the background, since it is appropriate for the strong and handsome and well-born and rich to receive not praise but congratulations on their good fortune.⁷

Several hundred years later Plutarch in his treatise *De malignitate Herodoti* observed that a historian's account can be censured for malice

if it asserts that the success was won not by valour but by money (as some say of Philip), or easily and without any trouble (as they say of Alexander), or not by intelligence but by good luck (as the enemies of Timotheüs claimed. . .).⁸

We need not conclude that Plutarch had Theopompus in mind when he wrote this passage to understand the cautionary tale about the perils of F 237.

But the two passages which have already been considered are insubstantial when compared to Wormell's third example. It is on this fragment, indeed, that the whole argument rests. Since it is so central to the discussion, I will translate a large part of the surrounding material and quote the crucial section in Greek. The fragment, number 27 in Jacoby, is found in the eighth book of Polybius in one of his digressions on proper and improper historiographical method. Polybius has criticized the way most historians have treated the expedition of Philip V against Messene—some neglecting it, others turning it into an encomium of the king. He calls for a balance in which the historian

⁷ [Arist.] *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 35, 1440b15ff, transl. H. Rackham in LCL (= Aristotle, *Problems* II [Cambridge (Mass.) 1937] p.405).

⁸ Plu. *Moralia* 856b, transl. L. Pearson in LCL (*Plutarch's Moralia* XI [Cambridge (Mass.) 1965] pp.17-19).

would neither flatter nor revile. Then, in § 9, he turns to Theopompus:

One might attack Theopompus on this count with special appropriateness, for while in the beginning of his composition about Philip he suggests that he was eager to attempt this subject since Europe had never brought forth a man such as Philip the son of Amyntas, immediately after this, in the proemium and through the entire history, he describes Philip as most uncontrolled (*ἀκρατέστατον*) in his relations with women (so much so that even his own household was shaken by his zeal and partiality in this direction) and as most unjust and unprincipled in respect to the activities of his friends and allies, as a man who enslaved the largest number of cities and did that with guile and violence, and as passionate especially in his drinking bouts, so much so that even in the daytime he would allow his friends to see him drunk. And if someone should choose to look at the beginning of the forty-ninth book (F 225) he would be quite astonished at the extravagance of the author, who in addition to everything else dares also to say the following (I copy verbatim): “For if there was any pervert or man of shameless character among the Greeks or the barbarians, all these came to Macedon to Philip’s court and were entitled ‘Companions of the King’, for Philip’s practice was to remove from honor anyone whose character was good and who showed concern for his personal reputation, while advancing and honoring spendthrifts, drunkards and gamblers . . . But to sum up . . . I consider the friends and so-called ‘companions’ of Philip such beasts and such a sort in their conduct that neither the centaurs on Pelion, nor the Laestrygonians who lived on the plain of Leontini nor any others of whatever sort could rival them.” Who would not condemn the bitterness and impudent loquacity of this historian? For not only does he contradict his own introductory statement but he also deserves censure for his slander of the king and his friends. . .

It is from this passage that the view originated that Theopompus admired Philip. One statement alone suggests anything of the sort: *διὰ τὸ μηδέποτε τὴν Εὐρώπην ἐνηνοχῆναι τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα παράπαν οἶον τὸν Ἀμύντου Φίλιππον*, which is translated above, “since Europe had never brought forth a man such as Philip, the son of Amyntas.” This has come regularly to be interpreted as a statement that Philip, whatever faults he might have had, was still a great man and worthy

of being praised.⁹ To be sure, it would be natural for Theopompus to begin with some exposition of the significance of his subject. Thucydides had done so and the rhetorical handbooks advised the speaker to stress that he was about to discuss matters “important or alarming or that closely concern ourselves” (*Rh.Al.* 29, 1436b7). It would be strange indeed if Theopompus had not said something about Philip’s “greatness.” The further inference, however—the conclusion that Theopompus expressed his esteem for the king—should be drawn more cautiously. The phrasing of the passage is less explicit than might be expected: ἐνηνοχέναι τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα. Polybius clearly takes this as high praise, and if he himself were not puzzled by the apparent contradiction in Theopompus’ work, we might readily accept his judgement. But the discrepancy seems so patent, and the wording at the crucial point so vague, that a moment spent examining the word τοιοῦτον will be no waste.

This adjective has a great latitude, but Theopompus seems to have made a distinctive use of it. In the fragments of his work, it is never used as praise. It can be purely descriptive, but its commonest use is to point with scorn to a person or an action whose moral quality might best not be named or repeated. Fragment 236 contains one example: περιήγετο γὰρ πανταχοῦ τοὺς τοιοῦτους ὁ Φίλιππος, “For everywhere he went Philip brought people of this sort (flute players, folk singers, βωμολόχους) with him.” But a better example comes in the passage of Polybius just quoted, in which, while describing Philip’s associates, Theopompus says (according to Polybius) that they were θηρία γεγονέναι καὶ τοιοῦτους τὸν τρόπον “such beasts and such a sort in their conduct,” where we might expect a pejorative adjective, such as ἀσελγεστάτους “most depraved.” The usage is common in Theopompus¹⁰ and accords with another rhetorical maxim of the *Rhetoric to Alexander* (35, 1441b20ff):

take care not to designate even his shameful deeds with shameful names, lest you seem to slander his character, but rather refer to such

⁹ Compare e.g. Bury’s paraphrase of the fragment “so great a man” (*supra* p.133) or N. G. L. Hammond in *OCD s.v. PHILIP* (2) II, “the greatest man Europe had known.”

¹⁰ The word τοιοῦτος is sometimes used in Theopompus with neutral connotation, neither praising nor blaming, e.g. F 75, 111, 236, 252; it is never used with favorable overtones, but frequently expresses hostility; e.g. F 25, 49, 81, 114 (three occurrences), 117, 134, 143, 213, 224, 225a, 236. This last group includes all instances in which the word is applied to human beings. There are in addition several passages where the text is questionable: F 22, 225a, 225b, 263a, 333. Similar uses of the word are not uncommon in other fourth-century authors; cf. e.g. Dem. *De falsa legatione* 200.

things allusively, and expose the action by using words that properly refer to other actions.

There is then a ready explanation of what Polybius thought a strange discrepancy in Theopompus' work. The opening is not a tribute to the Macedonian king but a deliberate ambiguity whose significance can only be appreciated after the reader has begun to survey the debaucheries and depravities of Philip's career. An appreciation of irony and a sense of humor were not Polybius' greatest strengths as a writer.¹¹ It is easy to imagine this conscientious historian diligently pouring over his Theopompus, but missing the malevolence that lurks behind the first words of the *Philippica*. His censure of what he considered a contradiction, the magisterial tone of his strictures, his eagerness to make an example of Theopompus' seeming deficiency have the air of a careful but humorless schoolmaster who fails to understand the ironic comment of one of his pupils and reproves him for it.

II

The survey of the passages cited by Wormell as "favourable accounts" of Philip completes the study of all the primary evidence that might support the thesis that Theopompus admired the Macedonian king. Although it is on the primary evidence that the thesis must stand or fall, certain corroborative arguments might be thought to confirm it. For the most part these arguments are insubstantial and need not detain us. For example, R. Schubert's¹² notion that since Theopompus was a pupil of Isocrates and since Isocrates admired Philip, Theopompus must also have admired the king, depends on a confidence in scholarly piety and a belief in the docility of students that few will share today. Similarly the tradition¹³ that Theopompus visited Philip in Macedon is no proof that he came away with a favorable view of the monarch. The sharp eye of John Gillies long ago noted the similarity between Theopompus' visit to Macedon and Voltaire's stay at the court of Frederick the Great: "Philip also found a Voltaire and a serpent in Theopompus the Chian, whose brilliant

¹¹ Cf. G. Murray, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 164-5.

¹² R. Schubert, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen zur Geschichte Philips II* (Königsberg 1904) 7-9.

¹³ T 7, cf. Sozomen, *Hist.Eccl.*, *praef.* § 5.

fancy and persuasive eloquence feebly atoned for the cruelty of his invective and the wickedness of his calumny . . . His indecency accused Philip of the same infamous passions which the impure fancy of the author of the *Pucelle* has imputed to the king of Prussia.”¹⁴

Another approach has been suggested by C. B. Welles in his useful comments on the source of Book 16 of Diodorus Siculus: “We may remember Theopompus’ critical attitude towards Demosthenes, as reported in Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 13.1; 25–26. This strongly suggests a favourable attitude towards Philip.”¹⁵ This is an interesting argument, for behind it stands the notion that Theopompus must have taken sides in the rivalry between the Athenian orator and the Macedonian monarch and that it is unlikely that anyone could be ill-disposed to both. A later section of this paper will deal in greater detail with this premise. For the moment, however, it is perhaps sufficient to point out that Theopompus’ treatment of Demosthenes is not as hostile as Welles’ comments might lead a reader not familiar with the fragments to conclude. It is true that in F 326 (= Plu. *Dem.* 13.1) he says that Demosthenes was “unstable in his habits and could endure neither the same business nor the same men for long,” but no other fragment is clearly directed against him, and one, F 327, narrates an episode which Theopompus probably considered to be to Demosthenes’ credit.¹⁶ The independence and integrity of Demosthenes’ remark that he would be the Athenians’ adviser even if they did not want him to be, but that he would not be a sycophant, even if they wanted him to be, should have won the praise of a man who so often showed his aversion to flattery¹⁷ and his distrust of the usual democratic politicians.

¹⁴ John Gillies, *A View of the Reign of Frederick II of Prussia* (London 1789) 18 and 19. Hercher’s *Epistolography* contains what purports to be a letter of Speusippus to Philip advising the monarch to have Antipater read his history to Theopompus so that he will be less harsh (*τραχύς*) (τ 7). The letter is probably a fabrication but would suggest that Theopompus was regarded as rather severe on his host.

¹⁵ C. B. Welles in his introduction to Diodorus Siculus vol. VIII (LCL, Cambridge [Mass.] 1963) p.5.

¹⁶ The ascription of this fragment to Theopompus is disputed. Mss A, B, C and E of Plutarch read *Θεόπομπος*; N and the later hand in Vaticanus 138 read *Θεόφραστος*. The old Teubner reads “Theopompus”; Ziegler’s new Teubner, “Theophrastus.” Jacoby remarked in his commentary on F 326, “es ist falsch, F 327 Theophrast zu geben, nur weil es günstig für Demosthenes lautet.” Similar problems are found in F 107 and F 404. One might suspect a tendency to corrupt “Theopompus” into the name of the better known author, but until more adequate collections and studies of Theophrastus’ fragments have been made, the ascriptions cannot be made with certainty.

¹⁷ See esp. F 124, 81, 185, 209.

Since Book 16 of Diodorus has sometimes been thought to follow Theopompus in its narration of Macedonian affairs, it too has been used as an argument that Theopompus' view was favorable to Philip. As in so many problems of *Quellenforschungen*, however, the demonstration of the connection between the two works is far from complete. The positive evidence for Diodorus' use of the *Philippica* in this book is slight: a passing allusion to the author in 16.71.3 and the use of the curious word *στρογγύλω* ('freighter') at 16.70.3, a word Theopompus also employs.¹⁸ But even if it could be proved that Diodorus relied on Theopompus as his principal source of information,¹⁹ it would remain to be shown that he slavishly adopted all his judgments. Although source studies of the less highly regarded ancient historians often assume that attitudes are transferred as readily as facts, this notion creates problems from time to time which warn one not to be uncritical of it. Consider, for example, the problem that a comparison of Justin and the fragments of the *Philippica* would pose for someone who proceeded on this assumption. He would note several passages in Justin's reworking of Pompeius Trogus that recall the *Philippica*, for example the account of Philip's loss of his right eye at the siege of Methone in Justin 7.6.14, which seems rather close to that in Book 4 of the *Philippica* (F 52).²⁰ He might conclude that Theopompus was ultimately an important source for Justin, perhaps the man on whom Pompeius Trogus relied most heavily. Would he then be tempted to decide that Justin's presentation of Philip as "wily and treacherous"²¹ reflected Theopompus' view? If so, how would he reconcile this picture of Philip with the one he had drawn from Diodorus Siculus 16? A few crises of this sort would be a sobering experience for the aspiring *Quellenforscher*. His youthful confidence about the ready transfer of ideals and evaluations would give way to a middle-

¹⁸ Cf. Theopompus F 341.

¹⁹ The bibliography on the vexed question of the extent of Theopompus' influence can be collected from the references in H. D. Westlake, "The Sicilian Books of Theopompus' *Philippica*," *Historia* 2 (1953/4) 288-307; N. G. L. Hammond, "The Sources of Diodorus Siculus XVI," *CQ* 32 (1938) 137-51; and K. Uhlemann, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen der Geschichte Philipps . . . im 16. Buche Diodors* (Strassburg i.E. 1913).

²⁰ Justin seems also to parallel in one way or another the following fragments of Theopompus: 28, 52, 66 (with Herodotus as a common source), 171, 283, 292 and 317. The references can be found in Jacoby's commentary on these passages. See also O. Seel, *Die Praefatio des Pompeius Trogus* (Erlangen 1955) esp. 31-4.

²¹ The phrase is Welles', *op.cit.* (*supra* n.15) 5. It is clear that Justin does not always parallel Theopompus; see e.g. Jacoby's commentary on F 236. Both Pompeius Trogus and Diodorus, however, may have shown greater freedom in their selection of sources than their modern critics are willing to allow them.

aged scepticism. In time he might become more cautious and at the same time more respectful of the ability of these historians to transform the whole impression created by an account without departing from its facts. This is the attitude which is needed in the present case. Both Diodorus and Justin may from time to time be following in Theopompus' footsteps, but it should not be concluded that they see the world through his eyes.

The survey of all the evidence, primary or secondary, which can with any reasonableness be brought to bear on the question of the treatment accorded to Philip of Macedon in the *Philippica* is now complete. It does not leave a great deal that suggests Theopompus "admired," "exalted," or "heroized" the Macedonian king. Indeed the reasons for the surprising currency of such assessments are more likely to be found in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century than in accounts based securely on evidence from the fourth century B.C. The hypothesis that Philip was Theopompus' hero was an attractive one in the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century and of the early years of the twentieth. It brought the *Philippica* into accord with two important, and contrary, developments in contemporary historical writing and made its author into an ancient precedent for modern accomplishments.

The first of these developments was a tendency to assimilate history to biography, to emphasize the personal elements in historical narrative and the rôle of the great man in explanations of cause. The *Philippica*, which properly deserves an important place in the development of biography,²² naturally came to be considered an ancient prototype of the type of history practiced by Carlyle, Macaulay and others. The difficulty in this otherwise appropriate comparison is that Theopompus did not share the often ill-restrained tendency to hero-worship of his modern followers. Critics of Theopompus began for the first time to talk of Theopompus' "heroes," as if it were axiomatic that a historian must have a hero, and then selected from the characters of the *Philippica* figures who could fulfil that rôle. Sometimes their choices were grievously mistaken and achieved at the expense of neglecting important ancient evidence.²³

²² See especially A. v. Mess, "Die Anfänge der Biographie I: Theopomp," *RhM* 70 (1915) 337-57.

²³ The Athenian Cimon, often considered a hero of Theopompus, is a good example. See my comments in *GRBS* 4 (1963) 107-14.

The other development is the widespread interest in the notion that history can and should be “objective” and that the true historian is the “critical” historian. The assumption that Philip was Theopompus’ hero served to increase the stature of the *Philippica* by making it the product of a man who, despite his admiration for the central character, could nonetheless point out with fairness the weaknesses as well as the strengths of his subject. It is the thought that in Theopompus antiquity saw a forerunner of modern historiographical techniques which so fascinated Wilamowitz and which lies behind his praise of the *Philippica*: “It was in fact a work to which, as far as intention goes, I know no parallel in literature. It is impossible to imagine what an influence such a book might have exercised upon modern writing.”²⁴

Thus the interpretation of the *Philippica* that was most commonly adopted derived from two drastically different intellectual tendencies—a movement to emphasize the biographical elements in history and a movement to develop a truly objective historiography. The product of this interpretation was an apparent reconciliation of these two tendencies and the creation, practically *e nihilo*, of a remarkable master of the historical craft, a historian who was a biographer, an admirer who could also be an objective critic.

III

The preceding discussion presents us with a paradox. There is no secure evidence for believing that Theopompus admired Philip. In fact, his hostility to the Macedonian king is made clear time and time again. On the other hand, Philip was surely the central figure, the organizing principle and the eponym of his history. The answer to the question why Theopompus paid so much attention to a man he did not admire is, of course, on one level perfectly simple. Philip succeeded. Whatever his failings or vices he raised Macedon from an insignificant and strife-torn province to the ruler of Greece and sired the man who was to subdue more of the world than most men could imagine. He is the central fact of fourth-century history, and no historian today or in antiquity could afford to neglect him.

But for a fourth-century Greek this very answer would raise another and more difficult question: how could a man of Philip’s vices achieve

²⁴ U. v. Wilamowitz, *Greek Historical Writing*, trans. G. Murray (Oxford 1908) 10.

such an extraordinary success? As has been seen, in the fragments he appears as extravagant, almost totally given over to pleasure, debauched, afflicted with all the shortcomings which the orthodox ethical thought of the fourth century deplored. The question in the reader's mind, and perhaps in Theopompus', is how could such a man succeed?

Some critics have attempted to make Theopompus an admirer of deeds based on nature, not on convention. In this view, now almost universally rejected, he becomes an ally of the natural man, not of conventional morality, a devotee of primitive simplicity, not of Hellenic over-civilization. He can thus be an admirer of Philip precisely because the Macedonian is not bound by the petty conventions of the Greek world. Whatever attractions this interpretation of Theopompus might initially possess disappear when his ethical views are studied with any care. It is one of the great merits of Gilbert Murray's essay to have shown the close connection between the ethical implications of the *Philippica* and those of the philosopher Antisthenes. Both would agree that "only one thing mattered, Virtue, and the surest sign of Virtue was temperance, simplicity of life, and a contempt for all bodily pleasures and the vanities of the world."²⁵ Once it is recognized that Theopompus is one of those Greek moralists who insisted on the supremacy of personal virtue, the way is clear to understand the connection he makes between individual morality and public success.

Fragment 40 is a good beginning:

The people of Ardia . . . own 300,000 bondmen who are like Helots. Every day they get drunk and have parties and are quite uncontrolled in their eating and drinking. Hence the Celts, when they made war on them, knowing their lack of constraint, ordered all their soldiers to prepare a most splendid feast in their tents and to put into the food a certain herb which had the effect of upsetting the bowels and thoroughly purging them. When this had been done some of the Ardiaeans were caught by the Celts and put to death while others threw themselves into rivers, since they were incapable of controlling their stomachs.

The fragment reads like any of a hundred other *stratagemata* from any of a dozen ancient sources. It is a perfectly straightforward

²⁵ G. Murray, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 162.

account of the physical incapacitation that resulted from a clever use of a powerful herb. Yet the final words of the fragment—*ἀκράτορες τῶν γαστέρων γερόμενοι*—hint that there may be another side to it. The statement that the Ardiaeans were unable to control their stomachs can be understood in a purely physical sense, but it also serves as a reminder of the Ardiaeans' inability to resist the pleasures of a good meal even if it meant the risk of poisoning. A little earlier in the passage Theopompus remarked that they were quite uncontrolled (*ἀκρατέστερον*) in their eating and drinking. The final phrase echoes that remark. The Celts, he says, recognized their lack of restraint (*ἀκρασίαν*) and used it to destroy them. Thus this fragment is a stratagem with a moral or at least with an implicit warning that the purveyors of pleasures can sometimes become the masters of those who lack self-control.

Fragment 134 describes a similar technique used to obtain mastery, this time in peace, not in war. Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, encouraged "those who wasted their substance in dice games and wine and other forms of riotous living, for he wanted them all to be corrupted and worthless." It is easy to guess why. Dionysius encouraged their debauchery and catered to their pleasures because he knew it is easier to maintain a tyranny if the citizenry is enervated by pleasure.

It is an Athenian, Chares, who shows how effective these techniques can be in a democracy (F 213). Although even on military expeditions he surrounded himself with flute players and whores and psaltrists and grossly misused the funds appropriated for the war, he never had any trouble with the Athenians:

on the contrary . . . they held him in higher regard than any other citizen. And justly so, for they themselves lived a life that invited youths to while away their time among the flute players and with whores and those who were a little older to spend their days drinking and gambling and in similar debauchery, and the people as a group spent more on public banquets and on the distribution of meat than in the administration of the city.

Theopompus' comments on Chares differ in one important respect from those on Dionysius and on the Celts. Chares is like these in that he succeeds, but unlike them in that he is himself dedicated to pleasure. In this way he is like Agathocles, whom Philip sent to win over the Perrhaebi. He had proven his ability in drinking and flattery

in Philip's parties and was then sent "to destroy the Perrhaebi and take charge of affairs there" (F 81). Later, Philip himself (F 162),

knowing that the Thessalians were licentious and wanton in their mode of life, got up parties for them and tried to amuse them in every way, dancing and rioting and submitting to every kind of licentiousness; he was himself naturally vulgar, getting drunk every day and delighting in those pursuits which tended in that direction and in those men, the so-called gallants, who said and did laughable things. And so he won most Thessalians who consorted with him by parties rather than by presents.²⁶

Thus Philip, by observing and sharing the laxity and the moral weakness of the Thessalians, achieved an easy victory. He is, in fact, the great illustration of what Theopompus felt to be the disparity between personal morality and practical success. To be sure, Theopompus tends to make his evaluations and comments more by implication than by explicit remarks. But running throughout his work is the notion that the man most skilled in the arts of corruption is the man who achieves the greatest success. As Murray saw, this is probably the meaning of his comment in the so-called "Encomium of Philip" (F 256) that "if Philip should choose to abide by the same habits, he would rule all of Europe."²⁷ His habits—drunkenness, licentiousness, extravagance, flattery, incontinence, perversion, all the artifices of corruption—would assure him a glorious triumph in the Europe of his day.

It is this disparity between moral excellence and political success that draws Theopompus' attention to Philip. Far from being his hero, he is the symbol of what seems to him wrong with the age, and it is this reason, not admiration, that leads him to set Philip at the center of his work and even name it after him. To Theopompus, Philip is the great paradigm, the engine of corruption, that draws evil to itself and destroys whatever good it finds:

. . . his companions were men who had rushed to his side from very many quarters; some were from the land to which he himself belonged, others were from Thessaly, still others were from the rest of Greece, selected not for their supreme merit; on the contrary,

²⁶ Athenaeus, *Deip.* 6, 260bc, transl. C. B. Gulick in LCL (Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* III [Cambridge (Mass.) 1929] p.171).

²⁷ G. Murray, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 162.

nearly every man in the Greek or barbarian world of a lecherous, loathsome, or ruffianly character flocked to Macedonia and won the title of "companions of Philip". And even supposing that one of them was not of this sort when he came, he soon became like all the rest. . . .²⁸

The note of disillusionment that sounds here recurs time and time again in the fragments of the *Philippica*. It is the voice not of the hero-worshipper but of a man who has experienced evil and drawn from that experience the most embittered conclusions about human nature, a man who might say of the subject of his history, as Motley did of another Philip, "If there are vices . . . from which he was exempt, it is because it is not permitted by human nature to attain perfection even in evil."²⁹

IV

The preceding sections of this paper may seem to some a needless defence of a position already adopted by Gilbert Murray. There is, however, a justification in reasserting Murray's view not simply because it has frequently been slighted or rejected in recent scholarship, but also because it makes possible a far surer consensus on the nature of the *Philippica* and its place in ancient historiography than now prevails. The next step in the inquiry is to consider Theopompus' political views as expressed in the *Philippica* in order to determine whether he advocated any political program or espoused any consistent position.

It will be well to begin by defining exactly the question at issue. This is not whether Theopompus had any consistent moral principles. The fragments make it abundantly clear, and almost all commentators are agreed, that Theopompus believed in sobriety, honesty, continence, avoidance of any excess in pleasure—in short in all the classical virtues. The issue is whether he believed any particular political program would attain these ideals and advocated that system in his writing. The answer to this question is most likely to be found in those fragments in which Theopompus praises individuals, states or institutions. An examination of these passages should make clear

²⁸ F 224 = Ath. *Deip.* 4, 166F et seq. (*op.cit.*, *supra*, n.26, vol. II).

²⁹ Quoted in E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York 1963) 99.

whether Theopompus' praise is given simply for personal uprightness or whether he espouses a consistent political view.

Since most commentators,³⁰ again with the notable exception of Gilbert Murray, agree that Theopompus was an admirer of Sparta, it might be thought that the Spartan form of government constituted a political ideal for him. A collective hero, a state or a form of government, might be substituted for a personal hero in the interpretation of the *Philippica*. An examination, then, of Theopompus' attitudes towards Sparta may help to clarify the question of his political standpoint.

What is surprising in any survey of the fragments concerning Sparta is the absence of any generalized praise of the Spartan system or any recommendation of it as a political ideal. The view that Theopompus was "pro-Spartan" rests not on any explicit statement but on three other bases:

1. the fact that he praises a number of Spartans in his writings,
2. a biographical argument based on the story in Photius (τ 2) that he and his father were exiled from Chios because his father was found guilty of *laconism*, and
3. the argument advanced by von Fritz that "The pro-Spartan elements in Plato's political theory . . . were bound to appeal to Theopompus. For this reason he praises Hermias for his adherence to Platonic principles."³¹

Let us consider each of these three arguments.

The statement by von Fritz is based on one fragment (F 250), badly corrupt, again not from the *Philippica*. It deserves a closer look:

The same author (*sc.* Theopompus) also records the reputation which Hermias won for himself: . . . (text mutilated) . . . having become genteel and cultured. And though he was a barbarian, he studied Philosophy with the Platonists; likewise, though he was a slave, he competed in the festivals with costly horse teams, and though he possessed but a tiny and rocky country, he acquired the reputation . . . (text mutilated) . . .

From this von Fritz concludes that Theopompus praised Hermias and

³⁰ This view is adopted, for example, by Momigliano in his article (*supra* n.4) and by von Fritz, *AHR* (*supra* n.3) 780-83.

³¹ von Fritz (*supra* n.3) 769, *cf.* 777. On Theopompus' treatment of Hermias, see D. E. W. Wormell, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 57-92.

admired Platonic political theory, even though elsewhere (F 259) he says that most of Plato's dialogues were useless, false and plagiarized—even though in the *Philippica* (F 291) he explicitly and severely condemns Hermias. According to von Fritz, Theopompus is a man of frequent and glaring contradictions, one moment holding Hermias up as a model, the next roundly condemning him. In fact, however, the fragment just quoted is no tribute to Hermias, but the account of a barbarian social climber who attempted to create a veneer of Hellenic respectability. Nor is there any mention of his "adherence to Platonic principles." Since the other fragments which allude to Plato (F 259, 294, 295, 275, 359) have nothing to say in the philosopher's favor, it would be unwarranted to conclude that Theopompus admired this man, his philosophy or his alleged political ideal, Sparta.

The biography of Photius is an equally unsatisfactory basis for concluding that he was an admirer of the Spartan political system. Photius (τ 2) says that he and his father went into exile when his father was convicted of *λακωνισμός*—favoring the cause of Lacedaemon. There is no mention of Theopompus' complicity in his father's activities, nor is the event dated with any precision. Photius simply says, "he was restored to his fatherland after the death of his father, when King Alexander of Macedon arranged the return through his letters to the Chians" (333/2 B.C.). It would be natural to suppose that Theopompus was quite young when his father got into trouble and was forced to leave with him. But even if it could be shown that he was a mature man when he left and had collaborated with his father, it would not follow that the Spartan form of government served as a political ideal in his published works.

To show that Theopompus' writings expressed admiration of the Spartan constitution we must turn to his works, or more precisely to the praise he accords individual Spartans. In the *Hellenica*, for instance, Theopompus is clearly much impressed by Lysander (F 20), though it is far from clear that he retained the same feeling in the *Philippica*.³² In any event, the praise of Lysander is a personal one and commends his moderation and restraint without revealing any general admiration for the Spartan system.

Similarly, Agesilaus receives Theopompus' approbation (F 22, 106, 107) for his ability to control his appetites. But he is also the subject of

³² See F 332, which might be criticism of Lysander as a dangerous innovator.

passages which are more objectively if not openly critical (F 240 and 323). Once again the fragments provide little basis to conclude that Theopompus was an admirer of the Spartan political system.

Theopompus, in fact, seems quite aware of the weaknesses of that system. He knows that not all Spartans are models of moral virtue and restraint, and several, including King Archidamus (F 232), are sharply criticized. He recognizes the changes that were taking place in the Sparta of his own day and notes the tendency towards strife and faction (F 240). Nor does the Lacedaemonian disposition to bribe (F 249) and be bribed (F 85) escape his notice. The most that can be said of his attitude to Sparta is that a few of his infrequent words of praise are directed to Spartans and that he knows that the Spartans have a reputation for moral discipline, even if all Spartans do not live up to it.

In short, the argument that Theopompus found in fourth-century Sparta his political ideal does not hold up. Nor are other arguments much better. It is evident he disliked democracy—the digression on the demagogues in Book 10 makes that clear, as does F 62. But it does not therefore follow that he admired oligarchy. In F 117, indeed, he points out the dangers of such a system. Tyranny fares no better. The only tyrant that he has any praise for is Cleomis or Cleomenes, who (F 227):

tied up in sacks the procuresses who were in the habit of seducing well-born women of the free class, as well as three or four of the most conspicuous harlots, and ordered them to be drowned in the sea.

Theopompus seems to admire this Draconic and illegal act, but his criticisms of tyrants in other passages (F 185, 187, 188) are a warning not to conclude that he is an admirer of tyranny as a political institution.

If no political system of his own day could win Theopompus' approval, did he find a political ideal in some earlier period? Was he, as von Fritz thought, a reactionary, "a man who not only dreamt of the good old times when there had been a strict order and a hierarchic society, but who had a very definite idea as to how and in what way only this dream of his could be made again to come true. He obviously thought that under existing conditions only a strong man with an iron hand would be able to bring back the order which he

desired with all his heart.”³³ It is true that Theopompus shows no love of change or innovation. But if he was a true reactionary there are but few signs of it among the fragments. Apart from his epitome of Herodotus, his interest in periods before the fourth century seems limited to digressions scattered here and there through the *Hellenica* and the *Philippica*. Some have assumed that the most famous of these, “On the Demagogues” in the tenth book of the *Philippica*, expressed some admiration for fifth-century Sparta, but apart from a few rather ambiguous phrases about two fourth-century Athenian statesmen (F 97, 99), the fragments from this excursus contain scarcely a favorable word about anything. Certainly Theopompus did not praise what others have sometimes regarded as “the golden age of Periclean Athens.” Rather the fragments suggest that he was skeptical about the claims made for earlier periods and that when he glances to the past he finds it little better than the present, though less frightening than the future. Thus the view that he was a reactionary must be abandoned for lack of evidence.

What then is to be concluded about Theopompus’ political philosophy? Is his a history devoid not only of heroes but also of any consistent principles? Can any consistency be seen in this sprawling mammoth the *Philippica*, 58 books named after, and centred about, a man he did not admire?

V

Virginia Woolf has called Greek “the impersonal literature.” The characterization applies well to many authors, but in the case of Theopompus it fails almost totally. His interest first and foremost is *personal* morality, the actions of individuals that he, as a historian trained in epideictic oratory, can praise or condemn. His contemporary Ephorus and many other Greek historians had shared this interest but with Theopompus it takes on a distinctive form. Before him Greek historical writing had consisted largely of narratives of individual cities, such as the *Atthides*, or of a single action, such as Herodotus’ account of the Persian war or Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian war, or of a given span of years, such as Xenophon’s *Hellenica*. Theopompus made a new departure when he decided to

³³ von Fritz, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 778.

focus not on a city, an action or a time but on one man. It was a brilliant innovation boldly proclaimed in the title of the work. History would never be quite the same again, for through this step, Theopompus had made possible a new variety of the genre, a personal, almost a biographical, history.

The new form had new rules—not that it required its practitioner to admire or praise the central figure in the work. The writer could still adopt the Thucydidean pose of objectivity and dispassion. He might even claim, if challenged, that he was still primarily concerned with the *political* effects of personal morality, just as Thucydides had been (2.65.8) when he noted the connection between Pericles' incorruptibility and his political success. But these protestations could not conceal important innovations—the examination of personal morality had become more searching and the range of topics considered suitable for discussion in history had been greatly expanded. In Thucydides, even in Xenophon, relatively little is heard of the sexual conduct, the use or abuse of food and wine, the frugality or extravagance of the major figures. Theopompus evidently showed a considerable concern with precisely these topics. When later critics turned to Theopompus, it was this which they noted and considered his distinctive feature. These are comments Dionysius of Halicarnassus set down in the first century B.C.:

The crowning accomplishment of his works is the distinctiveness which no one either before or after has so thoroughly and movingly accomplished. Of what does this consist? It is to see and express in each action not only the things that are clear to all observers but to examine also the hidden motives of actions and actors and all the states of the soul which are not easily discovered by most men, and to reveal all the mysteries of seeming virtue and undiscovered vice. Indeed it seems to me that the fabled examination in Hades of souls who have been separated from their bodies before the judges of that dread place is not so exacting as that in the writing of Theopompus. For this reason he has a reputation of being vicious, and adding certain unnecessary matters about distinguished personages to those more appropriate strictures. . . .³⁴

Thus a change in the structure and organization of history brought with it a change in its boundaries. History moved closer to the still

³⁴ D.H. *Pomp.* 6, 785R = *FGrHist* 115 τ 20a §§ 7–8.

inchoate art of biography. Its goal need no longer be limited to the explanation of a great action or the proper chronicling of a city, area or era, but could now include the evaluation of personal actions, feelings and motives. If in the old history it had been permitted to judge a man solely on his political effectiveness, in the new it was possible to condemn him solely for the secret failings of his inner life.

Under such exacting examination few men could stand. No individual, no age, no state was uncontaminated by some base motive or unworthy action. Whatever ideal is to be found in a work of this sort is not of this world but of lands imagined and not discovered. Thus history becomes not only personal but mythic. The two epithets are complementary, for it is those very qualities which are so sadly lacking in the personal lives of the individuals he described that are found in the city "Saintsbury" (*Εὐσεβής*) far beyond the river Ocean on the only true continent (F 75). In that land men lead their lives in peace and unfathomed wealth, harvesting crops from soil that has never been touched by plows nor trodden by oxen. There men live in health and die with a smile on their lips. The gods recognize the justice of the inhabitants of this city and see fit to walk among them. But in the real world of power politics, of cities—their rivalries, factions and disputes, of ambition, lust and self-seeking—in the world, that is, of Philip of Macedon—the gods seem far away and men, not least Philip, full of a passionate depravity that simultaneously fascinates and repels. Theopompus was revolted by the debauchery he saw or imagined he saw in contemporary life, yet was drawn on to paint it, fully, vividly. Sometimes, as in his description of the sexual practices at Etruscan drinking parties (F 204) his fragments read like the notebooks of a voyeur or the sermons of a cleric more eloquent in describing the vices that lead to damnation than the rewards which attend virtue. It is evil which fascinates and wins the unintended compliment of attention. So Philip, though Theopompus felt no admiration for him, could attain a central place and even usurp the title of his greatest work.

It is not surprising, then, to find in the *Philippica* an alternation between the personal and the mythic, between the realistic and the Utopian,³⁵ between indignant virtue and triumphant vice. The tone of the work shows a corresponding variation from a childlike sim-

³⁵ On Theopompus' Utopianism, see E. Rhode, "Zum griechischen Roman," *Kleine Schriften* II, 10f (= *RhM* 48 [1893] 111f).

plicity at tales of wonders to a vitriolic cynicism at the pretensions and professions of the world. Theopompus' new history is history in tension. It speaks about the age as well as about its author, about a time of transition when the old forms of politics and morality are giving way to new. Caught in the midst of this age, Theopompus could look neither forward nor back. He is a man torn between a past that he knows cannot be idealized and a future that seems to promise only unrelieved degeneracy. This is the source of his misery, his pessimism, but also of the power that even today can be found in the broken remains of his work.³⁶

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
January, 1967

³⁶ Much of the work done on this article was done while I was on leave from the University of Michigan as a junior fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. I am indebted to both these institutions for the leisure to study Theopompus, and to J. V. A. Fine and T. J. Luce, who read an early draft of these comments.