

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MESSENIACA OF RHIANUS OF BENE

The nine fragments of Rhianus which can with certainty be included in his *Messeniacae* make a basis for conjecture about the contents of the epic. Of the five mentions in Stephanus four refer to Peloponnese and one to Rhodes, which was named in the sixth book. Pausanias, whose sources for the Messenian wars conflate several accounts including those of Rhianus himself and of the prose writer Myron of Priene, shows that Rhianus's hero Aristomenes was not said in the poem to have fought in the second Messenian war: indeed Pausanias expressly disagreed with the statement of Rhianus that the war of Aristomenes was fought when Leotychides was king of Sparta¹. We know of no Messenian war of the period of Leotychides I, but Plato (*Laws* 692 D, 698 D-E) preserved a tradition of a war fought at the time of the battle of Marathon. The evidence that Rhianus believed Aristomenes to have fought at the time of Leotychides II may profitably be examined in the context of Spartan troubles in Peloponnese in the early fifth century. The lines

*οὐρεος ἀργεννοῖο περὶ πύχας ἔστρατόωνιο
χείματά τε ποίας τε δύω καὶ εἴκοσι πάσας* (FG Hist 265 F 44)

show that Rhianus mentioned a twenty years war, as Tyrtaeus did before him, but there is no evidence that Rhianus made his hero Aristomenes fight in it. The couplet probably refers back to the First Messenian war in which the Spartans were led by the kings Polydorus and Theopompus in the second half of the eighth century BC.

Plato's mention of Messenian unrest at the time of Marathon has been connected with the work of the exiled king Cleomenes in uniting the Arcadians by oath prior to his return to Sparta. The growth of an Arcadian League is illustrated by its coinage of the early fifth century, which suggests that Cleomenes's anti-Spartan activities were initially successful². But the king's

¹) Pausanias IV, 15.2. F. Jacoby, *F. Gr. Hist.* 265 F 43.

²) W. P. Wallace. *J.H.S.* LXXIV (1954), pp. 32 - 35.

return home and his subsequent death dashed the Arcadians' hopes of united opposition to Sparta. Not long afterwards ca. 489 - 8 the tyrant Anaxilas of Rhegium settled Messenian refugees at Zancle³, where they had fled after the failure of their revolt. The Spartan dedication at Olympia for victory over their enemies appears from the letter forms to belong to the beginning of the fifth century, and supports the evidence for a Messenian war about that time⁴.

The inference from the notice of Mount Atabyrion in Stephanus that Rhianus connected his hero with Rhodes at a late stage in the poem is justified by the account of Pausanias in which Aristomenes after refusing to lead the colony to Zancle, met Damagetas the Rhodian at Delphi and gave him his daughter in marriage; Aristomenes then went with his daughter to Rhodes. Thence, adds Pausanias, to be as consistent as possible with his dating of Aristomenes in the second Messenian war, he proposed to go to Sardis to Ardys son of Gyges and to Phraortes at Ecbatana: journeys which Pausanias could not have found in the poem of Rhianus unless it was very anachronistic⁵. The fragments of Rhianus allow us only to infer that Aristomenes was associated in the poem with Rhodes, possibly in a prophecy about his future movements. Diagoras the son of Damagetas was the subject of Pindar's seventh Olympian, but it is not said in that poem that Aristomenes's daughter was the mother of Diagoras. Pindar recalled Diagoras's successful contest in Arcadia and invoked Zeus Atabyrios, but these hints cannot be taken as allusions to the career of Aristomenes. There was, however, a cult of an Aristomenes in Rhodes⁶, and an Aristomenes was a Rhodian athlete in the second century BC⁷. Hence Rhianus's reference to Rhodes may be based on a tradition that Aristomenes came to the island after his flight from Messenia⁸.

Pausanias (IV. 24,1) recalled the marriages of Aristomenes's family with Arcadians. One married Damothoidas the Lepreate, another Theopompus of Heraea, and his sister Hagnagora went

³) E. S. G. Robinson. J.H.S. LXVI (1946), pp. 13 - 21.

⁴) L. H. Jeffery. J.H.S. LXIX (1949), pp. 26 - 30.

⁵) Pausanias IV, 24.2.

⁶) IG XII 1, 8.

⁷) Pausanias V, 21.10.

⁸) Wilamowitz. Pindaros. 1922. p. 361.

to live with Tharyx of Phigaleia. Damothoidas cannot be due to Rhianus because the name will not scan in an hexameter, but Theopompus belongs to a family famous in the late sixth and early fifth centuries for its athletic successes⁹, and Tharyx is probably an ancestor of the Phigaleian wrestler Tharycidas¹⁰. The marriages are appropriate to the period about 490 BC, when Messenia and the Arcadian League were uniting against Sparta. Mantinea, Sparta's friend, is ignored and Tegea which had finally been suppressed in the middle of the sixth century goes unmentioned. The tiny canton of Heraea, on the other hand, was minting at the beginning of the fifth century coins with the legend Ἀραδικόν; her activity suggests that she was the centre of the league¹¹, and an alliance between her leading athlete and the daughter of the Messenian champion would have been to the political advantage of both parties. Thus the mentions of Tharyx and Theopompus in Pausanias are probably due to Rhianus, whose early life in a Cretan palaestra would have encouraged him to make athletes prominent figures in his epic. The verse from the fifth book

τὴν μὲν ἀνήγει' ἄκοιτιν ἐπὶ κροναῆν Φιγάλειαν (F 40)

confirms that Tharyx was mentioned in the poem.

According to Herodotus (VI, 107) the Lacedaemonians were late for the battle of Marathon because they awaited the full moon before setting out. The delay may have been caused by Messenian trouble which the Spartans desired to conceal from Herodotus; but even if the need to wait for the full moon was offered as an excuse, the delay could in fact have been made necessary by a festival held at Sparta when the Messenians were in revolt. A most important festival at Sparta, during which even military operations were suspended, was the Hyacinthia in the month of Hecatombaeon. The Spartans delayed before leaving for Plataea because the festival was in progress (Hdt. IX, 7), and the Amyclaeans according to Xenophon always returned

⁹) P — W. RE VIII. i. Column 414. s. v. Heraia. (Bölte). For the stemma see H. von Gaertringen. Hira und Andania. 71 Winckelmannsprogramm. Berlin 1911, p. 12.

¹⁰) F. Jacoby. F. Gr. Hist IIIa Commentary p. 183, l. 29.

¹¹) cf. W. P. Wallace. J.H.S. LXXIV (1954) p. 33.

home for the Hyacinthia, even when campaigning abroad¹². Thus the festival which prevented the Spartans from arriving in time for Marathon was probably the Hyacinthia; they may have held it while the Messenian revolt was in progress.

In the narrative of Pausanias Aristomenes is captured by Lyctian archers from Crete during a forty day truce at the time of the Hyacinthia. The Cretans, who were not affected by the truce, may have been mentioned by Rhianus for their local interest, but Cretan mercenaries are common enough in the fifth century. Their presence in Messenia would have allowed the Spartans to continue operations against the Messenians while the Hyacinthia were being celebrated. A forty day truce, being longer than the festival itself, would have permitted some Spartans to hasten to Attica in three days (Hdt. VI. 120), to view the field of Marathon, and to return at once to resume the fight against the Messenians with their full army. The mention of the forty day truce, the Cretan archers, and the Hyacinthia suits the Marathon period well, and probably was taken from Rhianus by Pausanias or his source.

To conclude, the Messeniaca of Rhianus probably mentioned the following episodes: A fight at Ira (F 38), the Hyacinthian truce, the marriages of Aristomenes's female relatives to Arcadian nobles and the flight to Rhodes. The poem may also have had something to say about the activities of Cleomenes in Arcadia, since they were contemporary with the plot of the poem, and about his return to Sparta. The visit of Aristomenes to Delphi may also have been described, because some device would have been needed to connect the hero with Rhodes. There is no evidence at all that Rhianus described a long campaign including the battle of the Great Trench; his motive was to praise his hero as a second Achilles rather than to write a chronicle of events about 490 BC. Rhianus appears to have been closer in the construction of his plot to Homer than to the Cyclic poets, as we may expect from a poet who was also a good Homeric scholar. Thus it is unlikely either in the poem or in fact that there was a long struggle against Arcadia and Messenia at the

¹²) Xen. Hell. IV, 5. II. M. P. Nilsson. Griechische Feste. Leipzig 1906, 129 ff.

beginning of the fifth century; but if Aristomenes lived and fought amongst the Messenians and Arcadians against Sparta at the time of Marathon, his epic struggle as it appears from the fragments of Rhianus's poem helps to explain the military events of that period, and the growth of the Arcadian league.

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