

ANDROTION'S VIEW OF SOLON'S *SEISACHTHEIA*

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And yet there are some who have written, of whom one is Androtion, that the poor were well pleased being relieved not by a cancellation of debts but by a moderateness of interest rates and they gave the name "*seisachtheia*" to this kindness and to the increase of the measures and the value of the currency that occurred at the same time. For he made the *mina* of one hundred drachmas, whereas it had previously weighed seventy, so that since they paid the same in number but less in value, the debtors received great help, while the creditors were in no way harmed.¹

The fact that even in the fourth century B.C. there was a difference of opinion on the nature of the *seisachtheia* has not helped to resolve confusion amongst modern scholars. There have even been those who in desperation argued that Androtion was right and there was no cancellation of debts at all.² Their voice has been silenced and Aristotle's account is accepted.³ But Androtion's version has not been allowed to fade away gracefully. His mistake has been turned to good account and scholars have learned much about fourth-century Athenian politics from this fragment.

These scholars tell us that the only possible reason Androtion could have had for disagreeing with the traditional account was political bias.⁴

¹Plut. *Solon* 15.2 = Androtion, *FGrHist* 324 F 34. This is obviously in conflict with *Ath. Pol.* 6.1, where we are told that the *seisachtheia* was a cancellation of all debts "both public and private." Unfortunately it is not exactly clear what Androtion was saying, for, if we accept the emendation *τιμῆς* for *τιμῆν* proposed by Sintenis (perhaps with the addition of the article suggested by Jacoby, *FGrHist* 3b Suppl. 2.132 n. 3), Androtion seems to say at one time that the value of the currency was increased but at another that it was decreased. It is, however, difficult to accept the manuscript reading *τιμῆν*, for then Androtion would be saying that they called "the value of the currency" a *seisachtheia*. There is probably some corruption in the manuscript, but clearly Plutarch understood Androtion to mean that the currency was devalued and that this was part of the *seisachtheia*. Consequently this is what modern scholars believe Androtion to mean. For the emendation of 73 to 70 see T. Reinach, *Hermes* 63 (1928) 238.

²There is a comprehensive bibliography of this debate in K. Kraft, "Zur Übersetzung und Interpretation von Aristoteles, *Athenaion Politeia*, Kap. 10," *JNG* 10 (1959-60) 21 n. 1.

³Most forcibly expressed by C. Kraay, *Essays in Greek Coinage presented to Stanley Robinson* (Oxford 1968) 9: "There can be little doubt which version is to be preferred; Aristotle's, as we have seen, is clear and consistent: Androtion's makes economic nonsense." See also Busolt-Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde* (Munich 1920-26) 1.95; F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 3b Suppl. 1.145-146 and K. Kraft (above, note 2) 27 f.

⁴This way of thinking is a natural result of the fact that study of the Atthidographers in the last eighty years has been merely a by-product of source-criticism of the *Ath. Pol.*

Clearly, they argue, Androtion was trying to absolve Solon from responsibility for such a radical reform as the cancellation of debts.⁵ In doing this he was propagandizing for the views of the conservatives in fourth-century Athens.⁶ Solon's reforms had become political capital in the class warfare of the fourth century, and the conservatives felt obliged to eliminate this precedent from their history. Consequently, Androtion, the conservative historian,⁷ distorted history for political purposes. Thus

(cf. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* [Oxford 1952] 30) and source-criticism of the *Ath. Pol.* has long been a study of its biases. This has culminated in Jacoby's theory that Kleidemos wrote a democratically biased *Atthis* and Androtion answered him with an *Atthis* that was moderately conservative in its bias. Within this context Androtion's view of the *seisachtheia* was seen to have political bias from very early on. Most scholars found it anti-democratic at the least, and more commonly oligarchic or conservative. See, for example, G. Mathieu, *Aristote: Constitution d'Athènes* (Paris 1915) 116; Busolt-Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde* 1.94-95; H. Bloch, "Historical Literature of the Fourth Century, II, Notes on the *Atthis* of Androtion," *HSCP* Suppl. 1 (1940) 352; L. Pearson, *The Local Historians of Attica* (Philadelphia 1942) 83; F. Jacoby, *Atthis* (Oxford 1949) 123, 213, 384 n. 30, 386 n. 61; J. Day and M. Chambers, *Aristotle's History of Athenian Democracy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1962) 17. On the other hand Wilamowitz, *Aristoteles und Athen* (Berlin 1893) 1.42, saw democratic bias in the account of Androtion, and F. Adcock, "The Source of the Solonian Chapters of the *Athenaion Politeia*," *Klio* 12 (1912) 1-16, identified Androtion as the democratic source behind Aristotle's account of Solon. I find the current exclusively political interpretation of the purpose of *Atthidography* in the fourth century unconvincing, as I intend to show in a more general article on the *Atthis*.

⁵See especially F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 3b Suppl. 1.145: "This interpretation absolves Solon from the revolutionary measure of a confiscation of property, a menacing idea which alarmed the bourgeoisie of the fourth century. The precedent occurring in their own history had to be eliminated." This statement is typical of the rather slack way this subject has been treated. Solon specifically resisted confiscation of property, so there was no precedent to be eliminated. Jacoby's enthusiasm has carried him away. Also carried away by this theme is H. Bloch (above, note 4) 352, who states that Androtion's "euphemistic description of Solon's *σεισάχθεια* culminates in the assertion that *χρεῶν ἀποκοπή* was alien to the *πάτριος πολιτεία*." There is nothing in Plutarch to suggest that Androtion said anything of the sort.

⁶See Jacoby, as cited in note 5 above, and also throughout his Introduction to Androtion in *FGrHist* 3b Suppl. 1. In foreign policy the conservatives believed in the national war against Persia. At home they looked to Theramenes as their ideal, believed in the constitution of the 5000 (that is, where the holding of magistracies was limited to the *ὄπλα παρεχόμενοι* and was not remunerated), wanted to see the resurrection of the old powers of the Areiopagos, and resisted any efforts to tamper with the rights of property ownership.

⁷Jacoby actually calls him a "moderate conservative." In the case of fragment 34 his conservativeness is seen in the fact that he denied Solon the *seisachtheia* in its full sense, while his acknowledgement that Solon's action pleased the people is considered a moderation of the conservative position. Wilamowitz, *Aristoteles und Athen* 1.42, also noted that Androtion's account called Solon's reforms "volksfreundlich." For him, of course, this was only natural, since he thought the *Atthis* as a whole was democratically inclined.

this fragment provides us with an insight into the political debate of the fourth century and becomes one of the main arguments for the theory that the *Atthis* was politically motivated.⁸

The popularity of the above argument is largely based on the prevalent notion that social revolution was a particularly acute problem in the fourth century. The two main demands of social revolutionaries were redistribution of property and cancellation of debts.⁹ For this reason, it is argued, Solon's reforms first became a tool of politicians in the fourth century. It is true, as Fuks has shown,¹⁰ that the 360's saw a recrudescence of this form of social discontent, which had been comparatively, though not entirely, quiescent in the fifth and early fourth century. Although, clearly, the third century was the great century for strife between rich and poor, he is right in seeing the beginnings of this period of turmoil in the second quarter of the fourth. Not only the great mass uprising at Argos in 370,¹¹ but also the demands of the democrats at Syracuse in 356¹² testify to this. He is also right, however, in pointing out that it is not only under democracies that these reforms take place. They are particularly common under tyrants¹³—Agathokles in Syracuse, Apollodoros at Kassandreia, Klearchos in Herakleia Pontika—or under heads of non-democratic states¹⁴—Agis, Kleomenes, and Nabis in Sparta.¹⁵ In

⁸This view is best propounded by Jacoby in *Atthis* 71–79. In Androtion's case it rests upon Jacoby's interpretation of his background and political career as that of a moderate conservative, upon fr. 6 (on ostracism), upon fr. 34 (on Solon's *seisachtheia*), and upon what one might call a ghost fragment supplied as Aristotle's source for *Ath. Pol.* 23 (the action of the Areiopagos before Salamis). Of these the last is no evidence at all, while the idea that Androtion divorced ostracism from the reforms of Kleisthenes has been convincingly refuted, though in different ways, by K. J. Dover, "Androtion on Ostracism," *CR* 13 (1963) 256–257 and J. J. Keaney, "The Text of Androtion F 6 and the Origin of Ostracism," *Historia* 19 (1970) 1–11. An examination of Androtion's political career does not support Jacoby's interpretation, as I intend to show elsewhere. Thus Androtion's view of Solon's *seisachtheia* becomes the only argument for the theory. I exclude the evidence from Aristotle's *Ath. Pol.*, since the common assumption that Androtion is the source of the conservative bias in that work is acceptable only if it can be shown on independent grounds that his *Atthis* was conservatively biased.

⁹The basic study of the social-revolutionary movements in antiquity is R. von Pöhlmann's *Geschichte der sozialen Frage und des Sozialismus in der antiken Welt*³ (Munich 1925). See now D. Asheri, *Distribuzioni di Terre nell'antica Grecia* (Turin 1966) and A. Fuks, "Social Revolution in Greece in the Hellenistic Age," *Parola del Passato* 21 (1966) 437–448.

¹⁰*Op. cit.* (above, note 9) 439 n. 2.

¹¹Diod. Sik. 15.57.3–58.4.

¹²Plut. *Dion* 37.5–7; 48.5–6. See on this A. Fuks, "Redistribution of Land and Houses in Syracuse in 356 B.C., and its ideological Aspects," *CQ* 18 (1968) 207–223.

¹³Cf. Fuks (above, note 9) 443–444.

¹⁴Fuks (above, note 9) 442–443.

¹⁵Plut. *Agis* 8–10; *Kleomenes* 17. See Fuks, "Agis, Cleomenes and Equality," *CP* 57 (1962) 161–166.

fact, he might have added that the demands of the Syracusan democrats in 356 had a fairly close precedent in the redistribution of land and houses in equal portions by the tyrant, Dionysios I, in 404.¹⁶ Fourth-century political theorists saw a close connection between these demands and *stasis*, out of which arose tyranny.¹⁷ The connection was not lost on Solon in the sixth century, who refused to redistribute land for that very reason.¹⁸

But while all this is significant for the history of social and economic unrest in the Hellenistic Age, we should not allow it to influence our interpretation of internal affairs in fourth-century Athens. For, as Fuks notes, "Athens is conspicuous by its absence from the map of social-revolutionary movements in the Hellenistic Age."¹⁹ One can go further. Not only is there no evidence for such a movement in fourth-century, or third-century, Athens, there is strong evidence to show that the *demos* was against it.

To understand the attitude of the Athenian *demos* of the fourth century to these demands it is necessary to look back to the period of the restored democracy in 403 B.C. At that time, when Dionysios was redistributing property in Syracuse, the Athenians, by contrast, distinguished themselves by not seeking a redistribution of land and by paying back jointly the debts incurred by both parties, rather than each paying back its own. Aristotle was impressed and attributed this, to him, quite exceptional behaviour to the desire for *homonoia* on both sides.²⁰ In this he is in agreement not only with Isokrates²¹ but also with Demosthenes.²²

The action of these Athenians at the end of the fifth century influenced the attitude of fourth-century Athenians towards "cancellation of debts" and "redistribution of land." This can be seen not only from the favour-

¹⁶Diod. Sik. 15.7.4-5. Naturally Dionysios kept the best for his friends.

¹⁷See particularly Isok. *Panath.* 259; Plato *Laws* 3.684d and 5.736c and *Resp.* 8.565c; Aristotle *Pol.* 5.1309 a. Plato (*Resp.* 8.565e-566a) gives a graphic description of the way a leader of the people grows into a tyrant by promising amongst other things a redistribution of the land and a cancellation of debts.

¹⁸*Ath. Pol.* 12.3.

¹⁹*Op. cit.* (above, note 9) 440 n. 3.

²⁰*Ath. Pol.* 40.3.

²¹Isok. *Areopagitikos* 68-69.

²²Dem. *Against Leptines* 11-12. The language of Demosthenes is so similar to that of Aristotle in the *Ath. Pol.* as to suggest they had a common source. This was noted by A. Boerner, *De rebus a Graecis inde ab anno 410 usque ad annum 403 a. Chr. n. gestis quaestiones historicae* (Diss. Göttingen 1894) 66-67. He inferred that the common source was an Attidographer but, if Jacoby's dates for Kleidemos and Androtion are correct, this is impossible, for neither had been published at the time of the speech *Against Leptines*. Those who accept Androtion as Aristotle's source for this whole period have overlooked this awkward passage.

able view taken of it by Isokrates, Demosthenes, and Aristotle, but also from the fact that the demos took an official stand against movements in these directions, as is evident from a passage in Andokides, *On the Mysteries*²³ and from the oath of the Heliasts, quoted by Demosthenes in his speech against Timokrates.²⁴

And, indeed, we should not be surprised that the majority of people in Athens were opposed to reforms affecting their property rights. A. H. M. Jones has well demonstrated the essentially middle-class nature of the democracy in fourth-century Athens and has attributed to this the stability of the constitution.²⁵ Athens, in short, was a conservative democracy. In view of this attitude on the part of the majority of the people, one should hardly expect that fourth-century politicians would speak in favour of these reforms and, indeed, we hear of none who did. The fact that they came from the propertied class and frequently from the wealthier segment of society²⁶ no doubt contributed to their reticence. Possession of property overrides political idology.

All this, of course, is well-established knowledge. In the case of Androtion's view of Solon's *seisachtheia*, however, it leads to the inescapable conclusion that the present interpretation is no longer tenable. There now appear to be no politicians to advocate the reforms the conservatives are said to be so worried about. Furthermore, the majority of the citizens are clearly conservative in this matter of property rights. An historian who tried to show that Solon did not commit these radical reforms need not expect to meet the disapproval of his fellow citizens on

²³And. 1.88: τὰς μὲν δίκας, ὧ ἄνδρες, καὶ τὰς διαίτας ἐποιήσατε κυρίας εἶναι, ὅποσαι ἐν δημοκρατουμένῃ (τῇ) πόλει ἐγένοντο, ὅπως μήτε χρεῶν ἀποκοπαί εἶεν μήτε δίκαι ἀνάδικοι γίνοντο, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἰδίων συμβολαίων αἱ πράξεις εἶεν.

²⁴Dem. 24.149. ψηφιοῦμαι κατὰ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰ ψηφίσματα τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῆς βουλῆς τῶν πεντακοσίων. Καὶ τύραννον οὐ ψηφιοῦμαι εἶναι οὐδ' ὀλιγαρχίαν. Οὐδ' ἔαν τις καταλύῃ τὸν δῆμον τὸν Ἀθηναίων ἢ λέγῃ ἢ ἐπιψηφίσῃ παρὰ ταῦτα, οὐ πείσομαι· οὐδὲ τῶν χρεῶν τῶν ἰδίων ἀποκοπὰς οὐδὲ γῆς ἀναδασμὸν τῆς Ἀθηναίων οὐδ' οἰκῶν κ.τ.λ. For a discussion of this oath see U. Kahrstedt, *Studien zum öffentlichen Recht Athens* (Stuttgart 1934) 1.73–76. Kahrstedt considers it an "Eid τῆς βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου," and in dating it to the beginning of the fourth century says "Die Zeit passt zum Inhalt: die Wiederkehr der Vorgänge von 411 und 404 soll unmöglich gemacht werden."

²⁵A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1960) 75–96, especially 91–92, where he also notes the absence of suggestions for γῆς ἀναδασμός or χρεῶν ἀποκοπή and considers this "readily understandable, in a society where property, and particularly land, was so widely distributed."

²⁶This point is made most emphatically by J. Sundwall, *Epigraphische Beiträge zur sozial-politischen Geschichte Athens im Zeitalter des Demosthenes* (Klio, Beiheft 4, 1906) *passim*. His methods have been criticised recently by J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford 1971) xix–xx. However, Davies' own conclusion, that although many of the large property-owners were generals or politicians many were nonentities, does not conflict with Sundwall's.

these grounds. Rather they might be offended at his tampering with well-established tradition, a tradition which, incidentally, provided equally good ammunition for those opposed to these reforms as for those who wanted them. In fact, if we are to apply the present interpretation consistently, we might as easily postulate the use, by the conservatives, of Solon's refusal to redistribute land as part of their propaganda. No such use is postulated, and none can be demonstrated. Nor for that matter is there evidence on the other side from the literature of the fourth century or from the later literature that derives from the fourth century that anyone ever invoked Solon's cancellation of debts as a precedent for such a reform in that century. Yet such a claim must be assumed, if it is to be argued that Androtion and his fellow conservatives felt the need to eliminate the precedent.²⁷ Thus the present interpretation is inconsistent and unconvincing, even on its own terms. When one considers, in addition, the nature of Athenian society in the fourth century, the idea that Androtion's view of Solon's *seisachtheia* was a distortion of history for the purposes of political propaganda ceases to have any appeal.

Thus, fragment 34 can no longer be seen as an indication of Androtion's conservative bias. For, even if it is argued that, although this fragment may not reflect conscious distortion for the conservative position, it can be used as an indication of Androtion's own feelings about "cancellation of debts" and "redistribution of land," we cannot, for that reason, accept that he was any the less democratic than any other politician of his own day. To look at it from the other side, we can no more imagine Demosthenes, the most famous so-called "radical democrat" of the time,²⁸ proposing either of these reforms than we can Androtion. In fact, if we want to follow this line of reasoning that sees in his interpretation of Solon's *seisachtheia* a reflection of his attitude to the social and economic problems of his own day, we should conclude that Androtion was something of a radical amongst politicians, since we must assume that he was

²⁷Cf. Jacoby, as quoted in note 5, above.

²⁸The prevalent interpretation of Demosthenes' political career is that he began as a member of the "conservative party," then led by Euboulos, but soon broke from it to become a "radical democrat." See, amongst others, F. Kahle, *De Demosthenis orationum Androtioneae Timocrateae Aristocrateae temporibus* (diss. Göttingen 1909) 32 f.; W. Jaeger, *Demosthenes: The Origin and Growth of his Policy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1938) 57, 76, and 225 n. 16 and Jacoby, *Atthis* 293 n. 20. I must confess that I do not subscribe to this view, but this is not important to my argument. The view is held by those (like Jacoby) who interpret Androtion's statement on the *seisachtheia* as political propaganda for the "moderate conservatives." For an interpretation of the politics of this period which I find more persuasive see G. L. Cawkwell, "Eubulus," *JHS* 83 (1963) 47-67. See also R. Sealey, *Essays in Greek Politics* (New York 1965) 164-182 and, on fourth-century politicians in general, S. Perlman, "The Politicians in the Athenian Democracy of the Fourth Century B.C.," *Athenaeum* 41 (1963) 327-355.

in favour of a devaluation of the currency,²⁹ never a move popular with conservatives. The conservative solution might perhaps be found in Isokrates—pack them all off abroad or find a war for them to fight.³⁰

I doubt that it is possible to delve any deeper into Androtion's attitude towards debt in his own time. It is true that his father became a state debtor,³¹ but this does not seem to have had any effect upon his outlook. His own behaviour is inconsistent. On the one hand he was vigorous in his prosecution of those who owed arrears of *eisphora* to the state in 356/5,³² but during his governorship of Arkesine in the years immediately preceding he loaned money to the people of that city and refused to charge any interest.³³ The truth is, of course, that Plutarch's garbled report of Androtion's theory is most unsatisfactory for our purposes, since he does not give us any of Androtion's arguments. Without those we are always in danger of misjudging Androtion.³⁴

It is not impossible, in fact, that we are straining too hard to find political significance in this fragment. There has always been available to us another, simpler, approach, which we have lost sight of in our search for the sources of the political biases in the *Athenaion Politeia*. That is that Androtion, like some modern scholars,³⁵ was dissatisfied with the tradition of a complete cancellation of debts and tried to understand the *seisachtheia* in an original manner, his only mistake being that he applied fourth-century economic conditions to sixth-century affairs.³⁶ Now that

²⁹I have used the word devaluation here and elsewhere because, if the last sentence of Plutarch's quotation reflects Androtion's thinking, clearly he was arguing that the value of the drachma was decreased. It now took 100 drachmas to make the mina (which presumably in his theory remained constant in value) instead of 70. A peasant who formerly owed ten drachmas would pay ten new drachmas, which was the equivalent of seven old ones. Thus the drachma was devalued. If, however, as Jacoby claims (*FGH Hist* 3b Suppl. 1.146), the modern idea of devaluation was "alien to antiquity, and was not even discussed in the financial difficulties of the fourth century," this should be an indication to us of how little we know of Androtion's argument and how greatly Plutarch's misunderstanding might have confused the issue. But if that is the case, we can hardly build any theories about Androtion's political bias upon fragment 34.

³⁰*Panegyrikos* 34 and 182; *On the Peace* 24. On this see Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London 1955) 154–156.

³¹Dem. 22.33, 56, 68; 24.125.

³²Dem. 22.42 f.; 24.160 f. The date is of no consequence to the present discussion. I intend to defend it elsewhere.

³³*IG* 12.7, no. 5 = Tod 152.

³⁴See note 1, above, for the textual difficulties and note 29 for the probable contamination of ideas. For an interesting attempt at understanding Androtion's theory see M. Miller, "Solon's Timetable," *Arethusa* 1 (1968) 70–73.

³⁵G. de Sanctis, 'Aθῆναι (Turin 1912) 206–7 found it difficult to believe that all public and private debts were cancelled. Cf. M. Mühl, "Solons sogenannte XPEON AΠΟΚΟΠΗ im Lichte der antiken Überlieferung," *RhM* 96 (1953) 214–223.

³⁶His mistake, of course, consisted in his association of Solon's *seisachtheia* with any kind of currency reform. On the present numismatic evidence this is too sophisticated

the idea that he was distorting history for the purposes of political propaganda has been shown to be untenable, the possibility that the chief motivation for his view of Solon's *seisachtheia* was scholarly originality cannot be overlooked.³⁷

In any case fragment 34 cannot be considered propaganda for the views of any particular group in fourth-century politics,³⁸ and Androtion can be acquitted of the charge of distorting history for political purposes.

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for Athens in 594 B.C. Recent theories on the beginning of Athenian coinage place it no earlier than 575 B.C. (C. M. Kraay, "The Archaic Owls of Athens," *NC* 16 [1956] 43-68) and possibly as late as the third quarter of the sixth century (W. P. Wallace, "The Early Coinages of Athens and Euboia," *NC* 2 [1962] 23-42). Even if we assume that the Athenians were using Aeginetan coinage, this, too, had not been in existence long enough to become pervasive. Debts must still have been in kind.

³⁷In fact, as I intend to argue in a more general article on the *Atthis*, there are reasons for seeing Androtion's *Atthis* more as the work of a scholar than that of a politician. That is not to say that he achieved complete objectivity, any more than any other historian, ancient or modern, but that the sort of distortion to be expected is more along the lines of a justification of his own part in contemporary affairs than a tendentious distortion of the past, the effect of which would have been lost in a work such as the *Atthis*.

³⁸Miller (above, note 34) argues that "Androtion's interpretation of the Solonian tradition is not sufficient to establish its author's apologetic stand-point." M. Mühl (above, note 35) is also sceptical of the theory of political bias behind this fragment.