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THEOPHRASTUS
CHARACTERS

HERODAS
MIMES

SOPHRON AND OTHER
MIME FRAGMENTS



Edited and Translated by

JEFFREY RUSTEN

I. C. CUNNINGHAM

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PREFATORY NOTE

This volume is a thoroughly revised and considerably altered version of the edition that was published in 1993. The text and translation of Theophrastus' *Characters* and of Herodas' *Mimes* have been corrected and revised by Jeffrey Rusten and Ian Cunningham respectively. Dr. Cunningham has added an edition and translation of the mimes of Sophron of Syracuse and of fragments of popular mime dating from the 2nd century B.C. to the 5th century A.D. The 1929 edition of Cercidas and the Choliambic Poets with translation by A. D. Knox that was included in the 1993 volume is omitted here; of the poets in Knox's collection, Hipponax and Ananius are now included in the volume of Greek Iambic Poetry edited and translated by D. E. Gerber.

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THEOPHRASTUS
CHARACTERS

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PREFACE

Theophrastus' *Characters* is a pleasant little book for the casual reader, but an enormously difficult one for the scholar; I would guess that most of its editors, even the likes of Casaubon, Korais, Immisch and company, and Diels, have begun their work with relish and confidence, but concluded with an apologetic feeling that there was much more to be done. I am certainly no exception. The manuscript tradition of the work is perhaps the most corrupt among classical Greek authors, almost every other sentence requiring some emendation. To produce a text that can be translated and read requires adopting more conjectures than a proper critical edition might normally allow. Such a full edition—and a repertory of conjectures—is very much needed, but not to be sought here: my notes on the Greek text are normally restricted to recording conjectures by modern scholars, and are thus very limited; manuscript readings are reported at all only in these cases, and are usually taken from Immisch's 1923 Teubner edition, which I judged to be most accurate.

Many allusions in the *Characters* to the daily life of Athens require explanation; so when necessary I have not hesitated to annotate the translation more (on 16, "Superstition," *much* more) than may be customary for a Loeb volume. My translations of the individual titles were

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chosen to suit the descriptions (“Griping,” “Sponging,” “Chiseling”) rather than to render a single Greek word; but the Additional Notes give an account of each trait’s literal meaning, and its treatment in ancient literature.

For the section numbers within each character I follow the standard numeration (Steinmetz, Navarre, Immisch), rather than Diels’ Oxford Classical Text.

For advice and suggestions I owe thanks to many more than I could name. But I cannot pass over Peter Bing, who lent me his notes from what must have been fascinating lectures on the *Characters* by the late Konrad Gaiser; William Fortenbaugh, not only for the splendid new edition of the fragments of Theophrastus but also for comments and hints on the Introduction; Rudolf Kassel, who introduced me to the dissertation on the *Characters* by Markus Stein, who in turn generously allowed me to use it in advance of publication and made countless acute corrections of my own work; and, especially, Zeph Stewart, for many hours of careful reading of my results, and painstaking criticism combined with unfailing encouragement.

Ithaca, New York
August 1992

Jeffrey Rusten

The reprint of 2002 has allowed the opportunity for some corrections and updates, deriving especially from Robin Lane Fox, “Theophrastus’ *Characters* and the Historian,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 42 (1996) 127–170, and from James Diggle (who is now preparing a new edition of the *Characters* with commentary).

INTRODUCTION

Theophrastus' range of interests almost matched that of his teacher Aristotle, from great works on botany,¹ studies on winds, weather, and many other topics in natural science, to logic and metaphysics, rhetoric and poetics, politics and ethics.² He would doubtless be astonished to learn that he is best remembered today for a little book only marginal to these studies and preserved only in a mutilated, perhaps abbreviated, form. Yet his *Characters* became a paradigm for European literature, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found translators and imitators in England, France, and Germany.

Before turning to its relatively recent influence, however, we must first look at its author's career, the character of the book itself, and its affinities with ancient ethical, comic, and rhetorical writings, as well as several difficult (perhaps insoluble) problems: how the book came into being, why the text is in such lamentable condition, and to what extent the method and substance of this book can

¹ *Inquiry into Plants*, ed. and tr. A. Hort (2 vols., Loeb Classical Library, 1916); *De Causis Plantarum*, ed. and tr. B. Einarson and G. K. K. Link (3 vols., Loeb Classical Library, 1976–1990).

² See the bibliography in Wehrli, "Der Peripatos" 475–476. (For abbreviations and works cited by author or short title only see the Bibliography.)

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be reconciled with what we know of the philosopher Theophrastus himself.

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Theophrastus was born in Eresus, on the island of Lesbos, ca. 370 B.C. He may have studied philosophy earlier, but at least by the age of 25 he began to work with Aristotle, who after the death of Plato had left Athens for the patronage of Hermias at Assos, a town near Theophrastus' home.³ Hermias was executed by the Persians in 341; the young man followed his master first to Macedonia and the court of Philip, then joined him on his return to Athens after 334, where he was recognized as Aristotle's preeminent student and designated successor.

Theophrastus' residence in Athens coincided with a turbulent period in its political history,⁴ some of which is mirrored in the *Characters*. Despite the power of Macedonia, the city remained democratic, under the leadership of Lycurgus, until his death in 324.⁵ The subsequent death of Alexander himself threw all into confusion, beginning with the Athenian uprising against Alexander's regent Antipater

³ For speculations on this period see Konrad Gaiser, *Theophrast in Assos* (Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985.3). See in general the sketch of the lives of Aristotle (by H. Flashar) and Theophrastus in Wehrli, "Der Peripatos" 230–234, 477, and Theophr. fr., Introd. pp. 1–2.

⁴ See W. S. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens* (London 1911) chapters 1–3, Claude Mossé, *Athens in Decline* (London 1973) chapter 5.

⁵ F. Mitchel, "Lykourgan Athens, 388–322," *Semple Lectures*, series 2 (Cincinnati 1970).

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in 322 (when Aristotle himself withdrew again from Athens, leaving his school behind, and died in Euboea). Athens' defeat by Antipater led to a new oligarchic constitution under the Athenian conservative Phocion, with a limitation on the number of citizens.⁶ But then Antipater's death (319) produced a further struggle among his heirs, and the remnants of Alexander's family, for control of Greece: his designated successor Polyperchon, in partnership with Alexander's half-brother Philip III Arridaïos, proclaimed the autonomy of all Greek states in exchange for their support. Democratic forces in Athens rallied to him, and Phocion was executed. But Polyperchon's power waned, and in 317 Antipater's son Cassander assumed control of Athens, which he placed under the control of Demetrius of Phaleron, a student of Aristotle and staunch supporter of Theophrastus. Demetrius fled to Egypt in 307, and Theophrastus was driven for a year into exile;⁷ but after his return he remained firmly established as the head of the most popular philosophical school in Athens until his death ca. 285 B.C.

STYLE, STRUCTURE, AND SETTING OF THE CHARACTERS

As preserved in the medieval manuscripts, the *Characters* consist of: a *Table of Contents* and a *Preface* explaining the

⁶ L. A. Trittle, *Phocion the Good* (London 1988).

⁷ Through a decree against non-Athenian heads of schools, moved by a certain Sophocles of Sounion. J. P. Lynch, *Aristotle's School* (Berkeley 1972) 103–104, Theophr. fr 1.38; cf. Alexis PCG fr. 99, with the commentary of W. G. Arnott (Cambridge 1996) 858–859.

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genesis and purpose of the whole collection; and *thirty chapters*, each with:

1) *Title*: a single-word personality trait, always ending in *-ia*;

2) *Definition* in abstract terms of this quality;

3) *Description*, the longest part of each chapter, introduced with the formula “the X man is the sort who . . .,” and continuing in a series of infinitives giving characteristic actions;

4) *Epilogue* (in some cases) in a more rhetorical style, with moralizing generalizations.

It is certain that two of these elements—the preface and the epilogues—are not by Theophrastus himself, being later (perhaps much later) additions to the text. Of the definitions, one (the first) is certainly a later addition, and several others which seem irrelevant to the descriptions they introduce, or seem to be taken from other sources, are probably interpolations as well. (For the reasons behind these assumptions, see pages 30–32 below.)

What remains at the heart of the work are the descriptions, which are priceless for several reasons. First, because of their style. Theophrastus was a master of Greek rhetoric both in theory and practice—he received his name (“the divine speaker”) from it, being originally called Tyrtamus (fr. 5A-6)—but here he disregards its constraints: there is no avoidance of hiatus, no logical or rhetorical figures or structures. An introductory formula “X is the sort who . . .” (τοιοῦτός τις, οἷος . . .)⁸ leads to an

⁸ For the style compare PCG Antiphanes fr. 166.6, and the treatise on letter writing ascribed to a certain Demetrius (R. Kassel, *Kleine Schriften* [Berlin 1991] 420–421).

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infinitive containing the characteristic act— usually qualified by a series of participles giving the circumstances— followed by another participle and infinitive, and then another and another (sometimes interrupted with *δεινὸς καὶ* . . . “he is also apt to . . .”) until the description ends. Not all scholars have found this style pleasing, and the attempt to account for its singularity has led to theories that it springs from lecture notes or a personal sketchbook, or even that it is the work of an excerptor, or a forgery utterly unrelated to Theophrastus; the only certain conclusion is that it is unique in Greek literature.⁹

Second, the setting is anything but timeless or idealizing, being unmistakably the Athens of the last few decades of the fourth century B.C., whose customs, institutions, and prejudices form the backdrop of every character’s actions. Only the fragments of contemporary Athenian comedies offer an equal insight into the city’s daily life.

Finally, the descriptions are equally distinctive as literary portraiture.¹⁰ They are never generalizations, but catalogues of vivid detail (some indeed so distinctive that they are difficult to interpret). We learn, for example, the exact words of the obsequious man, the boor, or the babbler, which gods the superstitious man placates on which days, how the chiseler avoids school fees, how the rumor-

⁹ Critics of its monotony include R. Porson and H. Sauppe (see Gomperz 5), but most others have been more generous: see especially Pasquali, “Sui caratteri” 47–56.

¹⁰ For the background see Ivo Bruns, *Das literarische Porträt der Griechen im fünften und vierten Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1896); comparisons between Theophrastus and the portraiture of Lysippus in T. B. L. Webster, *Art and Literature in Fourth Century Athens* (London 1956) 124–133.

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monger or the garrulous man finds an audience and the ungenerous man avoids one, which market vendors the shameless man franchises, how much he makes each day, and where he carries his earnings.

DATE OF THE *CHARACTERS*

Numerous allusions in the *Characters* themselves seem to offer hints about when they were composed.¹¹ The most tantalizing clue is in the gossip spread by the rumor-monger in *Characters* 8: he claims that Polyperchon and “the King” have defeated and captured Cassander, and that the current Athenian leadership is worried. C. Cichorius thought this rumor suited best the situation in Athens in late 319, when a decree of the new regent Polyperchon had encouraged Athens to restore its democracy, and Cassander appeared weak;¹² in that case the king will have been Philip Arridaios, and the worried Athenian leader, Phocion (Plutarch, *Phocion* 32.1, Diodorus 18.55–56).

Cichorius went on to argue that other chronological indications are consistent with 319 as well: thus *Characters* 23 assumes that the famine at Athens and the campaigns of Alexander are over, but that Antipater is still alive and in Macedon, which points to 326–3, 322–1, or 319. There is

¹¹ On dating *Characters* see A. Boegehold, “The Date of Theophrastus’ *Characters*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 90 (1959) 15–19; Stein, *Definition und Schilderung* 21–45; Robin Lane Fox, “Theophrastus’ *Characters* and the Historian,” *PCPS* 42 (1995) 127–170 (especially 134–138).

¹² See C. Cichorius, Introduction to the edition of the Leipzig Philological Society, lvii–lxii.

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mention of liturgies (23.6, 26.6), which were abolished by Demetrius of Phaleron (317–307) and not reinstated thereafter. The complaints of the authoritarian in *Characters* 26 seem to have been composed under a democracy—as do the democratic sentiments of the patron of scoundrels (29.5). But the fact that in 26.2 commissioners are being elected rather than chosen by lot (cf. Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 56.4) suggests a date after 322.¹³

But recent scholarship has endorsed other candidates for “the king” of *Characters* 8¹⁴ and Cichorius’ insistence that all 30 sketches were composed in 319 seems somewhat doubtful. It is intrinsically just as plausible that different characters have different dramatic dates, and the various sketches may have been composed over a period of 10–15 years.¹⁵

There are other features of the *Characters* which recall anecdotal evidence on the life and school of Theophrastus.

¹³ See Boegehold in TAPA 90:18, and Stein, *Definition und Schilderung*.

¹⁴ Alexander IV, or Heracles, in which case the nervous current ruler of Athens will be Demetrius of Phaleron (and in any case the story is a lie). A detailed review of all the possibilities in Stein, *Definition und Schilderung* 21–36. Christian Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Anthony* (Cambridge MA 1997) 123, prefers 317 B.C.; Lane Fox 309.

¹⁵ This seems a reasonable assumption, particularly since 319 was a year of constant crisis in Athens; the attempted prosecution of Theophrastus by the democrat Hagnonides (Diogenes Laertius 5.37) may belong to this year also (Boegehold in TAPA 90:17). Habicht suggests “the years 324–315 should be accepted as reasonable boundaries.” Lane Fox (PCPS 43:138) suggests even wider boundaries, from the lifetime of Alexander to 309.

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He and his students dressed rather well, and had a reputation for high living;¹⁶ it is therefore noteworthy that there are four varieties of stinginess, but none of extravagance (see the Additional Notes on *Characters* 9). His elegant manners and sophistication were well known; and we find in this work a number of types who lack social graces or make themselves foolish in society (see Additional Notes on *Characters* 4). He discussed sacrifice at length elsewhere (fr. 584A–585), and constantly employs it here to illustrate his types (9.2, 12.11, 15.5, 16 *passim*, 17.1, 21.7, 21.11, 22.4, 27.5); his father was a fuller, a trade with which his characters often have dealings (18.6, 22.8, 30.10; for the prominence of this craft in *De Causis Plantarum* see Einarson and Link, *Introd.* viii note a).

THE CHARACTERS AND ANCIENT LITERATURE¹⁷

Ethics

The meanings of ancient Greek χαρακτήρ are derived from an original sense of an *inscribing* (χαράσσειν) onto a surface: the *imprint* on a coin, the *form* of a letter, often the *style* of an author for rhetorical analysis.¹⁸ “Character” in the modern sense is *not* one of its meanings—the Greek

¹⁶ Stein, *Definition und Schilderung* cites Teles fr. 30 Hense, Theophr. fr. 12, 23, Lycon fr. 7, 8, 14 Wehrli.

¹⁷ For the concept in general see the survey in C. B. R. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1990).

¹⁸ See A. Koerte, “XAPAKTHP,” *Hermes* 64 (1928) 69–86.