

DID THEOPHRASTUS HELP DELIVER ERESUS FROM TYRANTS?*

ABSTRACT

Plutarch's Moralia mentions that Theophrastus twice delivered his native city from tyrants (1097B, 1126F), a detail that has been difficult to make coherent with our existing understanding of Theophrastus' life. Theophrastus seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time for this to have been possible, or to have been too undemocratic and scholastic a philosopher to have wanted to participate in these struggles in the first place. By more closely examining the nature of Plutarch's comment and the evidence for Theophrastus' political orientation and character, this article argues that there are, however, grounds on which to take Plutarch's report seriously. It presents a case for Theophrastus' participation in two liberation struggles in 334 and 332, without complicating the trajectory of his accompanying Aristotle to both Macedonia and Athens during this period.

Keywords: Theophrastus; Eresus; Plutarch; tyranny; Alexander the Great; Macedonia

Most biographers of Theophrastus suggest that when Aristotle was called to Philip II of Macedon's court in Mieza in 343 B.C.E. Theophrastus likely went with him.¹ The two are thought to have stayed there for eight or nine years, until 335 or 334 when both of them went to Athens.² The case for Theophrastus' going to Macedonia with Aristotle is based on the following information. Both are described as arriving in Athens at around the same time.³

* Thanks are owed to Dimitri El Murr and René de Nicolay for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to the anonymous referee whose suggestions were very helpful.

¹ C.A. Brandis, 'Theophrastus', in W. Smith (ed.), *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London, 1870), 3.1087–91, at 3.1088; O. Regenbogen, 'Theophrastos von Eresos', *RE Suppl.* 7 (1940), cols. 1354–562, at 1357; W. Pötscher, 'Theophrastos', in K. Ziegler and W. Sontheimer (edd.), *Der kleine Pauly: Lexicon der Antike* (Munich, 1975), 5.720–5, at 5.720; K. Gaiser, *Theophrast in Assos: zur Entwicklung der Naturwissenschaft zwischen Akademie und Peripatos* (Heidelberg, 1985), 26; J. Mejer, 'A life in fragments: the *Vita Theophrasti*', in J.M. van Ophuijsen and M. van Raalte (edd.), *Theophrastus: Reappraising the Sources* (New Brunswick and London, 1998), 1–28, at 19; W.W. Fortenbaugh and R. Harmon, 'Theophrastus', in H. Cancik and H. Schneider (edd.), *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden, 2006), Brill Online; K. Ierodiakonou, 'Theophrastus', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition). These claims are in part based on Ael. *VH* 4.19, which describes Theophrastus' friendship with Philip. For Regenbogen (this note), Theophrastus' 'stay in Macedonia with Aristotle is certain, even if Ael. *VH* 4.19 is uncertain'. — All translations from German are mine. FHS&G refers to W.W. Fortenbaugh, P.M. Huby, R.W. Sharples and D. Gutas (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence* (Leiden / New York / Köln, 1992).

² For 335 or 'around 335', see Mejer (n. 1), 19; S. Pertsinidis, *Theophrastus' Characters. A New Introduction* (London and New York, 2018), 11; Ierodiakonou (n. 1). For 335/4: M.G. Sollenberger, 'The lives of the Peripatetics: an analysis of the contents and structure of Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum* Book 5', *ANRW* 36 (1992), 3793–879, at 3843; J. Diggle, *Theophrastus Characters* (Cambridge, 2004), 2. J. Rusten argues for 'after 334' in J. Rusten and I.C. Cunningham (edd.), *Theophrastus: Characters. Herodas: Mimes. Sophron and other Mime Fragments* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2003), 6.

³ Given the debate about whether Theophrastus studied in Athens with Plato prior to arriving in the city with Aristotle, I refrain from using 'returned' here as, for example, Ierodiakonou (n. 1) does. For scepticism about Theophrastus studying with Plato, see W. Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the*

Theophrastus mentions an estate in the town of Stagira in Macedonia in his will (Diog. Laert. 5.52). Finally, the list of Theophrastus' works includes a treatise entitled *Callisthenes, or On Bereavement*, revealing a deep friendship between Theophrastus and Callisthenes, the nephew of Aristotle who was likely taught by the two philosophers alongside Alexander (Diog. Laert. 5.44).⁴ There is another biographical detail, however, that makes the idea of Theophrastus accompanying Aristotle initially seem less probable. This is that, as Plutarch claims, Theophrastus 'twice delivered' Eresus, his native city on the island of Lesbos, 'from tyrants' (*Mor.* 1126F).⁵

This presents a complication because any of the opportunities to carry out the liberation of Eresus from tyranny would fall either in the period in which Theophrastus and Aristotle are thought to be in Macedon, or in the period in which Theophrastus and Aristotle are both thought to have already arrived in Athens.⁶ While there has been much debate over the exact timing of the struggles against tyranny in Eresus in this period, this holds true for the two major sets of dates proposed: both for the standard argument that there were three upheavals in 336, 334 and 332, and for the recent suggestion that only these two latter upheavals took place.⁷ In both cases, the argument runs that the Macedonians, led either by Philip in 336, or by Alexander in 334 and 332, overthrew the city's tyrants and replaced them with a democracy.⁸ If we wish to take this comment by Plutarch seriously, it has seemed that we would therefore need to revise our understanding of where Theophrastus was in this period. By looking at the context of Plutarch's claims, I suggest that this is unnecessary, proposing a chronology in which Theophrastus could have participated in these struggles without compromising the dates he is reported to have been in Macedon and then in Athens.

Theophrastus has often been thought to be a reclusive philosopher who, if occasionally interested in participating in public life, swayed towards supporting oligarchy and

History of his Development, transl. R. Robinson (Oxford, 1948²), 115–16 n. 1; W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1981), 6.35 n. 1. If both Jaeger and Guthrie question this detail, they are certain that, in Jaeger's words, 'Theophrastus joined Aristotle at least as early as the Macedonian period' or, in Guthrie's words, 'Theophrastus followed him to Macedonia'.

⁴ On the question of whether Callisthenes was Alexander's fellow pupil, see T.S. Brown, 'Callisthenes and Alexander', *AJPh* 70 (1949), 225–48, at 228 n. 13. A fragment of Theophrastus' treatise on Callisthenes is paraphrased in Cic. *Tusc.* 3.21. All quotations from Diogenes are from R.D. Hicks's edition and translation (Cambridge, MA, 1925).

⁵ For this text I use the translation by B. Einarson and P.H. De Lacy (Cambridge, MA, 1967).

⁶ For evidence of the tyrannies at Eresus, see *IG XII² 526*; *OGIS* 8; M.N. Tod, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1948), 253–63, no. 191; C. Michel, *Recueil d'inscriptions grecques* (Brussels, 1900), no. 358; A.J. Heisserer, *Alexander the Great and the Greeks: The Epigraphic Evidence* (Oklahoma, 1980), 27–78; P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions, 404–323 B.C.* (Oxford, 2003), 406–19, no. 83; A. Bencivenni, *Progetti di riforme costituzionali nelle epigrafi greche dei secoli IV–II a.C.* (Bologna, 2003), 55–77; A. Ellis-Evans, 'The tyrants dossier from Eresos', *Chiron* 42 (2012), 183–212.

⁷ For the opinion that there were three struggles against tyranny, see Heisserer (n. 6), 58–78; Rhodes and Osborne (n. 6), 406–19; Bencivenni (n. 6), 55–77; Ellis-Evans (n. 6), 183 n. 2; D.A. Teegarden, *Death to Tyrants! Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle against Tyranny* (Princeton, 2013), 124–5. For the challenge to this, see J.B. Lott, 'Philip II, Alexander, and the two tyrannies at Eresos of *IG XII.2.526*', *Phoenix* 50 (1996), 26–40; G.A. Lehmann, 'Zu den Tyrannis-Herrschaften in Eresos (Lesbos) während der Alexander-Ära', *ZPE* 194 (2015), 36–46; S. Wallace, 'The rescript of Philip III Arrhidaïos and the two tyrannies at Eresos', *Tyche* 31 (2016), 239–58. I describe this suggestion as 'recent' given how far Lott's article, until Wallace's retrieval of it, has mostly been ignored; Lehmann does not mention Lott's article, but comes to these conclusions independently (Wallace [this note], 240).

⁸ On this alternating structure, see Wallace (n. 7), 239.

monarchy, rather than democracy.⁹ If this proposed chronology holds, we will need to revise this vision: deepening the suspicion that he was not so much of ‘a friend of kings and oligarchs’¹⁰ as we might have initially thought. We will also gain new insights into his works. Diogenes Laertius lists Theophrastus as having written over twenty different political treatises (5.42–50), a body of writing which suggests, in the words of one commentator, how Theophrastus, along with other Peripatetics, ‘evinced a lively interest in history and politics’.¹¹ Four of these treatises focus on kingship, and the fact that Theophrastus dedicated one of them to Cassander has been used as part of the evidence to suggest that Theophrastus was no supporter of democracy.¹² If Theophrastus could have actively opposed tyranny on two occasions, we would gain some grounds to look at these treatises through a different lens. This could help us to cohere the critical comments Theophrastus is reported to have made on certain tyrants (*Suda* κ 2804 Adler = FHS&G 609; Plut. *Them* 25.1 = FHS&G 612; Ath. *Deipn.* 435e = FHS&G 548) as well as the resistance to particular practices of oligarchy that can be found in the fragments of the likely Theophrastean *On the Choice of Magistrates*.¹³ If Theophrastus was a more politically engaged philosopher than we have previously thought, we would further gain the possibility that his other works, notably the *Characters*, may have political facets that we have not yet sufficiently acknowledged.

The question with which we must begin, however, is on what basis we should trust Plutarch’s anecdotes, when several scholars have not.

1. TRUSTING THE EPICUREANS OR PLUTARCH?

Plutarch mentions this detail about Theophrastus in an attempt to reveal a contradiction present in the Epicurean Colotes’ arguments. Colotes, Plutarch argues, recognizes the need for good laws but, in the same breath, criticizes all those who participate in public life. This latter position is consistent with the typical Epicurean praise of the maxim λάθε βιώσας, ‘live unnoticed’, the notion that a life away from public service is most conducive to happiness.¹⁴ Here in his *Reply to Colotes in Defence of the Other Philosophers* (1126A–F), as in his *Is ‘Live Unknown’ a Wise Precept?* (εἰ καλῶς εἶρηται τὸ λάθε βιώσας), a brief treatise dedicated to the subject, Plutarch argues against this ideal. His allusion to Theophrastus’ liberation of Eresus is used in this vein, concluding a litany of examples that he gives of philosophers who carried out acts of political significance.

⁹ On Theophrastus as reclusive, see Mejer (n. 1), 11. On his oligarchic or monarchic political orientation, W.S. Ferguson, ‘The laws of Demetrius of Phalerum and their guardians’, *Klio* 11 (1911), 265–76; C. Habicht, *Untersuchungen zur politischen Geschichte Athens im 3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Munich, 1979), 27.

¹⁰ R.J. Lane Fox, ‘Theophrastus’ *Characters* and the historian’, *PCPhS* 42 (1996), 127–70, at 133.

¹¹ A.J. Podlecki, ‘Theophrastus on history and politics’, in W.W. Fortenbaugh, P.M. Huby and A.A. Long (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus. On his Life and Work* (New Brunswick, 1985), 231–49, at 231.

¹² Habicht (n. 9), 27.

¹³ J.J. Keane and A. Szegedy-Maszak, ‘Theophrastus’ *De eligendis magistratibus*: Vat. Gr. 2306, fragment B’, *TAPhA* 106 (1976), 227–40, at 231. For a recent investigation of authorship, see L. Fizzarotti, ‘Per una nuova edizione del cosiddetto *De eligendis magistratibus*’ (Diss., University of Bologna, 2019).

¹⁴ On this idea, see G. Roskam, *Live Unnoticed (λάθε βιώσας). On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden and Boston, 2007).

Plutarch begins by detailing the ways in which the philosophers Colotes critiqued were in fact responsible for creating or upholding the laws he valorizes.¹⁵ He then uses these examples to ask Colotes whether any public actions of similar import have ‘proceeded from Epicurus’ philosophy and maxims?’ (1126E). This is not, Plutarch clarifies, a question of listing Epicurean slayers of tyrants, champions of battle, advisers of kings, leaders of people or martyrs for just causes—all of which, we might think, would present too much of a contradiction with the doctrine of living unnoticed. Rather it is the question of which of their sages ever ‘took ship in his country’s interests, went on an embassy, or expended a sum of money?’ (1126E). These, Plutarch says, seem to be the kinds of public actions admired by Epicurus, given his ‘solemn glorification’ of the one instance when his follower Metrodorus assisted a Syrian royal officer who had been arrested (1126F). If this is the case, Plutarch demands, how would Epicurus have reacted if a philosopher did ‘as great a thing as Aristotle, who restored his native city which Philip had destroyed, or Theophrastus who twice delivered his from tyrants?’ (1126F). The whole Nile, Plutarch concludes, would have to be turned into papyrus, before Epicurus and his followers ‘wearied of writing about it’ (1126F).

While we should be wary of some interpretation bias here, given that Plutarch would be keen to emphasize (or over-emphasize) the political achievements of past philosophers, both Plutarch’s extensive knowledge of the Theophrastean corpus as well as his earlier critiques of Colotes for not having first-hand familiarity with Theophrastus’ writings (1115A) provide enough grounding to see whether this testimony can be forked out as one of the ‘rare gobbets of fact’ swimming in this ancient biographer’s stew of ‘dubious inference and unreliable anecdote’.¹⁶ The fact that Plutarch is happy to use Theophrastus’ political engagement as a final means to clinch this argument, and that he has previously had Theon invoke Theophrastus’ involvement in Eresus to a similar effect (1097B), gives this search for truth further foundation.¹⁷

Few biographers, however, incorporate Theophrastus’ potential participation in these liberation struggles in their histories of his life.¹⁸ Mejer’s account, which registers but dismisses these two Plutarchan comments, reveals two reasons why. First, that we are lacking evidence for a journey back to Lesbos after Theophrastus reaches Athens with Aristotle: ‘it is unlikely’, Mejer says, that Theophrastus ‘twice liberated his fatherland from tyrants’, as ‘we have no information that Theophrastus ever returned to live in Eresus once he had left for Athens’.¹⁹ Second, that the lack of detail that we have about Theophrastus’ life is perhaps due to how ‘he was a man who preferred

¹⁵ For a reconstruction of Colotes’ lost polemic, see E. Kechagia, *Plutarch Against Colotes: A Lesson in History of Philosophy* (Oxford, 2011), ch. 3.

¹⁶ I borrow this metaphor from J. Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1995), 1. For an indication of the large body of criticism on Plutarch’s knowledge of Theophrastus, see G. Roskam, *Plutarch’s Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum: An Interpretation with Commentary* (Leuven, 2009), 55 nn. 199 and 200. FHS&G has over 70 entries on Theophrastus’ life and works taken from Plutarch’s corpus. Plutarch’s comment (*Mor.* 135C) need not be read to show that Theophrastus was ‘among the philosophers who remained politically inactive’, as Roskam (this note), 55 claims; it simply states that Theophrastus was less active than Demetrius, and analogically just as active as Xenocrates—who Plutarch recounts went on an embassy to Antipater (*Phoc.* 27.1).

¹⁷ Phanius of Eresus appears in this earlier passage too. On his connection with Theophrastus, see Diog. Laert. 5.37, 5.50.

¹⁸ It is absent, for example, in Brandis (n. 1), Pötscher (n. 1), Fortenbaugh and Harmon (n. 1), and Ierodiakonou (n. 1).

¹⁹ Mejer (n. 1), 12 n. 32.

to live secluded from the outside world': a characterization that would make him unlikely to embroil himself in political struggles against tyranny.²⁰

This view of Theophrastus as a reclusive figure 'has the advantage', in Mejer's view, 'of agreeing with the characterization of Theophrastus by the Epicureans'—not by Colotes but by Philodemus, who, in a fragment from the *Notebook on Rhetoric* (fr. 16, lines 3–10), describes Theophrastus as a man who 'spent his whole life in private and [in] philosophy and [in] ignorance of the affairs of monarchs' (Θεόφραστον ἀλλὰ τὸ [δη]χέειν τὸν ἅπαντα [χρό | νο]ν ἐν ιδιωτεία καὶ [φιλο | σο]φία καὶ βας[ιλι]κῶν ἅ | πειρ]ία π[ραγ]μάτ[ων] [Text A].²¹ For Mejer, the Epicurean attitude towards Theophrastus finds further support in Diogenes' account of a letter that Theophrastus sent to Phanius in which he used the word σχολαστικός: 'scholarly' or 'free from political and business activities', in Mejer's translation.²² While it is not especially clear to whom Theophrastus is referring here—with Diogenes' line running, 'in this letter he [Theophrastus] has called someone "pedant"', ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἐπιστολῇ σχολαστικὸν ὠνόμακε (Diog. Laert. 5.37)—Mejer rests on a tradition of reading this to be self-referential, in the assumption that between σχολαστικὸν and ὠνόμακε the word αὐτόν has gone missing.²³ Mejer is careful to note that this reading of Theophrastus' life as secluded or scholarly 'is not contradicted' by the various stories of how Theophrastus 'had good relations with some rulers', 'spoke before the Areopagus' or 'worked to secure the return of the orator Dinarchus from his exile', as, in his view, these would have all been actions expected by 'famous intellectuals' in Athens.²⁴

Looking closer at the rulers with whom Theophrastus had good relations—how, for example, he was received by Cassander and how Demetrius of Phaleron helped him obtain a garden of his own (Diog. Laert. 5.37–9)—we might detect here a third reason why Plutarch's details have seemed anathema to our understanding of Theophrastus' biography: that his public actions make him seem supportive of oligarchy, and so would make it suspect that he twice participated in struggles that aimed to replace tyranny with democracy.

It is worth seeing what happens, however, when we apply pressure on this orthodoxy. We might first attempt to explain the lack of evidence for Theophrastus returning to Eresus after his arrival in Athens in 335/4 by arguing that he returned to his native city from Macedon instead. Here, the comparatively little information we have about Theophrastus' time in Macedon in contrast to his time in Athens could

²⁰ Mejer (n. 1), 11.

²¹ Mejer (n. 1), 11. Mejer here, at n. 31, cites Sudhaus's rendering of the fragment. 2.277.13–20 = FHS&G 27. Translation from FHS&G.

²² Mejer (n. 1), 11.

²³ For an account of the many ways in which scholars have read this line, see Sollenberger (n. 2), 3874–6. In Sollenberger's account, G. Ménage set a precedent for inserting αὐτόν. See his 'Observationes et emendationes in Diogenem Laertium', in M. Meibom (ed.), *Diogenis Laertii De vitis, dogmatibus et aphorismatibus clarorum philosophorum libri X* (Amsterdam, 1592), 2.204, col. 2. This approach was then approved by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos* (Berlin, 1973³), 1.64, for whom Theophrastus is a 'pedant'; by Regenbogen (n. 1), 1359, for whom 'there is no doubt that in this letter he called himself a scholar' (*Stubengelehrten*); and by F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles. Texte und Kommentar. Heft IX: Phainias von Eresos, Chamaleon, Praxiphanes* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1957), 27, for whom Theophrastus' letter contains a 'self-characterization' as a 'scholar' (*Stubengelehrten*), a term he borrows from Regenbogen. Wehrli (this note), 9.9 n. 13 proposes the insertion of ἐαυτόν instead.

²⁴ Mejer (n. 1), 11–12.

explain why we have no record for a voyage to Eresus. We could equally imagine that Theophrastus' participation in these liberation struggles did not require him to be *in situ*, making redundant the need for a documented return. I will come to an evaluation of these two hypotheses below.

We might secondly point to how far Mejer's argument about Theophrastus' preference for a quiet life rests on trusting two questionable details: the Epicurean characterization of Theophrastus and the idea that Theophrastus' use of the word 'scholarly' is indeed a reference to himself. Neither of these details is, however, as solid as it appears. The Epicurean perspective is compromised by how the full version of the Philodemus fragment, as restored by Sudhaus—the version quoted by Mejer—seems to give rise to an interpretation contrary to the one Mejer derives. If with Sudhaus we read the line following Mejer's extracted citation (fr. 16, lines 10–13) to be

[Ἀγένη] | [τοῦ] δέ τι [καί] περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν | [τῶν] καὶ Κριτολάω[ι καὶ Ἀριστῶνι προσπαισθέν] ('Something baseless about the same questions was also mockingly used against Critolaus and Ariston') [Text B],

it appears that Philodemus did not endorse the view that Theophrastus had no political experience.²⁵ In lines 3–10 of the fragment, Philodemus seems simply to be reporting views on Theophrastus' ignorance of politics (hence the accusative and infinitive construction in Text A). In lines 10–13, in Sudhaus's rendering (Text B), Philodemus would then be disqualifying the reproach in question. Even if Sudhaus's rendering is incorrect, relying on Philodemus' remarks would remain problematic, with Fortenbaugh commenting that it is 'more than likely Philodemus' characterization of Theophrastus is unfair and perhaps influenced by Theophrastus' quarrel with Dicaearchus'.²⁶ However, either way, the fragmentary nature of the evidence here makes it very difficult to use this as one of our foundations for a view of Theophrastus as a purely theoretical philosopher.

The self-characterization as 'scholarly' is equally shaky given how far, as Sollenberger comments, 'it is by no means certain that the insertion of αὐτόν is correct'.²⁷ Indeed, the text of the manuscripts preserved in Dorandi's recent edition only implies that Theophrastus called someone σχολαστικός, not that he applied the term to himself.²⁸ If both this emendation and the Epicurean perspective stand on unstable ground, we find ourselves without much on which to build an image of Theophrastus as a private philosopher. If instead of these details we begin with the list of Theophrastus' treatises, we would not need to work around Theophrastus' engagement in public life, as Mejer does, but would find this to be coherent with his philosophical interests in rulership, legislation, education and government.

Furthermore, we need not imagine that Theophrastus' interest in politics was strictly tied to monarchy or oligarchy, despite his evident connection with Cassander and Demetrius of Phaleron. Lane Fox nuances these existing pointers to Theophrastus' monarchic or oligarchic tendencies by describing how Themistius 'knew a tradition' that Theophrastus was hostile to Cassander (*Or.* 23.285c) and by looking at how Theophrastus left copies of his will both with a high-powered Macedonian courtier

²⁵ 2.277.20–2 Sudhaus.

²⁶ W.W. Fortenbaugh, *Theophrastus of Eresus Commentary Volume 6.1: Sources on Ethics* (Leiden and Boston, 2011), 18. See FHS&G 481.

²⁷ Sollenberger (n. 2), 3876.

²⁸ T. Dorandi, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Cambridge, 2013), 368.

and with the Athenian democracy's top general.²⁹ For Lane Fox, these are indications which both 'warn us against making Theophrastus too monarchic or oligarchic a figure', and instead suggest a complex and changeable political orientation, befitting Theophrastus' long life and the political turbulence it spanned.³⁰ Theophrastus' friendliness with Cassander is further compromised once we consider how one of the crucial pieces of evidence for the warmth of their relationship—Theophrastus' writing of a treatise *To Cassander, on Kingship*—had its authorship called into question in antiquity (Ath. *Deipn.* 144e–f).³¹

2. POLITICS BY PROXY

If the veracity of Plutarch's report is no longer at stake, in terms of its incoherence with the existing evidence and with Theophrastus' character and politics, the question of what exactly Plutarch means here remains unresolved, in terms of both how Theophrastus helped deliver Eresus from tyrants, and to which liberation attempts Plutarch refers.³²

The solution Lane Fox presents to these questions is that the two liberation struggles in which Theophrastus participated were 'probably 336 and 332', after which 'he then left Eresus' democracy'.³³ Lane Fox does not account, however, for how this answer fits with the two biographical details that we possess about Theophrastus' whereabouts in this period: placing Theophrastus in Mieza in 336, and in Athens in 332.³⁴ Nor is it made explicit why Lane Fox does not choose to place the second struggle against tyranny in 334.³⁵ If we wish to retain the evidence for Theophrastus' going to Mieza as well as the date of 335 or 334 for Theophrastus' arrival in Athens, one tentative chronology we could combine with Lane Fox's account could be as follows. Theophrastus went to Macedonia with Aristotle for seven years, from 343 to 336. In 336, having been notified about the Macedonian expedition to liberate his native city, Theophrastus returned to Eresus. Theophrastus could have stayed in Eresus for the liberation attempts in 336 and 334, perhaps having agreed with Aristotle to go together to Athens once matters were settled. This would allow Theophrastus to arrive in Athens in 334, after the second liberation had taken place. With this we would have a

²⁹ Lane Fox (n. 10), 133. Lane Fox here also complicates other evidence for Theophrastus' connections with oligarchy and monarchy, including his forced exile under the restored democracy.

³⁰ Lane Fox (n. 10), 133.

³¹ Here see also Podlecki (n. 11), 233.

³² While Wallace (n. 7), 245 suggests that 'Plutarch's anecdotes could, therefore, refer to any of the exiles or refusals of readmission seen under Alexander (334, 332, and 323), Philip III (319), or Antigonos Monophthalmos (306–301)', I do not consider dates after 332 as possible candidates for Theophrastus' participation. My rejection of 306–301 and 319 rests on the importance that I will claim for Theophrastus' participation involving the persuasion of a ruler, and the assumption that, owing to his existing relationship with Alexander, Alexander would be the most likely candidate. See n. 44 below for the reasons why I dismiss a date around 323 as an option.

³³ Lane Fox (n. 10), 133–4.

³⁴ This seems to be, in part, because Lane Fox does not think that Theophrastus went to Mieza. In his account of Alexander, Theophrastus is not mentioned as being present with Aristotle in Philip's court, but only referred to in passing as a 'pupil' of Aristotle: R.J. Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1973), 45, 57, 206, 246, 364.

³⁵ Lane Fox (n. 10), 160–1 n. 62 notes that 'various "liberations" from tyrants' can be inferred from the epigraphical evidence: 'one in or before 336, one (perhaps) in 334, one in 332'. It is not made fully clear, however, why this parenthesized adverb has found itself before the second attempt.

chronology coherent with Mejer's point that we have no evidence of Theophrastus returning to Lesbos from Athens.

But an even simpler explanation might be in order. Could it not be, as Lott suggests, that 'Plutarch must mean that Theophrastos spoke with Alexander on behalf of his *patria*' while he was in Macedonia?³⁶ Indeed, in his questioning about whether any Epicureans carried out acts of public service, Plutarch clarifies, as we have seen, that what he means by 'public service' is not going off to slay tyrants or champion in battle, but going 'on an embassy' or expending 'a sum of money' for one's 'country's interests' (1126E).³⁷ With this we might then ask if Theophrastus could not have 'twice delivered' his city 'from tyrants' in Plutarch's view, by going on an embassy to restore his native city's democracy, rather than participating in the battle in Eresus himself.

If Lott's suggestion of a kind of politics by proxy can help us understand how Theophrastus might have liberated Eresus, his argument about when this would have happened contains a complication. Lott pioneered the argument that there is only evidence for two tyrannies in Eresus, and therefore for only two liberation attempts. The first liberation struggle in 336, he maintains, has been concocted by scholars 'in order to make Philip a champion of democracy in Asia Minor alongside his son Alexander'.³⁸ In Lott's view, Philip aided the tyrants Apollodorus, Hermon and Heraeus to come to power around 338. Their tyranny, he maintains, was overthrown only in 334, in part as a result of Theophrastus' persuasion of Alexander. This was an action that Theophrastus had cause to take again in 332, after Eresus was seized by the mercenary Memnon of Rhodes and given two new pro-Persian tyrants, Agonippus and Eurysilaus.

The complication with this chronology is that, if we think that Theophrastus' persuasion of Alexander took place in person, it is unclear how Theophrastus might have solicited Alexander to help Eresus on this later date. By 332 Theophrastus was already in Athens, and Alexander was already enmeshed in the attempt to conquer Tyre, Gaza and Egypt, having set out from Macedon to Asia in May 334.³⁹ While it seems that Theophrastus could easily have been able to speak 'with Alexander on behalf of his *patria*' in early 334—especially if we follow scholars who argue for 334 (or after) rather than 335 as the year in which Theophrastus 'joined [Aristotle] on his return to Athens'—this is much less probable two years later.⁴⁰

Lott does not, however, leave us at this impasse, but instead offers one suggestion for how Theophrastus might have again influenced Alexander in 332. In his view, when Memnon died shortly after his conquest of Eresus, the Macedonians set out to recapture the city. When they were successful, Agonippus and Eurysilaus were promptly exiled and then sent to Alexander in Egypt. On his meeting with Alexander, Agonippus decided to criticize the *demos* of Eresus, and Alexander decided to return both him and Eurysilaus to Lesbos, where the Eresians could put them on trial themselves. At this meeting in Egypt, Lott intimates, Theophrastus participated in Eresian politics once more: 'While in Egypt Agonippus attempted (unsuccessfully) to implicate the

³⁶ Lott (n. 7), 38 [*sic*]. The suggestion that Theophrastus was only indirectly involved in overthrowing the tyrants in Eresus can also be found in Heisserer (n. 6), 75.

³⁷ Neither Lott nor Heisserer anchors their arguments about the indirect nature of Theophrastus' participation in the broader context of Plutarch's remarks.

³⁸ Lott (n. 7), 26–7.

³⁹ For Alexander's whereabouts in 332, see Lane Fox (n. 35), 178–97; and for his date of departure, Lane Fox (n. 35), 109.

⁴⁰ On the later range of dates proposed for their arrival in Athens, see n. 2 above.

demos of Eresus in his crimes. It is here that Theophrastos must have spoken against tyranny for a second time.⁴¹

This suggestion, while having the benefit of making sense of Alexander's location, does not resolve the complication, since it is not coherent with what we know of Theophrastus' whereabouts. Not only would Theophrastus already be in Athens in this period, but he is said to have rejected the invitation that Ptolemy I Sotēr extended to him to visit Egypt (which would have also needed to be later).⁴² If Theophrastus was not in Egypt to encourage Alexander to help Eresus in 332, we are then left with our search for a plausible time and date on which Theophrastus could have again spoken against tyranny.

One note in Lehmann's recent argument for the presence of two tyrannies in Eresus lays out a path for an alternative approach. Maintaining the notion that liberation attempts were only in 334 and 332, Lehmann comments that Theophrastus might have participated in either of them not only through direct action, or 'personal diplomatic influence', but also through sending 'letters to the king', participating in Eresian politics with an even greater degree of physical distance.⁴³ If Theophrastus might have advocated for the liberation of Eresus by means of a letter, Lott's initial dates of 334 and 332 would no longer seem so difficult to maintain. While in 334 Theophrastus could have spoken to Alexander in person, in 332 Theophrastus could have written to him instead. This would be coherent with the 'three books of *Letters*' Theophrastus is said to have written (Diog. Laert. 5.46), as well as with the well-known tradition of ancient letter-writing between philosophers and statesmen, an important tradition in the Hellenistic world.⁴⁴ With this hypothesis, we would gain a plausible sense of two dates on which Theophrastus could have twice delivered his native city from tyrants, consistent with our existing knowledge of Theophrastus' biography and—unlike Lane Fox's conjecture—with the recent dismissal of 336 as a potential liberation attempt.

CONCLUSION

This paper brings together two fields: scholarship on the life of Theophrastus and on the tyrannies at Eresus. By maintaining the chronology taken from the former and pairing it with the dates and details provided by the latter we do not, it then seems, find ourselves at such a crossroads. This is because Theophrastus' participation in these struggles

⁴¹ Lott (n. 7), 38.

⁴² See Diog. Laert. 5.37; Sollenberger (n. 2), 3820; I. Worthington, *Ptolemy I: King and Pharaoh of Egypt* (Oxford, 2016), 140.

⁴³ Lehmann (n. 7), 46 n. 38. On Alexander's reception of letters after having left Macedon, see L. Pearson, 'The diary and the letters of Alexander the Great', *Historia* 3 (1955), 429–55, at 443–50. Heisserer (n. 6), 76 also argues that the first of Theophrastus' interventions in Eresian politics could have involved writing to Alexander in the 330s. If my argument is in sympathy with these aspects of Heisserer's account, it finds unconvincing his suggested date of 324 for Theophrastus' second intervention, owing to how it is based on a politicized reading of the first line of Theophrastus' letter to Phantias, which is not supported by the rest of Diogenes' account of this text.

⁴⁴ On Aristotle's letters, see Diog. Laert. 5.27. See C. Natali, *Aristotle: His Life and School* (Princeton, 2013), 116–18 for claims on the authenticity of several of the letters (excluding those to Alexander). On the politics of letter-writing more generally, see P. Ceccarelli, L. Doering, T. Fögen and I. Gildenhard (edd.), *Letters and Communities: Studies in the Socio-Political Dimensions of Ancient Epistolography* (Oxford, 2018).

seems the action of the philosopher, not the fighter, with a strategy of convincing Alexander of the need to free his native city from tyranny on two different occasions. At neither point does it seem that Theophrastus would have needed to be elsewhere than in Mieza or Athens in order to do so. Rather, he could have exploited his position in the Macedonian court to exercise influence on Alexander or communicated with him by letter from Athens. If the chronology and the geography of Theophrastus' life in this way permit taking Plutarch's anecdotes seriously, so does a more nuanced account of Theophrastus' character and politics. By the possible truth of these comments in the *Moralia* we are provided with even more of a sense that Theophrastus was not a philosopher as unfriendly to democracy or to the participation in public life as previously thought.

This has two major consequences for our interpretation of Theophrastus' works. It first warns us against imagining that his many treatises on monarchy must contain a position supportive of this type of rule. Examining what we know of these works from the perspective of Plutarch's biographical detail, we might even start to discern a Theophrastean approach to monarchy directed towards alerting readers to how easily it can become tyrannical.⁴⁵ This could help to clarify why we have a report stating that his *On Kingship* (Περὶ βασιλείας) criticizes the tyranny of Hiero (FHS&G 612)—since, if fragments on tyranny naturally fit in a work entitled Περὶ μοναρχίας, they require an explanation in a work with Theophrastus' chosen title, given that βασιλεία is the good form of monarchy for Aristotle (*Pol.* 1279b5). Plutarch's detail could further help us to see potential critiques of tyranny in what remains of Theophrastus' political works, exposing a possible coherence between Theophrastus' remarks on Hiero, his critiques of the tyrant Dionysius (FHS&G 609; FHS&G 548), and the treatise he is said to have written *On Tyranny* (Diog. Laert. 5.45).

Opening up the perspective that Theophrastus could have been inclined towards democracy—at least at one point in his life—would secondly allow us to dissociate his works from being necessarily supportive of oligarchy. An ambivalence towards oligarchy would give coherence to the warning in *On the Choice of Magistrates* that, as one commentator puts it, 'a simple property qualification is a poor standard for evaluating prospective magistrates'.⁴⁶ It would also provide us with a new impetus to try to understand whether a political intention could be present in the one existing work by Theophrastus which directly engages with mocking a figure representing oligarchy: his *Characters*.⁴⁷

If we have reason to believe that Theophrastus could have participated twice in the liberation of Eresus from tyranny, we have reason, in sum, to approach his corpus from a changed point of view: one which considers how he might be engaging with politics not only differently but also more extensively than we have previously thought.

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⁴⁵ In line with Arist. *Pol.* 1279b.

⁴⁶ A. Szegedy-Maszak, *The Nomoi of Theophrastus* (New York, 1981), 102. See fragment B, lines 18–26, in Keane and Szegedy-Maszak (n. 13), 231.

⁴⁷ *Char.* 26. So far, four major lines of intention have been suggested: that the *Characters* serves an ethical, rhetorical, or poetic purpose, or that its incomplete nature aligns it with more fragmentary or miscellaneous genres. For a recent literature review, and an assessment of these claims, see G. Ranocchia, 'Natura e fine dei *Caratteri* di Teofrasto. Storia di un enigma', *Philologus* 155 (2011), 69–91.