The Berlin Graeca: a Further Note

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Friedrich Solmsen in GRBS 20 (1979) 89–122 provides a welcome description of Wilamowitz’s Graeca, a group of young scholars who, every second Saturday in term, read a selected Greek author under his guidance at Eichenallee 12 in Charlottenburg. The group is important for two reasons. For about a decade it served to train younger scholars of ability to textual criticism of the highest order. This point is beautifully emphasized by Solmsen. Further it was a source for a number of publications of Wilamowitz’s old age. Hesiodos Erga (1928) is merely the best known. The American parallel would be W. A. Oldfather’s Illinois Greek Club, the club that resulted in the publication of the Loeb Aeneas Tacticus. Solmsen is one of the four survivors of the Graeca, with Harald Fuchs, Werner Peek and Luise Reinhard. His extensive, authoritative account will be the Hauptquelle for how the group worked.

This note is meant in no way to denigrate a remarkable feat of memory that goes back over fifty years. Solmsen candidly admits (89 n.1): “my memory is bound to have erred in a number of instances.” Thus Wilamowitz was taken to Germany by the Italians not in a “submarine” (97) but in a “gunboat”—I assume a small cruiser. The story (92–93 n.5) that Theodor Mommsen, when offered the title Exzellenz, hastily wrote “an article scathingly critical of some official policies” and sent it “to a progressive news-

1 I wrote at GRBS 16 (1975) 453: “Schadewaldt had suggested in 1927, while still Dozent at Berlin, that he and Wilamowitz read the Erga together.” My source was Erga, 1: “Da schlug mein Kollege Schadewaldt vor, wir sollten die Erga gemeinschaftlich lesen.” I thought gemeinschaftlich meant a private reading by the two. It conceals a reference to the Graeca: see Solmsen 91.


paper with the request for immediate publication” to avoid the honor is surely legend. Mommsen would never have endangered his family and embarrassed his son-in-law in that way; there was no need. He simply wrote the government that he would decline the honor. His daughter Adelheid tells us what happened: 4

Wenige Tage vor dem achtzigsten Geburtstage 5 las er in der Zeitung, daß ihm der Titel Exzellenz verliehen werden sollte. Schleunigst musste Briefkarte und Umschlag herbeigeschafft werden, er schrieb an Ministerialdirektor Althoff, 6 und die Sache unterlieb. Er liebte die Alterstitel nicht, wie er von seinen vielen Orden nur den Pour le Mérite schätzte. Er brauche, so sagte er wohl scherzweise, keine Bestätigung, daß er keine silbernen Löffel gestohlen habe.

In matters of perspective there is room for disagreement—for example, Solmsen’s contention—which attests ‘the official view’—that Wilamowitz’s opinion of Jaeger endured amiable throughout the Berlin period. Wilamowitz did not reveal to a student fifty-seven years younger than himself what he really thought. This he reserved for letters to old friends and for his family. Of course he remained ‘treu’ to the collega proximus; that does not mean approval. “To jealousy and academic intrigue he was a stranger” (111). As an admiring student’s encomium of a great old man the sentence is understandable. 7 There were other views. Friedrich Meinecke has described the control that ‘the Göttingen Clique’ exerted over the Berlin Faculty. 8 Wilamowitz led them. The others were the Ger-

4 Adelheid Mommsen, Theodor Mommsen in Kreise der Seinen: Erinnerungen seiner Tochter (Berlin 1936) 18.
5 30 November 1897.
manist Gustav Roethe, the philologist Wilhelm Schulze and the
indologist Heinrich Lüders.

The Graeca was not a Wilamowitzian innovation, founded in 1921
to strengthen Wilamowitz’s contact with younger scholars. He had al­
ready in 1919 decided to form his Graeca. The evidence is a postcard of

Lieber Herr College. An Kranz hatte ich auch schon
gedacht, natürlich wenn er Lust hat, was Sie ja erkunden
werden. Hippokrates wird wegen des Textes schwierig; ich
würde sonst als Anfang π. τροφής vorschlagen, das ein
seltenes stilistisches Problem stellt. Thukydides wird sicher­
liech vielen gefallen. Plutarchs Delphika sind es wert. Aber
ich denke auch an Aristeides ὑπὲρ τῶν τεκτοποιων, damit sich
jemand findet, der den ersten Band mit Keils vollständigem
Material macht. Wir haben auch noch zwei schöne Reden,

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9 Solmsen 90: “as the Graeca began to meet in 1921 the prevailing opinion was that it
was designed to make up for his lessened contact with younger minds.”
10 See Winfried Bühler, Gnomon 41 (1969) 619–23. For Friedländer and Wilamowitz see my “The Credo of a New Generation: Paul Friedländer to Ulrich von Wilamowitz-
11 The date, as regularly with Wilamowitz’s postcards, is provided by the cancellation
on its front. I am grateful to Schwester Hildegard von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and to
Dr. K. Haenel of the Göttingen Library for permission to publish this postcard. My
colleague Professor Ernst A. Fredricksmeier generously made a first transcription.
12 Walther Kranz (1884–1960): see H. Herter, Gnomon 32 (1960) 782–84. For his
bibliography see Walther Kranz, Studien zur antiken Literatur und ihrem Fortwirken: Kleine
13 Not included among authors mentioned by Solmsen, 91.
14 Hippocrates, De alim., IX 94–121 Litré.
15 Also missing at Solmsen 91; both Hippocrates and Thucydides may never have been
read by the Graeca.
16 These were in fact later read by the Graeca with the result of frequent improvements
of the text: see Solmsen 91 n.3.
17 That is, Aristeides, Or. 46 Dindorf. The four are Miltiades, Kimon, Themistokles
and Perikles: see Schmid-Stählin II.2 704–05. Wilamowitz’s interest in Aristeides began
in 1875 (Kleine Schriften III 424–25). He warmly reviewed André Boulangier, Aelius
Aristide et la Sophistique dans la Province d’Asie au IIe siècle de notre ère (Paris 1923) at Litteris 2
(1925) 125–30= Kl.Schr. III 420–25, and the same year published his Academy address
Der Rhetor Aristeides (Kl.Schr. III 426–53). For his discussion of Or. 46 Dindorf see Kl.Schr.
III 449–50.
wohl Deklamationen, die sich als demosthenischer Zeit an­
hörig aufspielen, in den Papyri. 18 Das ließe sich unitis viribus
vielleicht erledigen, aber dazu müßte etwas Rednerisches
vorher abgetan sein. 20 Ich rede so, als würd aus dem Ganzen
etwas. Und dem traue ich nicht; Stimmung wird bei uns
immer flauer und trüber. 21 Am liebsten grabe ich. 22

εὖ πρᾶττειν Ἰηρ

UWILAMOWITZ

But Wilamowitz was not founding the Graeca; he was reviving it.
His father-in-law Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) had regularly
shared in meetings of the Graeca on Fridays, not Saturdays,
presumably until his death in 1903. Adelheid reports: 23

Weniger trat für die Jugend die Graeca in Erscheinung, an der
der Vater an zwei Freitagen im Monat teilnahm. Ich entsinne
mich nur des langausgezogenen, sehr ernsthaft anmutenden
Tisches, auf dem einzelne Bücher und einige Tintenfäßer
standen. Bei der Lektüre der griechischen Schriftsteller war
ausser den Herren niemand, bei dem anschliessenden Abend­
brot nur die Hausfrau zugegen.

But the origins of the Berlin Graeca or Graecitas extend far
beyond Mommsen’s arrival in Berlin (1858). 24 Christian Ludwig
Ideler (1766-1846) and the Quintilian editor Georg Ludwig
Spalding (1762-1811) founded the society at the end of the eight­
teenth century. It met at first Wednesday and Sunday evenings
from six to seven o’clock. Oddly, the first author read was Manilius. 25
Gradually the traditional format evolved. It met once a week
Friday evenings, the place of meeting revolving among the homes of

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18 I suppose he means BKT 7.4-13=2511 Pack² and BKT 7.31-34=2512 Pack².
19 Dr W. Buchwald informs me that unitis viribus is the Wahlpruch chosen by the
Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I on 12 February 1848. Its author was Joseph Ritter
von Bergmann (1796-1872).
20 Before reading the papyri we should have to read Demosthenes. For Wilamowitz’s
21 Simply a further expression of Wilamowitz’s depression at this time: see his letter to
Werner Jaeger of 26 November 1918 at HSCP 82 (1978) 323-25 with notes.
22 In her letters of the post-war period to Ellen S. Drachmann, Marie Mommsen alludes
repeatedly to her husband’s increased devotion to gardening. He turned to it in despair.
23 Adelheid Mommsen, op.cit. (supra n.4) 23.
24 See G. Parthey, Origines Graecitatis Berolinensis³ (Berlin 1876); Martin Hertz, Karl
Lachmann: Eine Biographie (Berlin 1851; repr. Osnabrück 1972) 211ff; and Wolfhart Unte,
“Berliner Klassische Philologen im 19. Jahrhundert,” Ergänzungsband zum Katalog
‘Berlin und die Antike’ (Berlin 1979) 9ff.
25 Hertz, op.cit. (supra n.24) 211.
its members. A Greek author was read and elucidated. After the reading (Herodotus was one of the first authors read) the members dined cheerfully together. Membership was not limited to professional philologists; a love for antiquity and a fastidious feeling for classical education were required. New members were “ins Griechische übersetzt.” Early members included great men like Wolf, Boeckh, Heindorf, Buttmann, Schleiermacher, Niebuhr, Immanuel Bekker, later Lachmann and Meineke. Leopold von Ranke became a member. Because Lachmann was a bachelor, after the reading he would take the group to a splendid Berlin restaurant, Beyermann’s, later Schott’s, “und oft liess er Champagner fliessen, die frohe Stimmung zu erhöhen.”

By Mommsen’s time the Graecca met only twice a month but still circulating with dinner among its members. By 1919 the original Graecca must have become moribund. Otherwise Wilamowitz would never have appropriated the name. He instituted several changes while retaining the name and purpose of the original group. He substituted alternate Saturday afternoons for Friday evenings and dinner. It no longer revolved but always met at his home. This was necessary, for it obviously could not meet at a student’s room. Membership regularly was restricted to students and younger colleagues, often themselves former students. Men like Diels, Harnack, Jaeger, Lietzmann, Norden, Schulze, obvious candidates for the original Graecca, were not included. But now women were admitted.

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26 Unte, op.cit. (supra n.24) 9, with a fuller list.
27 Hertz, op.cit. (supra n.24) 211. Wilamowitz would not have missed that Ranke and Meineke were both Schulpforte graduates.
28 Hertz, op.cit. (supra n.24) 212.
29 This is not inconsistent with Unte, op.cit. (supra n.24) 9: “Der hier von Savigny angesprochene Kreis war zugleich die berühmte Berliner Graeca oder Graecitas, die in dieser Zeit gegründet wurde und über Generationen hin bis in die Gegenwart bestanden hat.”
30 Solmsen 91: “every second Saturday afternoon.” Two Saturdays a month would more closely parallel Mommsen. Dinner would have been impossible. Food was scarce. Wilamowitz depended heavily on food packages from A. B. Drachmann in Denmark.
31 Friedrich Spiro appears the sole exception (Solmsen 91).
32 At least Dr Luise Reinhard (Solmsen 91). Revealingly Solmsen says nothing of Eva Sachs: see HSCP 82 (1978) 318 n.92. This confirms the tradition of Hausverbots.
The new evidence provided by Professor Calder shows that Wilamowitz’s idea for his Graeca goes back at least to 1919, and it may indeed have little or no causal connection with his emerititation. Calder errs, however, in regarding Wilamowitz’s Graeca as a revival or continuation of Mommsen’s. ‘Graeca’ is a generic, not a proprietary word, and every Graeca that I know of was a private enterprise. There was no question of a διαδοχή, and during the years in which Wilamowitz’s Graeca met there were in Berlin surely any number of other Graecas, whether under this name or any other, differing in interests, habits and procedures and without mutual contact. So for example Norden in the “Vorrede” of his Agnostos Theos refers to “unsere Graeca” in Berlin, where the Acta Apostolorum were read in the winter of 1910/1 and whose membership consisted of classicists and theologians. Of Graecas elsewhere the Hallensis was known on account of its occasional publications; that of Freiburg concentrated on the study of papyri; and in Strassburg, where Eduard Schwartz and the philosopher Windelband were members, literary and philosophical texts were read and discussed. It is thus misleading to speak of Wilamowitz as “appropriating the name” and “instituting changes.” I should add that no student was at any time a member of the Graeca.

Perhaps Calder is right to doubt the story of Mommsen’s article in a progressive newspaper to ward off the title ‘Exzellenz’, although one version does not necessarily exclude the other; for Wilhelm II was tenacious in such matters. The prime example is Bismarck’s vain protests against raising his status (on the occasion of his dismissal) to ‘Herzog von Lauenburg’. In the version which I heard (in 1923) Mommsen actually prided himself on having for once done better

1 As for publications which grew out of the Graeca, Hesiodos Erga is the only book of which this may be said; for Die Heimkehr des Odysseus (1927) was written in reaction to Eduard Schwartz’s Die Odyssee (Munich 1924), and the study of the latter books of the Odyssey with the Graeca merely helped him to test and clarify his convictions. There are, however, a number of articles and “Lesefrüchte” which grew out of his reading with the Graeca. Of these I mention only two which appeared too late for inclusion in the Wilamowitz-Bibliographie: “Die Katapolei des Empedokles” (SB Berl. 1929, 626–61) and emendations to Empedocles’ Περὶ φύσεως included in “Lesefrüchte,” Hermes 65 (1930).
than Bismarck, who had so often gotten the better of him in the political arena.

Concerning Wilamowitz's relations with his colleagues, I am not persuaded that my impressions are wrong. As to Harnack, frictions with Wilamowitz in the early Berlin years related mainly to the Kirchenväter-Kommission, where Harnack held out as long as he could against classicists (Eduard Schwartz, Paul Wendland et al.) as editors. In the 1920's their relationship was friendly, although Wilamowitz was sometimes critical of Harnack's scholarship (e.g., of his reconstruction of Porphyry's Adversus Christianos), and Harnack could be mildly ironical about δ πάντα, as he liked to call him. On Dörpfeld Wilamowitz was unduly hard. As far as I know, the Leukas thesis sufficed to make him forget all indisputable merits of Dörpfeld. Kurt Hildebrandt had provoked Wilamowitz by his aggressiveness and dilettantish arrogance. More interesting than Wilamowitz's reaction to this (self-appointed?) spokesman for the Stefan George circle would be his opinion of the master himself. Here the information is unfortunately very scarce, conflicting and unreliable.

"Wilamowitz did not reveal to a student ... what he really thought" (scil. of Jaeger). I might add: "nor to a young Ph.D. or Privatdozent." All of this, while true, is irrelevant. I believe I have emphasized sufficiently (98ff supra) how discreet Wilamowitz was and how rarely he allowed himself a critical remark on Jaeger or for that matter any of his colleagues. Channels by which such remarks would reach younger people, including advanced students, were by no means lacking; but Wilamowitz saw to it that there was nothing to pass through them. Nobody, least of all Jaeger, had illusions about Wilamowitz's critical attitude. On proceedings in the Berlin faculty I cannot report much. It is certain that Wilamowitz's influence was great and that the 'Göttinger' were united by close ties of friendship. Roethe had been one of his best friends in Göttingen, and the friendship with Schulze went back to Greifswald, where Schulze had been

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2 The warm friendship between Mommsen and Harnack was something unique, described most perceptively by Agnes Zahn-Harnack in the biography of her father.

3 I for one am not convinced that the parody of George's early poetic style attributed to Wilamowitz is really his. The poem ends on the lines "... alles lacht so blau; ja, glaub mir, Stefan, alles lacht so blau." This has enough of Wilamowitz's irony and wit to pass as genuine, but there are chronological difficulties.
one of his most distinguished students. However, three or four men were a minority in a Faculty whose membership must have ranged between fifty and a hundred. Influence is not invariably exerted through 'intrigue'.

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