

Normal Lengths of Prytany in the Athenian Year

Benjamin D. Meritt

WHEN DATES in Athenian decrees are given in terms of both the festival and the prytany calendars it has become clear since the study by Pritchett and Neugebauer in 1947 that any irregularity must be attributed to the festival calendar.¹ The treatment of the prytanies was quite impartial, and any restoration of an inscription which attributes more than 30 days or less than 29 days to any prytany in an ordinary year during the period of the twelve *phylai* is suspect. It has taken a long time to shake off the old idea of irregular prytanies which manifested itself so often in the restorations made by Kirchner in the *Inscriptiones Graecae*, but there is now no valid excuse for assuming such irregularities. If other restorations can be made which do not demand irregularities in lengths of prytany, they must be attempted.²

¹ W. Kendrick Pritchett and O. Neugebauer, *The Calendars of Athens* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1947) 3–4. Their thesis is now generally accepted, with certain necessary modifications for the fourth century. In the fifth century, when there were ten prytanies, down to and probably including the first prytany of 407/6, the prytany year approximated the solar year. Lengths of prytany were of 37 and 36 days. The first prytany of 407/6 (of 37 days) was probably the last of the quasi-solar year (cf. *ProcPhilSoc* 115 [1971] 114–17 with tables 2 and 4). From 407/6 down to 308/7, still in the period of the ten prytanies, the lengths of prytany in an ordinary year of twelve months were of 36 and 35 days, but their sequences were not always the normal four times 36 followed by six times 35 (B. D. Meritt, *The Athenian Year* [Berkeley and Los Angeles 1961] 134; *AJP* 95 [1974] 279). After 307/6 when there were twelve *phylai* the lengths of prytany in an ordinary year of twelve months could be the same as the months or could be six times 30 followed by six times 29, or *vice versa*, or indeed any combination which allowed an impartial distribution within the year of six prytanies of 30 days and six prytanies of 29 days, in whatever order (Meritt, *op.cit.* 135–40).

² Jon D. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian State* (Princeton 1975), emphasizes another criterion which must be observed in the restoration of texts. One should avoid dates for meetings of the assembly which conflict with major state festivals. This thesis is sound and admirably documented by Mikalson. As one of the first-fruits of attention to it the restoration of Boedromion 20 in 222/1 for a meeting of the assembly must be withdrawn (B. D. Meritt and John S. Traill, *The Athenian Agora*, XV: *Inscriptions, The Athenian Councillors* [Princeton 1974] p.120 no.129 line 3). The date to be restored is [ὀγδόη ἐπὶ δέκα τρίτῃ καὶ ἐξήκοστῇ τῆς πρυτανείᾳ], and the same retardation had taken place in the festival calendar which is evident also in the calendar equation of line 37 (*op.cit.* p.122). Boedromion 20 was the first full day of the Mysteries at Eleusis.

In 1961 I suggested that in four separate years there may have been a prytany of 31 days in an ordinary year.³ These suggestions must now be corrected.

The first year was 258/7 B.C. when Thymochares was archon. This was represented by a text published in the *Corpus* (IG II² 700) as of the third prytany, with the *phyle* Antigonis or Demetrias and with the date [Βοηδ]ρομιῶνος ἔνει καὶ [νέαι] in the festival calendar followed by a space of eighteen letters for the date by prytany. Mikalson (*op.cit.* p.64) gives the text again but leaves only five spaces for the name of the *phyle*. There is, of course, no *phyle* with only five letters in the genitive of its name. He also reduces the number of letters for the date by prytany from eighteen to sixteen. For the validation of any restoration these mistakes have first to be corrected.

I republished the *Corpus* text in 1938, restoring the dates to suit an intercalary year,⁴ but when Pritchett and I came to draw up our archon list for the mid third century we found that the sequence of intercalary and ordinary years suggested strongly (if it did not prove) that the year of Thymochares should be ordinary,⁵ and we made it so by assuming that one of the first two prytanies must have had 31 days. This violates the first principles of impartial lengths of prytany. In the somewhat later study by Pritchett and Neugebauer the authors held to an ordinary year but avoided any irregularity in the lengths of prytanies.⁶ They did, however, assume a possible irregularity in the *stoichedon* order of fifty letters on a line, and they allowed themselves a liberty in restoration by noting that frequently unscribed spaces exist on the stone between phrases.⁷ Neither the assumption of irregularity in spacing nor of unscribed spaces in the line where the date occurs is good if some better solution can be found. They also suggested as an alternative that the date should be ἐνάτει καὶ εἰκοστέϊ, when, in addition to assuming an unscribed space before the day, they thought it possible that the first three months had only 29 days

³ *Op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 81 with n.9.

⁴ *Hesperia* 7 (1938) 110–12, 113.

⁵ William Kendrick Pritchett and Benjamin Dean Meritt, *The Chronology of Hellenistic Athens* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1940) 97.

⁶ *Op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 81 with n.9.

⁷ There is much less disturbance in the order than Kirchner thought, as was noted in *Hesperia* 7 (1938) 113, and there is no evidence for any irregularity in the opening lines. There are indeed unscribed spaces between phrases, but the one place where such an epigraphical phenomenon is never known to occur is between the date by month and the date by prytany (*cf.* *AJP* 95 [1974] 274–75).

each. The assumption of three hollow months in succession depends on a theory, for which there is no evidence in historic times, that lengths of months were determined by empirical observation of the new moon.⁸

In 1961 I still held to an ordinary year, with one of the first two prytanies having 31 days, but cited the alternative (which would be correct epigraphically) for an intercalary year. The year of Thymochares appeared in my table of archons as ordinary.⁹ The matter could not be left there. After considering what the possibilities were for a normal restoration, epigraphically, to yield an ordinary year I later proposed the following restoration of the formula of date in lines 2–4 of the inscription: [Βοηδ]ρομιῶνος ἔνει καὶ [νείαι ὀγδόει καὶ εἰκοστῇ τῆς πρυτανείας],¹⁰ or with the spelling νείαι retained the extra letter needed to fill the *stoichedon* line might have been supplied by reading ὀγδοίει instead of ὀγδόει. Both variants are well attested. The last day of Boedromion was the 88th day of the year (29+ 30+ 29), and this was equated with the 28th day of the third prytany (30+ 30+ 28). There has been no need to assume any irregularity of prytany length. I note again that the year was ordinary to clarify the confusion in my presentation of 1961.

The second year in which I suggested a possible prytany of 31 days was 195/4, in a text first published in 1940.¹¹ Here the calendar equation was read as [Βοηδρομιῶνος ἔνει καὶ νείαι] ἑβδόμει καὶ εἰ[κοστῇ τῆς πρυτανείας]. The authors noted that the context seemed to call for the restoration of the month Boedromion. Since the decree praises *epheboi* “the probability is great” that this month name should be restored. The 27th day of the prytany is sure, and the question now is to find which date by month can be equated with it.

The restoration of the name of the month as Boedromion would require that one of the first three prytanies should have had 31 days. As was the case when the assumption was made for *IG II² 700* (see above) such a restoration would violate the law of impartiality in the lengths of prytanies. In an ordinary year, which this clearly is, the last day of no month before Posideon can be equated with the 27th day of any prytany. When the text was published in 1940 we were not so

⁸ Cf. Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 1–15, 16–37, 44; *TAPA* 95 (1964) 228–34; *ArchEph* 1968, 87–88.

⁹ Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 140–42, 233.

¹⁰ *Hesperia* 38 (1969) 112–13.

¹¹ Pritchett and Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 111.

averse as we were after 1947 to an irregular length of prytany. Now we know better, and I restore:

Chronology, p.111

[ἐπὶ ἄρχοντ]ος ἐπὶ τῆς Ο[ἰνείδος ἕκτης πρυτανεί]
[ας ἦι -----]κράτου Σημαχί[δης ἐγραμμάτευεν· Πο]
[σιδεῶνος ἐνεὶ καὶ νέαι] ἐβδόμει καὶ εἰ[κοστῇ τῆς πρυτανείας]
κτλ.

While it is true that one expects the honors for the *epheboi* to be voted in Boedromion, none the less there are examples of votes longer delayed. A vote of praise for the *epheboi* of 185/4 was made in the tenth prytany of the following year (IG II² 900), and honors for the *epheboi* of 246/5 were voted in the year 244/3, after a delay of thirteen months, in the month of Pyanopsion.¹² Surely, it is better to accept a delay of three months, as here suggested, than to violate the law of impartiality in lengths of prytany which a prytany of 31 days would mean. Here the first six prytanies were of 30 days each and the vote was passed on the 177th day of the year.¹³

The third year for which I suggested a prytany of 31 days was 176/5 when Hippakos was archon.¹⁴ As the inscription in question of this year was first published the suggested date in the prytany was *μιᾶι καὶ [τριακοστῇ]*, but this in itself is not enough to assure that any one prytany had 31 days, for the restoration *μιᾶι καὶ [εἰκοστῇ]* is apt and is equally possible. If the date was the 21st of the ninth prytany the day of the year was the 255th, granted that the first six prytanies were of 29 days each and the last six of 30 days each. This brings the month date to Elaphebolion, the one month *par excellence* when days were added *extra ordinem* to the festival calendar.¹⁵ The 9th day of Elaphebolion would normally have been the 245th day of the year. It was delayed by the addition of ten extra days, and in consequence the

¹² See *Χαριστήριον εἰς Ἀναστάσιον Κ. Ὀρλάνδον, Α'* (Athens 1965) 194–96.

¹³ This decree is cited by Mikalson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 65, from *Chronology* for a restored date in Boedromion.

¹⁴ Pritchett and Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 120.

¹⁵ In 271/0 the 9th of Elaphebolion was intercalated four times (*Hesperia* 23 [1950] 299) and at that time the festival date had been retarded in all by eight days. In 145/4 the Dionysia in Elaphebolion had been postponed as much as nineteen or twenty days (*Agora* XV pp.191–92 no.238; cf. *TAPA* 95 [1964] 255). In general see also Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 33, 147–48, 161–65, 208.

calendar equation may be restored to read [μηνός Ἐλαφηβολιώνος ἐνάτει] ἐσιόντος μιᾷ καὶ [εἰκοστῇ τῆς πρυτανείας]. This is probable; other solutions are possible, but there is no longer reason to believe that any prytany in this year had 31 days. I choose to restore the 9th rather than the 10th day of Elaphebolion because of the improbability of a meeting of the *ekklesia* on Elaphebolion 10.¹⁶

The fourth year for which I suggested a prytany of 31 days in an ordinary year was 168/7 when Xenokles was archon (IG II² 945). This year is best taken as intercalary with the calendar equation Σκιροφοριῶνος ἔνει καὶ νέαι μιᾷ καὶ τριακοστῇ τῆς πρυ[τανείας] representing the next to last (383rd) day of the year. The day was in fact Σκιροφοριῶνος ἔνη καὶ νέα προτέρα, but the distinguishing epithet προτέρα (or ἐμβόλιμος) was not always added in a published text.¹⁷ This year will have had the normal sequence of prytanies of 32 days each.

The same impartiality in lengths of prytany must be assumed for the fourth century when there were only ten *phylai*. I had taken the correspondences between the calendar equations of two inscriptions of the year 327/6 to show that the final prytany probably had 37 days.¹⁸ No prytany during the period of the ten *phylai* in the fourth century should have had more than 36 days or less than 35 days in an ordinary year. If the first five prytanies had 35 days each the equation in IG II² 357 is correct for Prytany VI 3, the 178th day of the year: ἔνει κ[αὶ νέαι τρίτει τῆς πρυταν]είας.

$$\begin{array}{r} 30 \quad 29 \quad 30 \quad 29 \quad 30 \quad 30 = 178 \text{ days} \\ 35 \quad 35 \quad 35 \quad 35 \quad 35 + 3 = 178 \text{ days} \\ \langle \text{Posideon} \rangle 30 = \text{Prytany [VI 3]} = 178 \text{th day} \end{array}$$

Continuing the count into the equation which can be restored in IG II² 356 one finds that the 26th day of the seventh prytany, with the sixth prytany of 36 days, comes at least to the 237th day of the year, while the next to last day of Anthesterion is only, by calendar count, the 236th day. It is best to assume here a retardation of one day in the festival calendar, as preferable to the assumption that one of the last

¹⁶ Mikalson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 125, citing W. S. Ferguson, *Hesperia* 17 (1948) 134–35. It should be noted in passing that the restoration in *Agora* XV p.150 (173 line 32) should also be with ἐνάτει instead of with δεκάτει. The calendar equation here in line 3 shows that the festival count had already been delayed by one day. The restoration of ἐνάτει would reflect a retardation of two days in early Elaphebolion.

¹⁷ See, for example, IG II² 471 and 472 of the year 306/5, where the date Prytany X 29 is equated once with Mounichion ἔνη καὶ νέα (with no epithet) and once with ἔνη καὶ νέα ἐμβόλιμος.

¹⁸ *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 98–99. The inscriptions are IG II² 357 and 356.

prytanies of the year had 37 days. The retardation could have taken place at any time in Gamelion or Anthesterion and the prytany year could have continued normally to its end with the last five prytanies of 36 days each, a total of 355 days.¹⁹

〈Anthesterion〉 29= Prytany [VII] 26= 236th day

The definition of the year as having 355 days is indicated by the sequence of months, where two full months were juxtaposed to satisfy the calendar equation of IG II² 357.

I have discussed several times the dates in another text of 327/6, where I feel confident that there is no calendar equation, only two ways of naming the 22nd day of the month.²⁰

I know of no irregularity which demands any prytany of more than 39 days or less than 38 in an intercalary year in the fourth century in the period of the ten *phylai*. The irregularities that had to be assumed in 333/2²¹ all disappear when IG II² 358 is properly assigned to 307/6.²² In 341/10 and in 336/5 the equations between Skirophorion ἔνῃ καὶ νέᾳ and Prytany X 37 are to be justified by taking ἔνῃ καὶ νέᾳ as the next to the last day rather than as the last day of the month, so that Prytany X may have a normal 38 days.²³ The same relationship exists in another text of uncertain date ca 330/29, where the year was ordinary and the tenth prytany must have had 35 days.²⁴

Some good can come from studying again already published inscriptions in the light of our increasing knowledge about the calendar. New inscriptions will undoubtedly be found, and one of the criteria, among others, which must be taken into account in the restoration of them is the principle of impartiality in fixing the terms of the several prytanies within the year.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

February, 1976

¹⁹ Pritchett and Neugebauer (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.1] 52–54) treated the year as intercalary, but its position in the Metonic cycle makes this extremely improbable, especially after an intercalary 328/7. See Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 96.

²⁰ See Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 100. My latest suggestion was in *ArchEph* 1968, 115. I believe it possible that the adverb ὁμῶς (=‘likewise’) might have been used instead of *vivi*. For a similar use of ὁμῶς see the text of IG I² 52 line 24 as published by R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford 1969) p.176.

²¹ Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 84–85.

²² *Hesperia* 33 (1964) 13–14.

²³ Meritt, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 10–12, for the restorations in IG II² 229 and 330.

²⁴ IG II² 415.