

ATHENA'S ROBE

Athens was Alexander Fuks' first love, and it is a matter of regret that he never carried out a plan to translate what he affectionately described as his 'Hebrew Zimmern'. I offer here in his memory a short note to show how much in the dark we can still be about the most central issues.

It has been generally assumed¹ that the robe (peplos) offered to Athena at the Great Panathenaea was placed on the olive-wood statue of immemorial antiquity, which was certainly small and portable. The view recently expressed by H.W. Parke,² that by the late fifth century the peplos was of colossal size and offered to Pheidias' chryselephantine statue of Athena, dedicated in 438 B.C., has been treated as heresy by at least one reviewer, G.T.W. Hooker.³ The matter seems to me to be more open than that.

Parke is clearly relying on Fragment 30 of the *Macedonians* of the Athenian comic poet Strattis; the date is uncertain, but cannot be far from 400 B.C. The translation must be something like "This robe with ropes and windlasses countless men haul up like a sail on its mast." Hooker comments "We do not know the context, nor whether there is any element of comic exaggeration here; but the speaker is not saying that the peplos was as big as a sail, only that it was hauled up in the same way". But the countless men are outside the comparison, and, whatever the exaggeration, it seems hard to think that many men would be required for a small peplos.

There has long been evidence that a mast and cross-stay were important for the peplos as early as 299/8 B.C., when new ones were provided by King Lysimachos, in control of timber-rich Thrace.⁴ Further

¹ As far as I can see, Deubner, *Attische Feste* (1932), 29–34, the fullest collection of evidence on the peplos, takes no position on this, but see Herington, *Athena Parthenos and Athena Polias* (1955), 25, with references.

² *Festivals of the Athenians* (1977), 39.

³ *JHS* 98, 1978, 190–1.

⁴ Deubner, 32 n. 2.

evidence for the importance of getting the right equipment in the early third century comes from a new inscription,⁵ which describes a successful application to Ptolemy II in 282 or 278 for ropes for the peplos. The importance of Egypt to mainland Greece for cordage needs no demonstration.⁶ That the equipment needed was on a scale to support a large robe is clear, and on the face of it the view that Strattis is describing a large peplos is strengthened. Since the application to Lysimachos slightly antedates the occasion in 297 or 296 when Lachares stripped the gold plates off Pheidias' statue, there is no temptation to believe that it was this stripping which occasioned a change of statues, and no other occasion for a change of statues suggests itself; a change is hardly to be attributed to the conservative Lycurgus.

Other points have been raised. Hooker's objection that the Parthenon frieze depicts a small peplos, estimated at 4 by 7 feet, is substantially weakened by Boardman's demonstration⁷ that the frieze does not represent the contemporary festival. The passages thought by Herington⁸ to show that the peplos was put on the olivewood statue refer to the Plynteria, not to the Panathenaea, and the inscription he quotes is in any case earlier than 438 B.C. On the other side, we can add that the peplos took nine months to make.⁹

I therefore conclude that there is some probability that, as soon as Pheidias' statue was completed in 438 B.C., a central religious rite of the Athenian state was transferred to it. If this could be more firmly established, it would be a cardinal piece of evidence for our understanding of Periclean Athens.

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⁵ T.L. Shear, *Hesperia* Suppl. XVII (1978), pp. 3–4, lines 64–70. Shear's commentary, pp. 39–44, is largely concerned with the Panathenaic ship.

⁶ Hdt. VII 25.1, Hermippos F 63.12–13, Diodorus XIV 79.4 (Egypt cannot be a source of wooden ship-equipment).

⁷ *Festschrift für Frank Brommer* (1977), 39–49. That the peplos is depicted here is denied by Nagy, *Class. Phil.* 73, 1978, 136–41, who accepts the evidence for a large peplos, but thinks that the olivewood statue was large.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, 17 n. 2.

⁹ Deubner, 31. That large numbers of *ergastinai* prepared the wool for the peplos c. 100 B.C. (*ibid.* and cf. Nagy) probably proves nothing, since these noble ladies may only have put in a fairly formal appearance.