

ROMANS AND PIRATES IN A LATE HELLENISTIC ORACLE FROM PAMPHYLIA

In the publication of their second journal of archaeological travels in Cilicia, Bean and Mitford included the text of an unusual inscription from the site of ancient Syedra. The text has previously been discussed by Louis Robert, by the Hungarian historian of piracy Egon Maróti, and also by H. W. Parke.¹ Although all four made suggestions about the date and interpretation of the inscription, no firm conclusions were reached.

The text of the inscription, incorporating amendments suggested by Robert and Maróti, is:

Πάμφυλοι Συεδρῆς ἐπιξύν[ω ἐν ἀρούρη]
ναίοντες χθόνα παμμιγέων ἐ[ριβώλ]ακα φωτῶν,
Ἄππος δείκηνλον ἐναιμέος ἀνδοφόνοιο
στήσαντες μεσάτω πόλιος [π]α[ρ]ὰ ἔρδετε θύσθλα,
δεσμοῖς Ἑρμείαιο σιδηρείοις μιν ἔχοντ<ο>ς·
ἐγ δ' ἐτέροιο Δίκη σφε θεμιστεύουσα δικάζ[οι]
αὐτὰρ ὁ λισσομένω ἱκελος πέλοι· ὥδε γ[ὰρ] ὕμειν
ἔσσεται εἰρηναῖος, ἀνάριον ὄχλον ἐ[λά]σσας
τῇλε πάτρης, ὅρσει δέ πολύλλιτον εὐοχθείαν·
σὺν δὲ καὶ ὑμέες ἀπτεσθαι κρατεροῖο [π]όν[οι]ο,
ἧ σεύοντες ἡ ἐν δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις πε[δ]ώ[ν]τες],
μηδ' ὄκνω δόμεναι ληιστήρων τίσι[ν] αἰν[ί]γην].
οὕτω γὰρ μάλα πάσαν ὑπεγδύσε[σθε κ]όλο[υσιν]

I translate as follows:

The Pamphylians of Syedra, who share common lands, living on the fertile land of mixed peoples, offer a sacrifice, setting up on the summit of the city an image of Ares the bloodstained slayer of men, held in the iron chains of Hermes. On his other side may Justice, laying down the law, give judgement upon him. And may he become like one who begs. For, in this way, he will be at peace with you, driving the hostile horde far away from the fatherland, and he will call forth the prosperity you have greatly implored. And, in addition, you should take up the fierce battle,² either driving away, or binding in unbreakable chains, and do not, through fear, pay a terrible penalty because of the pirates, in this way you will certainly escape all punishment.³

The restoration in the first line is that of Robert, and it has a Homeric basis.⁴ Bean and Mitford suggested that the unusual imagery of Ares in chains precluded the possibility of a mainland Greek source for the oracle, but Maróti rejected this view. Robert compared it with a similar inscribed oracle from Iconium, featuring Ares with Hermes and Themis, which he argued derives from the oracle at Claros.⁵

¹ G. E. Bean and T. B. Mitford, *Journeys in Rough Cilicia in 1962 and 1963* (Vienna, 1965), pp. 21–3; L. Robert, *Documents de la Asie Mineure méridionale* (Geneva/Paris, 1966), pp. 91–100; E. Maróti, *AAA Hung.* XIV (1968), 233–8 (in English) and *Gymnasium* 98 (1991), 177–8 (in German); H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London, 1985), pp. 157–9.

² *ponos* is clearly used here in its Homeric sense of ‘battle’, rather than merely ‘toil’; see *LSJ*, s.v. *πόνος*.

³ I am very grateful to my colleague Dr Stephen Instone for his suggestions regarding this translation. I have not discussed all the details of the vocabulary and grammar of this inscription, having nothing of significance to add to the observations of earlier commentators.

⁴ Robert, op. cit., p. 92, based on *Il.* 12.422.

⁵ Op. cit., pp. 96–100. On the ritual context of the inscription and the statue group see C. A. Faraone, *Cl. Ant.* 10 (1991), 168–70.

The general meaning of the oracle is clear enough: do not give in to the *leisteres* or you will be punished. The word *leister* is best understood in its Homeric sense of 'pirate'.⁶ It could possibly mean just 'bandit' or 'robber' but this is unlikely, in view of both the Homeric style of the oracle's language and the coastal location of Syedra, which gives a maritime context, justifying the usual interpretation of *leister*.⁷ The reference to prosperity may be a very general one, or it might suggest that the Syedrans were hoping to improve their wealth from some form of 'commerce', which the presence of piratical neighbours would have seriously inconvenienced, unless they were prepared to co-operate in the manner described by Strabo for the city of Side.⁸

The editors concluded on the basis of the letter forms that the inscription was probably cut in the early imperial period, but the contents strongly suggest that it is a copy of an earlier document. That the original version of the oracle was delivered to Syedra at some date before it became part of a Roman province seems beyond doubt. It would be inappropriate for the Syedrans to seek or accept oracular advice to go to war, which is the clear implication of the phrase, 'take up the fierce battle', when they were under the protection of Rome. Bean and Mitford's dating to the triumphal period seems far too late, and fails to provide a credible context for the oracle.⁹ The date and context can best be determined by considering what it was that prompted the Syedrans to declare their opposition to piracy. Maróti and Robert agreed that some date before Pompey's campaign of 67 B.C. is appropriate, and suggested that the fates of Phaselis and Olympos at the hands of the Roman magistrate P. Servilius Isauricus may have provided the spur. It seems more likely, however, that the problem of choosing between Romans and pirates confronted the Pamphyliaans earlier in the first century B.C., since the oracle clearly assumes that the struggle with the pirates is far from over for the Syedrans. It could well be that the choice was presented to them as a consequence of the leading role in the suppression of piracy which the Romans assumed at the end of the second century B.C., a role which they publicised in the provisions of the *lex de provinciis praetoriis* of 100 B.C.¹⁰ In this statute the Romans justified making Cilicia into a regular praetorian province by referring to the need to deny bases to pirates and to enable the citizens, allies, and friends of Rome to sail the sea in safety.¹¹

A potential difficulty with this argument is the lack of evidence for the existence of Syedra in the early first century B.C., but this does not preclude an earlier date for the oracle, as knowledge of Syedra before the mid-first century A.D. is limited to a brief mention in Lucan's *Civil War*.¹² It simply is not possible to establish when, and in what form, Syedra first became an independent community. It must have been

⁶ *Od.* 3.73, 9.254, 16.426, 17.425.

⁷ The sense of urgency which seems to have prompted the Syedrans to obtain this oracle also implies that their problem is greater than mere banditry, which was typically a local phenomenon, more easily dealt with than piracy; see Dio Cass. 36.20.3–4.

⁸ Str. 14.3.2. Note also 14.5.7 on the extent of the territory which the 'pirate' Zeniketos controlled prior to his defeat by Servilius Isauricus (Korykos, Phaselis, and parts of Pamphylia). Cicero II *Verr.* 4.21 emphasizes Phaselis' connections with pirates.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 22–3. Their suggestion that Syedra did not exist at all before the mid-first century B.C. is based on a lack of conclusive evidence and cannot be used to determine the date of the oracle. Parke's second century A.D. date is similarly inappropriate: *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁰ Revised text in *IGSK Knidos*, vol. 1; also in M. Crawford (ed.), *Roman Statutes* (London, 1996), pp. 231–70. The Syedrans' fear of Rome is also invoked in the discussion of the oracle by F. Sokolowski, *BCH* 92 (1968), 519–22.

¹¹ *lex de provinciis praetoriis* Knidos copy col. II, lines 2–4 and col. III, lines 28–37.

¹² Lucan 8.260. Strabo does not mention Syedra. See further Bean and Mitford, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–3.

overshadowed to some extent by neighbouring Korakesion, a centre of resistance to Pompey in 67 B.C.¹³ Bean and Mitford suggested that Syedra could not have acted independently of its neighbour,¹⁴ but the nature and extent of the larger city's influence is also impossible to determine. Furthermore, in 102 B.C., when Marcus Antonius the Orator campaigned in this region, he apparently based himself west of Syedra at Side, a major port of Pamphylia, and, as already mentioned, in later years a favourite haven for Cilician pirates.¹⁵ This would imply that the Pamphylians had not yet come so heavily under the influence of Cilician pirates as Strabo's comments might indicate.¹⁶ Whereas the fame of Korakesion is largely attributable to its resistance to Rome, it may have been their early decision to adopt the Romans' side, and their inferior status among the cities of the region, which kept the Syedrans out of the historical accounts of 'Cilician' piracy and consigned them to near oblivion. They had done nothing to warrant censure, and their exploits were too few to require a record of praise.

The original question put to the Clarian oracle by the Syedrans seems to have been a very simple one: 'Should we fight the pirates, yes or no?' The consultation procedure at Claros¹⁷ allowed the basic reply ('Yes!') to be presented in the form of elaborate oracular verses, complete with Homeric phrases and, perhaps intentionally, ambiguous in its reference to the source of the Syedrans' concerns.¹⁸

Why did the Syedrans proclaim their stance in this fashion? Perhaps part of the explanation lies in the 'mixed' nature of their community, partly Cilician and partly Pamphylian, and their relative insignificance among the cities of Southern Anatolia. The oracle and the choice of allegiance could serve as a focus for unity among the Syedrans and give them a feeling of distinctiveness and importance. It also aligned them (potentially) with the powerful Romans whose advance in Anatolia, while not necessarily irreversible in the early first century B.C., must have seemed very difficult and dangerous to oppose, but beneficial and safer to befriend.

The Syedrans would not have been the only ones who had a difficult choice to make as a result of Rome's anti-pirate policy. It is usually assumed that the entire southern coast of Anatolia was a mass of pirate bases, with virtually no 'honest' cities left by the time Pompey took up his special commission in 67 B.C.,¹⁹ and this is what the main ancient narratives imply in their descriptions of the background to the *lex Gabinia*.²⁰ These generalizations are not fully representative, however, as they underplay or ignore the decisions of other communities to stand apart from those designated as pirates, and even to join in the struggle as the Romans required, evidence for which can be found in both literary and epigraphic sources.

Strabo insisted that, in general, the Lycians were far more 'civilized' than their Pamphylian and Cilician neighbours, and, therefore, they had resisted the temptation

¹³ Plut. Pomp. 28.1; Vell. Pat. 2.32.4.

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁵ *ILLRP* 342, ll. 4–6. A. N. Sherwin-White, *JRS* 66 (1976), 1–14 argues that this inscription refers to the campaign of his son, Marcus Antonius Creticus, but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever went further east than the Aegean.

¹⁶ It has recently been argued that Cilician piracy was an economic and political response to Roman occupation and exploitation of Southern Anatolia, by H. Pohl, *Die römische Politik und die Piraterie im östlichen Mittelmeer vom 3. bis zum 1. Jh. v. Chr.* (Berlin, 1993), but see *CR* 45 (1995), 99–101.

¹⁷ See Parke, op. cit., pp. 219–24.

¹⁸ Compare the Lycian inscription discussed below.

¹⁹ For example, H. A. Ormerod, *Piracy in the Ancient World* (Liverpool, 1924), pp. 205–13. A similar view is implicit in Pohl, op. cit.

²⁰ Plut. Pomp. 25; App. Mith. 92; Dio Cass. 36.21–2.

to profit from piracy,²¹ although he conceded that Phaselis and some other parts of Eastern Lycia had come under the influence of pirates.²² Further evidence of divisions among the Lycians over the appropriate attitude to take towards the practice and support of piracy may be gleaned from a group of inscriptions of the early first or late second century B.C. from Xanthos. Two seem to have been part of a tropaeum which was built into the wall above the city gate, and a third was found lying nearby.²³ All three honour an admiral called Aichmon who was elected to command the Lycian League's war fleet, fought a naval battle around Gelidonya, and won several victories on land. One text gives intriguing hints about the identity of the particular opponents defeated by Aichmon and the Lycians.

Aichmon, son of Apollodotos, (of the tribe of) Sarpedon, having been elected by the Lycians to command over their assembled war fleet, and having persevered against the ones having been in a state of opposition to the nation, for the entire duration of the campaign, industriously and boldly, having prevailed against the enemy, to Ares in token of thanks.²⁴

Dittenberger in his commentary drew attention to the peculiar phrasing used to denote Aichmon's opponents and concluded that they were Lycians. I am in agreement with this view, especially as it seems that the mention of a sea battle followed by landfalls on 'enemy' territory in *OGIS* 552 would fit with an attack on the coast of Eastern Lycia, around Phaselis and Olympos, which were strongholds of Zeniketos in the 70s B.C.²⁵ Aichmon's campaign could have been a Lycian response to the call to take up the armed struggle against pirates as outlined by the Romans in the *lex de provinciis praetoriis*. The lack of any apparent Roman involvement would fit with the relative inactivity of Roman magistrates in the region following the publication of the law, and the fact that it was only a Lycian campaign would explain the absence of Aichmon's exploits from the narrative sources, which are almost exclusively concerned with the activities of Roman commanders in this period. After the passing of the *lex de provinciis praetoriis* we are, however, very much in the dark about the course of Roman magisterial activity in Anatolia. It may be that the Syedrans, along with many others, expected a more rapid Roman advance in their region than actually occurred. They could not have anticipated the rise of Mithridates and the long struggle for dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean which ensued.²⁶ It is worth noting that many of those designated as 'pirates' by our sources for this period are allied to or in some way associated with Mithridates, which may be less an indication that pirates flourished in the power struggle and more a result of Rome

²¹ Str. 14.3.2. He describes them as *politikos kai sophronos*, which is clearly intended as a contrast with the politically unsophisticated (and piratically inclined) Pamphylians and Cilicians.

²² Str. 14.5.7. Phaselis is one of the last suitable harbours east of Cape Gelidonya, and certainly the best equipped. It would not be surprising that pirates made frequent landfalls there.

²³ *OGIS* 552, 553, 554. The date of the entire group is deduced from the lettering and the lack of any indication of direct Rhodian or Roman control. For obvious reasons I am inclined to date the inscriptions and the events they record to the early first century B.C.

²⁴ *OGIS* 553:

Αἰχμῶν Ἀπολλοδότου | Σαρπηδόνης, αἰρεθεὶς ὑπὸ | Λυκίων ἐπὶ τοῦ συναχθέντος στρατοπέδου | καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τὰ ἐναντία πραξάντων τῷ ἔθνει | καὶ προσκαρτερήσας πάντα τὸν τῆ[ς] στρατείας | χρόνον φιλοπόνως καὶ φιλοκινδύνως, | καταγωνισάμενος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους, Ἀρη χαριστήριον.

²⁵ See above n. 8. The duration of Zeniketos' hegemony is indeterminable. In spite of the triumphal tone of the inscriptions, there is no need to assume that Aichmon's victories were conclusive.

²⁶ See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East* (London, 1984), chs V–VII, for narrative and analysis.

applying a pejorative label to her enemies.²⁷

The Syedrans announced through their acceptance of this oracular advice their stance as pro-Roman, and in Roman terms, anti-pirate. Other Southern Anatolian communities followed suit, or stuck with local allegiances and suffered the fate of Side and Phaselis.

Why was the oracle reinscribed during the imperial period? Perhaps the origin at Claros has something to do with this. Strabo, writing in the early first century A.D., seems to believe that the oracle is no longer functioning, yet Tacitus and Pausanias indicate that it was flourishing.²⁸ Robert argued that several Syedran coins from the second and third centuries A.D. depict the statue group of Ares, Hermes, and Dike.²⁹ It might be that renewed interest in Claros, as well as the cult of Ares, encouraged the Syedrans to revive the main evidence of their connections with both by restoring the statue and its inscribed oracle at the heart of their city.

This article has advanced an alternative interpretation of the Late Hellenistic oracle from Syedra published by Bean and Mitford, placing it in the context of a declared Roman policy of opposition to piracy manifested in the *lex de provinciis praetoriis* of 100 B.C. The oracle shows the reponse of a small community to the Romans' anti-piracy stance and illustrates the considerable variation in attitudes to Rome and piracy which existed in the region prior to Pompey's celebrated campaign of 67 B.C.³⁰

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²⁷ For the long tradition in the ancient Mediterranean of categorizing political opponents as pirates, see P. de Souza, 'Greek Piracy', in A. Powell (ed.), *The Greek World* (London, 1995), pp. 179–98.

²⁸ Str. 14.1.27; Tac. Ann. 2.54; Paus. 7.1.3. Parke, op. cit., chs 8 and 9.

²⁹ Robert, op. cit., pp. 97–8; G. F. Hill, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Lycaonia and Cilicia in the British Museum* (London), p. 159.

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