XIV. The Covenant of Plataea

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The discovery and the prompt and competent publication of the Themistocles Decree (M. H. Jameson, *Hesperia* 29 [1960] 198–223) have opened our eyes to the proper appreciation of the Oath of Plataea.[1] There can be little doubt that both inscriptions, though inscribed after the middle of the fourth century, record documents of the Persian Wars. Herodotus, who does not mention the documents in question, is not discredited by these discoveries; but our knowledge of the Persian Wars is greatly increased, especially by the realization (1) that the Attic orators and the writers of Athenian history possessed an account of the Persian Wars which was, if not at variance with, at least independent of that of Herodotus, and (2) that their account was often based on genuine documents. Since this applies also to other periods of Athenian history, such as the ages of Solon and Pisistratus, and even to the Peloponnesian War as described by Thucydides, it is now possible to write a history of Athens which closely corresponds to the popular tradition with which the Athenians of the fifth and fourth centuries were familiar.

As a small contribution to this larger task, a discussion of the "Covenant of Plataea" may be offered because there seems to be some evidence available which has not been considered so far in the controversy which has arisen between the distinguished ancient historian, J. A. O. Larsen, and one of the brilliant editors and authors of the *Athenian Tribute Lists*, H. T. Wade-Gery. Moreover, the topic itself is of considerable interest and importance since it illustrates the nature of the Athenian tradition which has so long been obscured by an otherwise justified admiration for Herodotus and an unjustified belief in the exclusiveness of his account.[2]

[1] M. N. Tod, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* 2 (Oxford 1948) No. 204, with the necessary corrections made by G. Daux, *Studies Presented to D. M. Robinson* 2 (St. Louis 1953) 775–82.

[2] For another example of a well attested episode of the Persian Wars which is omitted by Herodotus, see A. E. Raubitschek, "Das Datislied," *Charites, Studien zur Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by Konrad Schauenburg (Bonn 1957) 234–42.

The "Covenant" is known only from Plutarch's *Life of Aristides* (21.1). The context in which it stands is independent of the account of Herodotus, although Plutarch followed him very closely, even to accepting his casualty figures on the Greek side (Herod. 9.70.5 = Plut. *Aristides* 19.5). After a lengthy discussion (9.71–85) of the most distinguished fighters and of the distribution of the spoils (interspersed with some anecdotes), Herodotus simply says (9.86–88) that the Greeks buried their dead and held a council at which it was decided to march against Thebes and to demand the extradition of the chief pro-Persians. If Thebes should refuse, they would take the city. So on the eleventh day after the battle they went to Thebes and besieged the city for twenty days, at which point one of the guilty escaped, while the others were surrendered and executed.

Before turning to Plutarch it may be well to compare the account of Diodorus, whose source Ephorus follows Herodotus but makes some additions (11.33): after the battle the Greeks buried their dead (more than 10,000 while Plutarch has only 1,360), divided the booty and assigned awards. They dedicated a tripod at Delphi,[3] and the Athenians first held at that time their public funerals, the Epitaphia. Then Pausanias moved to Thebes and demanded the extradition, which was granted. The guilty men were executed. There is no mention of any joint resolution taken by the Greeks after the battle and before their attack upon Thebes, but Diodorus does report (11.29.1) that *before* the battle the Greeks vowed, in case of victory, to celebrate at Plataea on the anniversary of that day a festival of *Eleutheria* accompanied by games.

Plutarch's account is detailed and comprehensive. He first establishes the precise day of the victory (19.8), which he probably knew from the celebrations of the anniversary which were still held in his own day (21.6). He then tells the anecdote (20.1–3) explaining how and why the Plataeans received the prize of excellence and were given eighty talents to build a sanctuary of Athena; he adds significantly that the paintings in this temple were still in good condition in his day. Finally, he reports the story (20.4–6) of Euchidas, who in one day ran to Delphi and back and brought the sacred fire to light the new altar of Zeus and the

[3] Diodorus gives the inscription and repeats with minor variations the two epigrams on the dead of Thermopylae, which Herodotus had quoted in 7.228.

other altars which had been defiled by the Persians. When Euchidas died of exhaustion, he was honored by a statue the inscription of which Plutarch saw and quotes.

All these details illustrate the actions of the Greeks assembled *after* the victory at Plataea. Plutarch refers to this assembly repeatedly, first (20.2) speaking of their council and then (20.5) of their leaders. Finally, the most important part of the meeting is reported, namely the establishment of the "Covenant" (21.1–2): when then a general assembly of the Greeks took place, Aristides proposed a decree that there should convene every year in Plataea representatives and delegates from Greece and that every four years the Games of the *Eleutheria* should be conducted. There should be a joint Greek assessment of ten thousand shields, a thousand horse, and a hundred ships for the war against the barbarian; and the Plataeans should be inviolate and sacred so long as they sacrificed to the god on behalf of Greece.

Nobody can seriously question either the establishment in 479 of the *Eleutheria* or the exceptional position of the Plataeans. The former is attested by Diodorus, by an inscription (*IG* VII.2509), by a fragment from one of the comedies by Poseidippus (frag. 29, Kock), and especially by Plutarch's own account, although we do not have any contemporary supporting evidence. The latter is attested by Thucydides, who refers several times to the guarantees given to the Plataeans (2.71.2 and 4); the doubts expressed by the authors of the *Athenian Tribute Lists* (3.102) do not seem to me to be justified.

It is the "Covenant" itself, with its representatives and the joint assessment of troops and ships, which has been subjected to severe and continued criticism.[4] George Grote said that "The defensive league against the Persians was again sworn to by all of them, and rendered permanent," but his editors J. M. Mitchell and M. O. B. Caspari (London 1907) 239 and note 3, declared that "Plutarch's statements . . . must be regarded with a good deal of suspicion." Busolt's footnote (*Gr.Gesch.* 2^2 [Gotha 1895] 741, note 2) is, as usual, comprehensive but not decisive; he said

[4] The figures and the proportions of the armament (10,000 men, 1,000 horse, 100 ships) have seemed schematic, but we find the same proportions in the force to be assembled against the Spartans in 377 B.C. (Diod. 15.29.7: 20,000 men, 500 horse, 200 ships) and later by Demosthenes (*Vitae X or.*, Decree 1, 851B: 10,000 men and 1,000 horse). Thus the figures themselves are not schematic but conventional.

that the veracity has been denied without good cause, but he adds that Plutarch's source was probably the unreliable Idomeneus. In the *Athenian Tribute Lists* 3 (Princeton 1950) 101 we read: ". . . we suspect that this covenant is not authentic," and, finally, I. Calabi (*Ricerche sui rapporti fra le poleis* (Florence 1953) 63–69) completes her remarks with the assertion: ". . . la lega ellenica è solo un'ipotesi di autori moderni, la festa panellenica una celebrazione nostalgica dei Greci dell'epoca Romana"; P. A. Brunt closes the case (*Historia* 2 [1953] 157) with the declaration: ". . . the evidence of Plutarch . . . is worthless."

Against this formidable array of adverse criticism, J. A. O. Larsen alone has upheld the reliability of Plutarch's account and the historicity of the "Covenant." Beginning in 1933 (*CP* 38 [1933] 262–64), continuing in 1940 (*HSCP* 51 [1940] 177–79), and completing his argument in 1955 (*Representative Government in Greek and Roman History* [Berkeley 1955] 48–50 and 208–210, notes 4 and 7), Larsen has patiently insisted that "if we did not have an account of the Congress . . . it would almost be necessary to postulate something of the kind" (*HSCP* 51 [1940] 179, note 2), a truly Cartesian syllogism.

Independent confirmation of Plutarch's account of the "Covenant" is provided by a curious Byzantine excerpt of the ninth book of Diodorus dealing with the seven wise men, in particular with Chilon (9.10.5): " . . . he advises against assurances and strong pledges and decisions in human affairs, such as the Greeks made when they had defeated Xerxes. For they swore in Plataea to transmit to their children's children the enmity against the Persians, so long as the rivers flow into the sea and the human race exists and the earth bears fruit. Yet having made firm pledges in face of the uncertainty of fortune, after some time they sent ambassadors to Artaxerxes the son of Xerxes concerning a treaty of friendship and alliance."

This is not the place to explore the wisdom of Chilon and its reflections in later Greek literature.[5] Nor do I propose to examine the significance of this passage for our knowledge of the famous peace of Callias.[6] It may be appropriate, however, to

[5] Attention may be called, however, to the curious statement in Sophocles' *Ajax* (678–83) which seems to recall Chilon's *gnômê*.

[6] Without anticipating further discussion, it may be suggested that the "Peace of Callias" is a genuine document of the middle of the fifth century, that its historical

discuss briefly the nature of Chilon's "prophecy" and of the oath itself.

Diodorus himself credits Chilon also with the famous advice "nothing in excess" and says (9.10.3) that it implies one should not make final decision in any human affair, as did the Epidamnians, whose two parties swore eternal enmity only to be reconciled later. Although we cannot date the *stasis* in Epidamnus, we read of it in both Thucydides (1.24.3–4) and Diodorus (12.30.2). Similarly Chilon's most famous *dictum*, that the island Cythera should not have been created or once created submerged below the surface of the sea, is reported, following Herodotus (7.235), by Diogenes Laertius (1.71–72) in a context very similar to that of the other Chilon episodes of Diodorus. Here again later history bears out the wisdom of Chilon's pronouncement. Finally, we may recall the remark about Munychia made by Epimenides (Plut. *Solon* 12.5–6 = Diog. Laert. 1.114) which belongs in a similar context. Unfortunately we do not know the source of all these anecdotes about Chilon and about the other "wise" men, but the tradition goes undoubtedly back to the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ. It is quite possible that Ephorus himself illustrated the two statements of Chilon with historical events which seemed to him pertinent, the oath of the Epidamnians in the one case, that of the Greeks in the other. (For similar forward references in Ephorus, see *FGrH* 70 F 21 and 39.) At any rate there seems to be no good reason to doubt the historicity of either story.

The oath itself is curious in the vivid images which it presents to indicate the eternity of the hostility towards the barbarians; no doubt this is the formulaic language of archaic poetry.[7] This

significance at the time was greatly reduced by the condemnation of its negotiator Callias (Demosthenes 19.273 *pace* M. Cary, *CQ* 39 [1945] 88–89, note 5), that it was inscribed or rediscovered at the time of the King's Peace and then given an historical importance which Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 153, 154) rightly denied. Thus the peace of Callias is one of the documents mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

[7] To achieve the same end, the Phocaeans sank heavy iron weights into the sea before they left their city, saying that they would not return until this *mydros* reappeared on the surface (Herod. 1.165.3). The original members of the Athenian alliance did the same thing at the request of Aristides (Aristotle, *Const. of Athens* 23.5). Similarly the Athenians swore to pursue the war against the Persians "as long as the sun takes the same course" (Herod. 8.143.2, with R. W. Macan's note [London 1908] *ad loc.*; Plut. *Aristides* 10.6). The inscription from the tomb of Midas (Plato, *Phaedrus* 264D: Diog. Laert. 1.89–90; Preger, *Inscriptiones Graecae metricae* [Leipzig 1891] 188–92,

everlasting enmity against the Persians was well known in Athens: Isocrates, *Panegyricus* (4) 157, refers to it, and so does Demosthenes (10.33). The curse mentioned by Isocrates was first pronounced by Aristides before Salamis (Plut. *Aristides* 10.6), and it may have been used by him in the Hellenic oath sworn after Plataea. At any rate the "Covenant of Plataea" appears to have been a genuine document of 479 B.C. which was incorporated into the historical tradition, once in order to illustrate a saying of Chilon, and another time to give added splendor to the statesmanship of Aristides. Although Busolt (*Gr.Gesch.* 2^2 [Gotha 1895] 740, note 5 (on 741) and 741, note 2) and Jacoby (on *FGrH* 338 F 7) strongly suggest that Plutarch's source was Idomeneus, we may confidently assert that the tradition surely goes back to the fourth century B.C., perhaps to the *Plataicus* of Hyperides which we know only from Plut. *De gloria Ath.* 350B. It may be significant that Isocrates in his *Plataicus* (14) of *ca.* 371 B.C. does not mention the "Covenant" (see especially 57–63); did the document become known after this time?

To sum up, a future historian of Athens will remember that the Greeks after Plataea made a covenant which was very short lived if it was operative at all; it was to be sure, the direct predecessor of the league of 478 B.C., which was also organized by Aristides (Aristotle, *Const. of Athens* 23.5). The festival *Eleutheria*, however, continued to be celebrated, and the special position of the Plataeans was remembered, though not always respected. Herodotus does not mention the "Covenant," but in the fourth century the contrast between the bold language of the "Covenant" and the "Peace of Callias" was noted, and the oath of the everlasting hostility against the barbarian was recalled in connection with the traditional anti-Persian policy of certain circles in Athens. While the "Covenant" had little historical significance, it is a genuine document of the Persian Wars.

No. 233) mentions a whole series of similar provisions beginning with "as long as the water runs" (presumably downhill, because the "uphill rivers" became proverbial; see Euripides, *Medea* 410; *Suppliants* 520; Demosthenes 19.287; Hesychius, *s.v.* "*Anô potamôn*" [ed. K. Latte]). The most striking parallels come, however, from Latin poetry: Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.607; Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.10.