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AN ORACLE FOR RAIDERS?

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 108 (1995) 95–99

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. σοι[σι]
 λῆϊστοί· θε[δ]-
 [ς] δὲ ἔπεν· δίκ-
 αιον ποιεῖν
 5 ὡς πατέρες.

Boustrophedon, lines 2 and 4 retrograde
 A. Rehm, *Didyma II, Die Inschriften* no. 11¹

This inscription, probably of the sixth century B.C. to judge by letter forms, but incomplete and now lost, is sometimes seen as an enquiry about whether certain people might justly be plundered, in piratical raiding. Since the start of the inscription was missing even before it was lost, the full question and the implications of the oracle's reply cannot be assessed. But if this interpretation is correct, if raiders could actually ask an oracle about raiding at all without impiety, this inscription would at least fit in with some good evidence for believing that, within limits, unprovoked piratical raiding was not universally seen as wrongful in principle in early Greece, whatever the raiders' victims might think of it.

Here, this interpretation of *Didyma II* no. 11 is defended, not least against the efforts of Bravo and Fontenrose to interpret the critical restoration λῆϊστοί in quite different senses.² But it is first necessary to assess the merits of this restoration.

1. The initial lambda, and alternatives to λῆϊστοί

Rehm's photograph (Abb. 16) of Haussoullier's squeeze leaves no doubt that the letters -ῆϊστοι stood in the retrograde line 2. To the right of the ēta there seem to be marks and depressions in which one can with some hesitation see part of the sloping hasta of a lambda. Its other sloping leg may have run along the diagonal break in the stone just to the right. Rehm calls the lambda "wahrscheinlich". Le Bas was more decisive in seeing a sloping

¹ *Didyma* (ed. Th. Wiegand) II *Die Inschriften*, A. Rehm, ed. R. Harder (Berlin, 1958) pp. 2–3 (letter forms) and 8 with Abb. 16 (Haussoullier's squeeze). Facsimiles of the original in H. Roehl, *Inscriptiones Graecae Antiquissimae* (Berlin, 1882) no. 489. Rehm's view is shared by G. E. Bean, *Aegean Turkey* (London, 1966) pp. 231–232 and 239, and H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (Beckenham, 1985) pp. 28 and 32. Non-committal are L. H. Jeffery, *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford, 1990) pp. 335 (also for letter forms) and 343 no. 36, and D. F. McCabe and M. A. Plunkett, *Didyma Inscriptions* (Princeton, 1985) pp. 114 and 170 no. 647. I am grateful to Drs. D. M. Bain and D.M. B. Denison for valuable help in the preparation of this paper.

² B. Bravo, Sulân. Représailles et justice privée contre des étrangers dans les cités grecques. *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* ser. iii X 3 (1980) pp. 675–987 esp. 857–858 and 970. J. E. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult and Companions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988) p. 180, no. 2.

hasta though he thought it belonged to an alpha.³ But two other nineteenth century witnesses who saw the stone itself, namely Ross and Newton, do not show any letter to the right of the ēta, and their illustrations of the inscription are probably more accurate in most details than that of Le Bas, because theirs correspond more closely to Haussoullier’s squeeze than does Le Bas’.⁴ All the same there almost certainly was a letter to the right of the ēta in line 2 just as there is a kappa at the end of line 3 and an alpha at the start of line 4 in approximately the same position below that space. In any case ηῖστοι alone would be meaningless. All this means that the letter to the right of the ēta was too faint for Ross and Newton to see or to interpret, but not too faint and ambiguous for an expert like Rehm long familiar with the site, its inscriptions and his predecessors’ work to regard lambda as probable (if not better). This carries much weight even if it cannot be totally decisive.

But it perhaps helps to rule out one possible rival to λῆῖστοί among the other words ending in -ηῖστος in C. D. Buck and W. Petersen, *A Reverse Index of Greek Nouns and Adjectives* (Chicago, 1944) pp. 512–13. This is ὀνήῖστος. In its favour, it is not hard to imagine that Didyma could have been consulted about e.g. the justice of a claim by a group to be considered “most serviceable”, “most able” and therefore somehow privileged, when we consider how sensitive this question apparently was in archaic Ephesus nearby (Strabo XIV,1,25: 642; Diogenes Laertius IX 2). On the other hand the retrograde nu of that word might have been expected to appear somewhere near the right of the ēta, and no-one has seen any trace of it.

A more dangerous rival to λῆῖστοί might be κληῖστοί, in some context of barricading suppliants up in a sanctuary (cf. Thuc. I 134). But against this it is perhaps hard to see how the oracle’s reply would fit, with its mention of δίκαιον. λῆῖστοί thus remains the most likely restoration, and one that avoids the further problems that arise if some word such as these alternatives that started at the end of line 1 stood in place of λῆῖστοί, with consequences for the restoration of line 1.

2. The meaning of λῆῖστοί

In *Il.* IX 406 and 408 λῆῖστός and λειῖστός quite clearly mean physically able to be captured (in unprovoked raiding), cf. *Inschriften von Priene* 268 c line 5⁵. In our inscription, while it is theoretically possible that inexperienced or very nervous raiders would need to ask an oracle about their practical chances of success, bolder and more sophisticated ones would surely ask a different question, namely if their proposed victims were “fair game”

³ Ph. Le Bas and W. H. Waddington, *Voyage Archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure, Inscriptions Grecques et Latines* III pt. I (Paris, 1870) no. 221, Facsimile Vol. p. 65, Transcription Vol. p. 81.

⁴ L. Ross, *Archaeologische Aufsätze* (Leipzig, 1855–61) II p. 660. C. T. Newton assisted by R. P. Pullan, *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus and Branchidae* (London, 1861–63) Vol. I, pl. xcvi no. 70 (facsimile), Vol. II pt. 2 p. 782–783 no. 70 (transcription). Roehl (op. cit. note 1 above, no. 489) reproduces Ross and Newton. Newton’s facsimile brings the diagonal edge of the break too close to the ēta, to judge by the squeeze in Rehm, *Didyma* II Abb. 16.

⁵ F. Hiller von Gaertringen, *Inschriften von Priene* (Berlin, 1906) pp. 153–154.

that could justly be plundered. The oracle's δίκαιον picks this up, whatever the implications of its reply were for the enquirers.

Bravo in his invaluable paper on reprisals in ancient Greece (n. 2) is unwilling to see a question about unprovoked raiding being asked of a respectable oracle in the sixth century. For he believes that in that very time unprovoked piratical raiding was ceasing to be acceptable (ibid. pp. 953–983). He therefore takes ληϊστοί to mean able justly to be seized in reprisals (a form of seizure, in the face of provocation, always inherently respectable in Greece). But in none of the many texts that certainly do refer to reprisals and that he examines in such detail, does this word occur in this sense of seizure under provocation, and in both *Il.* IX 406 and 408 and *Inschriften von Priene* 268 c 5 just referred to only unprovoked seizure is meant. There seem no grounds, then, to support his view and not to see *Didyma* II no. 11 as an oracle for raiders, if ληϊστοί is correct.

Fontenrose *Didyma* p. 180 on our inscription objects to this view as follows: “Rehm and others have supposed that the consultants requested a sanction for piracy . . . But we have too little to go on, just one word and part of another. Apparently we have the whole response, which sanctions the practice of the consultants’ ancestors; they should continue in that path. The question could be, ‘Is it right to do as our fathers have done to keep us from being subject to plunder?’ In short, we have no context for *lēistoi*.”

Fontenrose is entirely correct about the lack of context, but his own suggested alternative is surprisingly tortuous, and again it is hard to see how δίκαιον can enter in. Thus if the inscription really did originally read ληϊστοί then it most probably arose from the need felt by scrupulous and pious raiders to check that their proposed victims really could legitimately be attacked, odd though this seems today.

3. The context: raiding and its conventions in early Greece

This view of *Didyma* II no. 11, while it cannot claim certainty can at least claim to be consistent with what is known about unprovoked raiding in early Greece. To begin with Homer.⁶ Much of the social behaviour that he depicts surely was not imaginary; his audiences evidently found it perfectly comprehensible. If it represents eighth century or Dark Age Greece or both, as can be argued, then not too long before the sixth century unprovoked piratical raiding was in principle widely acceptable. *Il.* IX 406–408 shows that the glorious Achilles takes cattle raiding for granted. The *doyen* of Homeric diplomats, Nestor the wise, can after wining and dining surprise visitors (one of whom is a very proud and powerful goddess in disguise) ask without any offence, just factually if they are sailing on definite business or wandering at random as raiders do over the sea, who roam risking their lives, bringing evil on men of other lands (*Od.* III 69–74). There were limits; those

⁶ Homer: M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London, 1991) ch. 3; O. Murray, *Early Greece* (London, 1980) ch. 3. For a rather different view, W. Nowag, *Raub und Beute in der archaischen Zeit der Griechen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1983) reviewed in *Gnomon* 57 (1985) pp. 655–657. Most recently, H. van Wees, *Status Warriors* (Amsterdam, 1992).

closely linked to the gods or to oneself were out of bounds. Odysseus does not crudely rob the priest of Apollo at Ismarus, instead he accepts prestigious and valuable gifts from him (*Od.* IX 196–211). And when Antinous' father Eupheithes in company with Taphians raided the Thesprotians, who were friends of the Ithacans (Penelope has to stress this), the conspicuous rage of the Ithacan *demos* nearly lead to the death of this basileus (*Od.* XVI 421–430). This was partly no doubt because the Ithacans feared Thesprotian reprisals but also surely because of outraged feelings and awareness of the importance and obligations of friendship and the danger of betrayal.⁷ Such links sometimes might conflict or even be obscured somehow (cf. *Il.* VI 119–236). Thus in the Homeric world and so probably in the early Greek one, one could raid but had to watch very carefully whom one raided. Raiding was not itself held to be evil, nor was it universally thought to be condemned by the gods. Certainly Eumaeus the swineherd thinks raiders are cruel and fear the gods' avenging wrath. But he admits Zeus gives them booty and anyway he was born a prince but ruined by kidnapers (*Od.* XIV 80–88; XV 449–484). And at *Od.* XX 47–51 Athena herself seems to relish the prospect of cattle raiding.

In the law of archaic Athens too, men going after booty, ἐπὶ λείων οἰχόμενοι, or for trade could make valid contracts so long as they contravened nothing in the public records (such as existing alliances, probably, in the case of raiders).⁸ And there is no reason why these Athenian raiders should not have included unprovoked raiders as well as men taking reprisals. Bravo (*ibid.* p. 857) thinks only the latter are envisaged, but none of the technical terms for reprisals that he explores so exhaustively are used in this text, only general terms. Thus all forms of private raiding in general are probably meant, unprovoked as well as private reprisals or private raids on the enemy in war.

Finally well after the time when Bravo thinks raiding was ceasing to be respectable, the earlier fifth century Teian Curses condemn *Aisymnetai* who go raiding or harbour raiders who raid ἐκ γῆς τῆς Τηϊῆς ἢ θαλάσσης⁹. It is not clear whether it was feared such delinquents might take plunder from Teian territory or territorial waters, or rather, by using them as a base, bring revenge down on their innocent compatriots. But there seems no curse on anyone who raids from a base at a sufficiently discreet distance from home.

In early Greece then (and later as in the Wild West of Greece in Thucydides' own day, I 5) taking care not to raid those who might have some link with a god or with your own state (or who might take reprisals on it or had friends who might) was very necessary. Perhaps *Didyma* II no. 11 shows that in some difficult cases the possibility of a link with a god or the enquirers' state actually had to be checked by pious and sober raiders by reference to an oracle, even though some raided first and asked questions afterwards, if we may believe

⁷ For the role of such links in Homeric society and in later Greece, M. I. Finley *The World of Odysseus*, esp. ch. 3, and G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, esp. ch. 5.

⁸ *Digest*, XLVII,22,4. The phrase (strikingly reminiscent of Nestor's greeting above) is accepted as an archaic element by D. M. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica* (Princeton, 1986) pp. 13–14.

⁹ R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1969) no. 30 = *SIG*³ 37, 38, B8–23 ὄστις : τὸ λοιπὸν : αἰσυμνῶν : ἐν Τέωι - - - ληΐζοιτο : ἢ ληϊστάς : ὑποδέχοιτο : εἰδὼς : ἐκ γῆς : τῆς Τηϊῆς : ἢ [θ]αλάττης : φέροντας - - -.

Herodotus III 39. Doubtless inter-state friendships in early Greece would reduce raids by Greeks on Greeks and displace some raiding to colonial waters. But it was perhaps only when the Delian League made most states in the Aegean officially friends of each other for a very considerable time, that unprovoked raiding was virtually outlawed within most of that large area. Then too, imperial Athens had an unprecedented practical need to protect her allies and her own interests and possessions against every sort of disruption and threat. So in turn the hostility that Thucydides and his readers took for granted towards unprovoked raiding (I 5) naturally came to replace the general indifference and toleration towards it that seem to have been prevalent in early Greece, partly no doubt precisely because many early Greek raiders were careful just whom they attacked. *Didyma* II no. 11 may fit into this picture then, always providing that the restoration here defended is not mistaken.

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