

# PLATAIA BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS: THOUGHTS ON THE SMALL BOIOTIAN POLIS AS A SYMBOL OF UNITY AND AS A PARADIGM OF DISUNITY IN ANCIENT GREECE

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**Summary:** The special significance of Plataia already before the famous battle of 479 BC (in the mythical tradition connected with its site) and afterwards in the vicissitudes of the inter-Greek developments after the Persian Wars is analyzed to illustrate the bipolar importance of site and city as both a celebrated, dexterously manipulated symbol of unity and a bitter paradigm of practical disunity in Greek history.

The small settlement of Plataia, the ancient *polis* between the northern slopes of Kithairon and the river Asopos in southwest Boiotia, is a big name in Greek history.<sup>1</sup> Since the decisive epilogue of the Persian invaders' defeat on Plataian land in 479 BC, the city almost naturally acquired and the Greek victors, with Sparta and Athens as protagonists, unanimously sanctioned its halo of a sacred and inviolable place: It was forever dedicated to the memory of and entrusted with the periodic realization of the proper honours for the Greeks fallen there as defenders of Greek freedom, while the Plataians were recognized as permanent custodians of a specific new cult of Zeus Eleutherios, the Panhellenic god who favoured and in a sense sealed Greek freedom. Apart from yearly

1 On the history of ancient Plataia the synthetic treatments by Kirsten 1950 and Prandi 1988 remain valuable. Badian 1993 has insightfully treated the history of the city up to its extinction in the Peloponnesian War. A recent set of relevant contributions focusing on aspects of the battle of 479 BC (and its topography) has been edited by Konecny & Sekunda 2022.

memorial celebrations, still conducted by the Plataians alone in Plutarch's times (ca. beginning 2nd century AD), a penteteric festival – that is, programmatically conceived as corresponding to a Panhellenic festival – named *Eleutheria* should also take place at Plataia (Plut. *Arist.* 21. 1).

The historical context of those common decisions of the Greek victors, attributed by Plutarch to a proposal of Aristeides, was unique as Greece had just left behind an extreme phase of danger, having safely surmounted the 'razor's edge' (ξυροῦ ἀκμῆ) as contemporary poetry (Simonides in *Anth. Pal.* 7. 250) epitomized Xerxes' invasion. Plataia should then symbolize what Greek unity and co-operation had been and would ever be able to achieve. Let us be more precise: the shining light of Greek victorious collaboration on the battleground of Plataia against the Persian land forces in Greece managed first to impose itself, as the decisive result and impression, on the dark aspects of other Greeks' having chosen/been forced to collaborate with Xerxes' (and after his departure, Mardonios') numerically far superior army. Plataia was thus right from the beginning of its glory characterized by an underlying crude antithesis of light and shadow, presence and absence of a spirit of Greek unity, which would often reappear and influence the city's chequered classical history.

I. Now, it seems to have escaped scholarly comment so far that Plataia already satisfied crucial conditions of being invested with such a symbolic role of unity due to its apparently older cultic peculiarity inside Greek myth and religious practice. This emerges from the essence of its main and distinct local festival of *Daidala*.

We owe the knowledge of sense and content of this Plataian festival to Pausanias (9.3). The *Daidala* should commemorate, according to the local tradition reported by that *periegetes* of the 2nd century AD, a central divine reconciliation, between Zeus and Hera. As Pausanias relates the local story, during one of the periods of tension between Zeus and his divine consort, the supreme pair was separated and Hera preferred to stay alone on Euboea.<sup>2</sup> Then the local king of Plataia Kithairon, whose name should have been later given to the adjacent mountain, advised

2 On the difficult relationship between Hera and Zeus, see Pirenne-Delforge & Pironti 2016: esp. 109-19.

Zeus to construe a clever trick in order to regain his wife's favour: The supreme god had the fame spread that he would marry another woman. The news on the preparations reached Hera and roused her jealousy and anger but then, on the day of the supposed wedding, when Hera came to stop it and tore in indignation the dress of the (fake) new wife, she discovered that a wooden substitute, a female *xoanon* or *daidalon* (hence the name of the later festival), was borne in the wedding carriage. The goddess was thus pleased and reconciled with her astute consort. The Plataians should have commemorated exactly that restitution of divine harmony and family peace on the highest level through their periodic (possibly septennial) festival of *Daidala*.<sup>3</sup> This limited, small festival, *mikra Daidala*, the local story ran on, should have also later assumed a pan-Boiotian character, where all main Boiotian *poleis* participated, even Thebes after its re-foundation by Kassandros' initiative (since 316 BC, cf. below). In any case, Plataia was forever linked as a place with the memory of an effective divine reconciliation. It was established as the site where it had proved possible to end a feud of the highest order, an event that had also been judged worthy of periodic celebration.

One should consider here that controversies and confrontations of gods and humans followed parallel lines in the Greek world, at least since the Homeric poems. We may recall Achaeans and Trojans building opposite camps with corresponding divine favour and disfavour of the divided Olympian gods as their supporters: among them Hera had a high relevant record, often vying on such issues with Zeus (as in the beginning of rhapsody Δ of the *Iliad*). It was thus quite appropriate for the place where mutual divine understanding and peace had been achieved to symbolize also a similar choice of behaviour among men. Already Plataia's mythical-religious identity seems to have prefigured it for the role of a symbol of appeasement and unity in the Greek world. This may have then assumed a specific historical content due to the united Greek land forces' victory there, with the participation of the Plataians themselves, at the

3 On the content and periodic celebration of *Daidala*, *mikra/megala*, the basic data have been collected and discussed already by Kirsten 1950: 2319–21. On the development of the festival in Hellenistic times and its Boiotian context Knoepfler 2001a & 2001b are now basic. Cf. also Chaniotis 2002 on the various strains of interpretation of this festival and their possible synthesis.

end of the Persian invasion of Greece. That victory further resulted in the unanimously conferred task to the small Boiotian *polis* and its citizens of preserving that tradition of Greek unity and its festive expressions, as best as they could (and, indeed, as the original community of the deciding Greek victors would allow them to).

II. Of course, symbolic images are not always easily congruous with the data of the real world. Plataia was a difficult case in this respect. For geography predestined it otherwise to be a site on a delicate border. Its citizens' apparent claim in Pausanias' times (and probably well before), mirrored in his own persuasion, was that they were indigenous (*autochthones*, Paus. 9.1.1) – *nota bene*, like the Athenians, their closest friends nearby, as we shall see. Nevertheless, they were certainly and consciously part of the Boiotian *ethnos*: they lay at the extreme southwest corner of the land taken by their tribal fellows, the rest Boiotians. One could view them within a pastoral simile as the last sheep of the Boiotian herd in a southern direction. Unfortunately, however, there was a much stronger fellow animal with shepherd ambitions in Boiotia: Thebes. Plataia meant to remain Boiotian but resisting any Theban authority over itself, even in federal (pan-Boiotian) function or disguise. To attain this, in other words: to evade Theban control from their north, the Plataians could best face further south, to Attica, and they decided to do that persistently. Thus, well before the Persians' interventions in Greece, the Plataians had looked for a patron outside Boiotia and willing to support them in the face of the Theban menace. According to Herodotos (6.108.2-3),<sup>4</sup> their initial thought was to address for help the established land power of archaic Greece, Sparta. It was then the Spartan king Kleomenes (I) around 510 BC (519 if one accepts Thucydides' dating [3.68.5]) who should have directed them to Athens as a near and more practical solution of alliance. Herodotos' judgment, probably echoing Athenian views, was that this advice to Plataia mainly aimed at causing Boiotian difficulties for Athens. However, Sparta may have been simply unwilling to involve itself in inter-Boiotian affairs, so far outside the Peloponnese, its

4 Cf. How & Wells 1928.II: 109-10; Kirsten 1950: 2284-86. Badian 1993: esp. 116-22 rather over-emphasizes the Plataians' ensuing dependence on Athens in Herodotos as a sort of 'political slavery'.

primary sphere of influence and control. In any case, by thus acting, Sparta donated to its still nascent rival Athens a satellite of faith and duration: the Boiotian Plataia entered a long-standing political allegiance to Athens. The small Boiotian *polis* based its hopes of independent survival in its natural/ethnic context on becoming dependent on Athenian aid. As a *periegete* of Boiotia in Hellenistic times (3rd century BC), Herakleides Kritikos, formulated it retrospectively and succinctly, the citizens of Plataia became “Athenians-Boiotians”.<sup>5</sup>

The Plataians’ loyalty to Athens was singularly proved at Marathon (490 BC), and since then also combined with a clear anti-Persian dimension. Exactly this dimension found an ideal ground for further development during Xerxes’ invasion. Now Thebes became and remained until the end a collaborator of the barbarians while Plataia remained on the Athenian-Spartan and Panhellenic side and proved not only an active combatant but also the favourable setting for the final Greek victory.<sup>6</sup> As long as the anti-barbaric front was solid and Thebes did not belong to it, Plataia was best served and able to flourish as a permanent servant of Athenian strategy being – very comfortably for Plataia – an aspect of a common Hellenic one. The subsequent role of the custodian of Panhellenic memories suited also best the small city’s local context of interests.

III. The key to Plataia’s happy honorary guardianship at its finely constituted ‘*lieux de mémoire* of Hellenic victory over the barbarians’, as one may name it, was exactly its identification with a Panhellenic freedom where Athens should be at least co-dominant and Thebes as far as possibly absent. This condition was best fulfilled in the direct aftermath of the great battle on Plataian soil. However, neither the content of *eleutheria*, applicable not only towards the barbarians but also in inter-Greek sense,<sup>7</sup>

5 ...Οἱ δὲ πολῖται οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἔχουσι λέγειν ἢ ὅτι Ἀθηναίων εἰσὶν ἄποικοι καὶ ὅτι τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ Περσῶν παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἡ μάχη ἐγένετο. Εἰσὶ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι Βοιωτοί (Frg. I, §11; Arenz 2006: 106). Cf. further on the interpretation of this whole passage on Plataia, Arenz 2006: 75-77, 157-58.

6 The importance of exactly where the final battle of the Persian invasion was fought for Plataia itself has been correctly stressed by Badian 1993: 121.

7 On the semantic political content of Greek *eleutheria* Raaflaub 1985 is always basic.

nor the positions of the big Greek cities, and the context of their interplay of power, were to remain stable. Poor Plataia should then repeatedly suffer bound on the turning wheel of history. Its devotion to Athens, ever mutual, would not easily change but almost all other factors did, and the victorious Panhellenic site and *polis* par excellence had to bear the results especially of the rehabilitation of Thebes, first as ally of Sparta against Athens, already before but especially during the big Peloponnesian War, and then as rising independent power and pan-Boiotian leader against Sparta in the fourth century BC. Both these crucial changes of interstate relations in Greece cost not only the freedom but also the bare existence of Plataia as a *polis*. The settlement-monument of Greek *eleutheria* against the barbarians had to sustain the internal, in each case opportune interpretations and abuses of Greek freedom as strife for power and domination. It was then a fully cognate irony of history that the symbol of Greek anti-barbaric unity could only survive if the champions of hegemony and practical disunity in classical Greece would allow it in the context of their fierce antagonisms.

An eloquent and grave – in more than one sense! – presage of relevant developments after the Persian Wars lay already in a detail of the burial monuments of the Greeks fallen at Plataia. There has never been a common grave monument for the latter (a sort of Panhellenic *polyandron*). According to Herodotos (9.85) the Athenian dead were buried together, the Spartans – more impressively and finely emphasizing the strength of their participation – in three separate burials: one for the younger Spartans [ἰπένεες], one for the rest, and one for the helots. All other Greeks were buried in separate grave monuments of their various cities on the area of Plataiai.<sup>8</sup> Until Pausanias' (9.2.5) time this separate practice had been retained as a simple tripartite burying arrangement: one grave for the Spartans, one for the Athenians, one for all the other Greeks. Anyway, a common burial solution had never been realized. The fellow warriors of the common struggle against the barbarians returned to their civic groups upon leaving to Hades, the individual policies of their cities fully revived in and through their burial arrangements. They had died

8 “At the entrance of the city” according to Paus. 9.2.5. Jung 2006: 259 n. 115 supposes a common burying ground (‘Gesamt-komplex’) for all Greek burials but the evidence seems insufficient for such a conclusion.

for a common cause but separate habits and identities persisted, as –outstandingly – those of the two big protagonists, Sparta and Athens. These protagonists insisted thus on their proudly distinct accommodation even in glorious memory beyond death, and, no wonder, in further political action. The clear burial dividends of the victory prepared it.

IV. Thus it is no big surprise that in the first years of the Peloponnesian War (430-427 BC) Sparta as ally of and dependent on Thebes and its interests did not refrain from brutally abolishing the *polis*-statehood of Plataia. Thucydides' picture of the preceding dialogue between Plataians and Thebans in front of Spartan judges (3.52-68), against the background of Plataian loyalty to Athens, is justly monumental. The Plataians caught in the city after the long siege were executed, the women sold into slavery, and the city finally razed to the ground. Any surviving citizens – who had previously and mainly fled from the besieged city (Thuc. 3.24) – became homeless and entered a longer 'smooth exile' in Athens, which housed and provided them with the rare honour of Athenian citizenship, with some limitations.<sup>9</sup> Athens settled then apparently at least a part of this useful human potential at Skione in Chalkidike, after the expulsion of the disloyal Skionians, during the further course of the Peloponnesian War (421 BC [Thuc. 5.32.1]). Thus, the ex-guardians of Panhellenic glorious memory were used to fill gaps in the larger kleruchic policy of the Athenian Empire. They had now expressly to guard only Athenian interests.

In an annex of superb historical irony, it was then the old executioner of Plataia in the big inter-Greek war who was to play the role of the city's saviour after its end. Sparta's alienation with Thebes in the Corinthian War of the beginning fourth century BC instigated the now severely disputed, essentially ex-hegemon of Greece to restore Plataia after the King's Peace (387 BC) as a city (Paus. 9.1.4-8), by then urgently appreciated as a valuable counterweight with a useful re-directed loyalty to Sparta against a more and more uncontrollable Thebes. It was characteristic that a small contingent of Plataians came to aid the Spartan garrison when still mastering Thebes in 379 BC. (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.10). However, the

9 The evidence has been collected and analytically discussed by Prandi 1988: 111-20; and most recently by Blok 2017: 257-59.

old Boiotian master was soon freed from the Spartans and their control, and Theban – now independently risen – power and ambitions remained too near and too strong for Plataia to secure its own freshly restored civic existence. The city's Panhellenic glory was ever an indirect but eloquent stain on the historical record of Thebes, which judged the small neighbour again unbearable as a real political entity and community. Thus the Plataians were expelled again (in 373 BC), this time at least without a preceding blood-bath (a simple evacuation stratagem sufficed), and sought for a second time refuge in Athens, where they were re-offered some form of citizen rights (Diod. 15.46.4-6 [*isopoliteia*]; Paus. *loc. cit.*). The emblematic city of Panhellenic memories experienced a second extinction and its citizens a renewed exile, its place was secure in history and Panhellenic symbolism but not in current and hard political realities. Thus also its function as permanent servant of that symbolism was frigidly co-extinguished.

V. It is highly interesting that the Plataians' claim of existence on the map of Greek cities after this new misfortune was fully endorsed and presented in Athens by the greatest publicist and representative of the Panhellenic ideal in fourth-century Greece, Isokrates, the Athenian of wide Hellenic horizons in his times par excellence. He adopted as a writer the unfortunate Plataians' cause and published a preserved treatise (*Plataikos*) on their fate trying to remind his fellow Athenians of the small city's highly symbolic role in Greek history, despite and irrespective of the fact of its still recent restitution by the Athenians' traditional antagonist, Sparta. In his view, the miserable Plataians were too connected with Athens and Panhellenic tradition to remain the victims of inner Greek tensions. Recent favour and disfavour for the Plataians inside the problematic hegemonic triangle Sparta-Athens-Thebes should not override the permanent value of what the city symbolized and guarded for Greek history. Plataia should stay on its traditional throne of Panhellenic memories, surpassing the usual *polis* horizon of ambitions and inter-Greek victories (*Plat.* 59). Its prime function should remain to keep that tradition alive and guarantee a continuous service to it. Those cherished Panhellenic deeds and their memorialization at Plataia, Isokrates emphasized, were exactly the basis of later Athenian hegemonic growth itself

(ib.). Of course, Athenian uneasiness in regard to Theban now also grown ambitions was no less an aid of Isokrates' rhetoric argumentation. The old role of a small Boiotian counter-Thebes, topographically opportune and allied with Athens, had not become redundant. It is no accident that Isokrates' fiery fellow Athenian patriot, the great Demosthenes, later (353 BC) also alluded to the obligation of Athenian support for the re-establishment of Plataia as an old glorious city.<sup>10</sup>

However, the specific historical context itself of Isokrates' speech favouring the restitution of Plataia proved not favourable enough. His pamphlet was published between 373 and 371 BC,<sup>11</sup> that is between the new expulsion of the Plataians and the congress at Sparta, where the latter and Athens tried to find a compromise of their claims of Greek hegemony in view of the rising Theban Boiotia. However, the Battle at Leuktra took place soon (twenty days!) after that compromise, and proved now beyond any doubt the new military power of Thebes, opening the way for the further establishment of its hegemonic ambitions in Greek politics. The Athenians, with or without Isokrates' advocacy and despite their disagreement with Theban harsh policy,<sup>12</sup> were objectively unable to help the Plataians regain their land and *polis*.

Nevertheless, the importance of Plataia as a potential showcase of a Panhellenic political memory and programme was thus highlighted again. Any future adoption of a similar project would naturally tend to incorporate the ideological asset of Plataia and its useful guardian role, should only be that Thebes would not stay in the way of its realization.

In the meantime, Plataia's grand position was further indelible only in memory and utopia. It is probably exactly this aspect that we find reflected in the famous 'Oath of Plataia' as preserved on a long-debated inscription from Acharnai in Attica, datable around the middle of the

10 Dem. 16.25: τὰς μὲν Θεσπιάς καὶ τὸν Ὀρχομενὸν καὶ τὰς Πλαταιαῖς κατοικίξασθαι φῶμεν δεῖν καὶ συμπράττωμεν αὐτοῖς καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀξιῶμεν (ταῦτα γὰρ καὶ καλὰ καὶ δίκαια, μὴ περιορᾶν πόλεις ἀρχαίας ἐξανεστῶσας).

11 See Kirsten 1950: 2310 with lit.; Prandi 1988: 130.

12 See esp. Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.1 on Athenian feelings and considerations already before the congress at Sparta. See on this whole phase of Greek history the penetrating analysis by Carlier 1995: 52-55.

fourth century BC. A betraying passage of that text,<sup>13</sup> purportedly the oath sworn by the Greek combatants of 479 BC before the battle, includes the promise not only to punish the land of the Thebans (inflicting on it an indemnity of one-tenth) but also ‘to preserve untouched Athens, Sparta and Plataia’. It is not to exclude that some Plataian refugees had been settled in the deme of Acharnai after the new expatriation, which would even better explain the erection of the stele at this place.<sup>14</sup> In any case, the triangle of political reality (and realism), Sparta-Athens-Thebes, is turned here into an utopian one, Athens-Sparta-Plataia, absolutely matching the pious wishes of contemporary Plataians and Athenians.

VI. The conditions necessary for the fulfillment of the Plataians’ dream of *polis* rebirth appeared when Isokrates’ final favourite champion of a Panhellenic policy, Philip of Macedonia, established his own version of hegemony in Greece and proved stronger than both Thebes and Athens united at Chaironeia in 338 BC. The Plataians were now best-qualified to be integrated as a living community into a new political order where Panhellenic memories could find a place not impaired by Theban influence or inclusion. It was then quite natural that Philip allowed them after Chaironeia to regain both the home and status they had repeatedly lost before (Paus. 9.1.8).<sup>15</sup> Alexander’s later destruction of Thebes (autumn 335 BC) made things even easier for the Plataians: their local big brother and menace had been extinguished, which further secured their own preservation.

After Kassandros initiated the re-foundation of Thebes in 316 BC, breaking also in this point with Alexander’s policy, a peaceful co-existence of the two Boiotian cities seems to have been gradually and finally

13 Rhodes & Osborne 2003: no. 88 (with detailed discussion of all relevant problems and lit.), § II, 32-35: δεκ/ατεύσω τὴν Θηβαίων πόλιν, καὶ οὐκ ἀνασ/τήσω Ἀθήνας οὐδὲ Σπάρτην οὐδὲ Πλαται/άς (cf. the comm. ib.). See also more recently on the fourth-century context of the oath Kellogg 2008.

14 One may correlate here the appearance of the cult of Athena Areia, also typical of Plataia, in the same deme and times. Cf. Kirsten 1950: 2310.

15 According to Dem. 19.112 Philip had already presented the re-foundation (i.e. fortification) of Plataia as a plan before the Peace of Philokrates (346 BC). Cf. Dem. 6.30.

achieved, as signaled exactly by the Theban participation in the Boiotian *Daidala* as a pan-Boiotian festival (Paus. 9.3.6), already mentioned before. Now that a pan-Boiotian understanding was assured, Plataia was able to play on unharmed its Panhellenic role further into the Roman imperial period as Plutarch experienced and reported. Bitter inter-Greek experiences had ultimately helped the Panhellenic character of Plataia and its local activities and role mount a safe pedestal. Martyrdom counted, in the long run.<sup>16</sup>

An expression of this ripe political wisdom seems to have been also the testimony in the Hellenistic period of the cult of Zeus Eleutherios at Plataia in a new specific conjunction with that of the Concord of the Greeks (Ὁμόνοια τῶν Ἑλλήνων). This meaningful addition, attested first in the famous decree of a common synedrion of the Greeks at Plataia for Chremonides' brother Glaukon (ca. middle of the 3rd century BC),<sup>17</sup> may date back from Philip's and Alexander's times, when the two kings' Greek Alliance must have been very well served by it, but it seems to have certainly remained fully relevant also for later periods.<sup>18</sup> At least it may have helped appeals to and activations of a common Greek front (again appearing as a Greek Alliance or *Koinon* of the Greeks) under some Macedonian king or against him (e.g. an Antigonid). However, the symbolism of Greek unity and common action of the Greeks remained Plataia's political capital, which had to be adjusted to successive political contexts exactly like the idea of Greek freedom. The past of the Persian Wars survived together with Plataia as an abiding ideal of unity conveniently labelled on ever changing realities of disunity.<sup>19</sup> The Roman Empire – understandably and especially Hadrian's<sup>20</sup> times, when also the Athenian

16 It is a fine remark by Knoepfler 2001b: 18 that the similar Theban vicissitudes since Alexander decisively prepared this appeasement with Plataia.

17 Étienne & Piérart 1975; cf. Buraselis 1984 on the date of the decree.

18 On the addition of the cult of Homonoia to that of Zeus Eleutherios at Plataia as a development to integrate into the policy of Philip II and Alexander: West 1977. On various later datings of it (Lamian War, Galatian Invasion, Chremonidean War) see the lengthy discussion by Jung 2006: 325-40, favouring, on a weak source basis, the first alternative.

19 On the Hellenistic context of this reality concerning Plataia, see also Wallace 2011.

20 One may note that Hadrian is given the title *ktistes* in inscriptions of Plataia: EA 1917: 162 no. 11; ib. 1934/5, παρ. 15, 180. Cf. Hadrian's statue erected at Delphi by οἱ ἱε

Panhellenion of similar (and possibly borrowed) conception was founded – seems then to have been the final favourable historical context for the Plataian *Koinon ton Hellenon*, its *Eleutheria*, widely esteemed in the whole Greek world, and the parallel Panhellenic celebrity of the city.<sup>21</sup> The idea of a unity of the Greeks, long lost on the level of a real political/military collaboration, was preserved on a cultural-athletic one. It was a phantom of the past but an ever symbolic and vividly respectable one.

VII. One may finally and soberly conclude, (also) on the basis of the Plataian example, that the paradigm of disunity, in other words: the diversity of political interests and identities, ran a parallel course with any symbol of unity among the ancient Greeks, as that paradigm was deeply embedded in fundamental characteristics of the Greek *polis* world, especially the tenacity of the idea of *polis* autonomy. The value of political unity and Greek freedom versus the barbarians were ever historically appreciated and specifically honoured at Plataia. However, they always tended to be overshadowed by actions dictated by inter-Greek confrontations as appropriately and amply testified/illustrated in the course of the ancient history of the inner-frontier-city of Boiotia.<sup>22</sup> Light and darkness alternated in the life of the small *polis* as in the real essence of what it was supposed to symbolize for Greek history.

In the third century BC the comic poet Poseidippos acidly remarked that Plataia was a real *polis* only during the Panhellenic festival of the *Eleutheria*, otherwise having only a shadowy life (verbally “being an

Πλαταιὰς συνιόντες Ἕλληνες; Syll.<sup>3</sup> 835A. A statue of Herodes Atticus has been erected by the same *Koinon* (τὸ κοινὸν συνέδριον τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῶν εἰς Πλατῆας συνιόντων) according to an inscription preserved in Thebes, possibly initially also from Plataia: *IG VII 2509*.

21 On Plataia in Roman times the substantial sketch by Kirsten 1950: 2314-16 and the detailed synthesis by Jung 2006: 344-83 remain useful. Of fundamental value for the continuation of the *Eleutheria* in this period and the victors' title πρώτος Ἑλλήνων: Robert 1929. See further C. Müller's contribution in this volume (17-42).

22 Cf. Prandi 1988: 183-84, who concludes correctly: “La strategia di Platea per difendere o recuperare il proprio territorio fu sempre il ricorso ad un'autorità esterna: Sparta, Atene o la Macedonia...”.

ἄκτῆ”, that is, an empty place).<sup>23</sup> One could add that the city was permanently identified with an ideal of Greek unity remembered by all as a respectable achievement of common struggle against the Persian invaders but not necessarily as a paradigm of actual practice in inter-Greek affairs. Unity shone in memory but it was often eclipsed, like Plataia itself, by individual *polis* interests and antagonistic ambitions, developed on a grand scale by the big cities. Unity and disunity co-existed as the twin faces of the ancient Greek political mindset and its historical course.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Poseidippos fr. 29 (Kock): ναοὶ δὲ εἰσὶ καὶ στοᾶ, καὶ τοῦνομα, / καὶ τὸ βαλανεῖον, καὶ τὸ Σαράβου κλέος, / τὸ πολὺ μὲν ἄκτῆ, τοῖς δ' Ἐλευθερίοις πόλις.

24 Cf. Prandi 1988: 189. – I owe warm thanks to Rosalind Thomas for revising my English, to Christel Muller for various suggestions of improvement and to all other *synthiasotai* of the ENSAGH for the discussion of my original paper at Delphi. Of course, all remaining faults are mine.

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