

Studying Greek History through Inscriptions

Athenian History through inscriptions

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- Osborne, R. – Rhodes, P. J., *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478-404 BC.* Oxford 2017

1. Athenian legislation in the Archaic period (text 1)
2. Persian wars (texts 2, 3)
3. 1st Athenian Confederacy and the Athenian Hegemony in the 5th c. (texts 4, 5)
4. Peloponnesian war (text 6)
5. 2nd Athenian Confederacy in the 4th (text 7)
6. Athens and the Macedonians (texts 8, 9)

The historical context of Dracon's laws

Dracon provided Athens with its first set of written laws amid widespread social discontent (621 BC). His legislation should probably be seen as **an attempt to curb some of the excesses of the ruling aristocracy, and firmly establish the rule of law over the will of powerful families.** Much of the legislation of Drakon was superceded by later statutes, but his **homicide law**, which remained valid throughout the classical period and until the end of the Athenian *polis*.

The historical context of their republication

- After the oligarchic revolution of 411, in 410/9 the restored democracy undertook a revision of the laws, about which we are richly informed in Lysias 30 and Andocides 1.81-84. A committee of *anagrapheis* ("writers-up" or "inscribers") of the laws worked until the Thirty came to power in 404, and continued on the restoration of democracy in 403/2 until 400/399. Its task was not to make new laws, but to collect and rationalise existing law.
- Apart from this inscription, other parts of the revised code surviving on stone are: laws about the Council of 500, *IG I³ 105*, a law about the trierarchy, *IG I³ 236a*, a law about taxes or contributions, *IG I³ 237*, a very fragmentary law of uncertain purpose, *SEG 39.18*, and the sacrificial calendar of Athens, *SEG 52.48B*.

Decree to republish Dracon's law
IG I³ 104, Athens, 621/0 BC and 409/8 BC

Diognetos of Phrearrrhioi was secretary.

Diokles was archon. The Council and the People decided. Akamantis was in prytany. Diognetos was secretary. Euthydikos was chairman. [such and such] proposed: the inscribers or writers-up of the laws shall inscribe Dracon's law on homicide, taking it over from the king, with the secretary of the Council, on a stone stele and set it down in front of the royal stoa. The official sellers shall make the contract in accordance with the law, and the Greek treasurers shall provide the money.

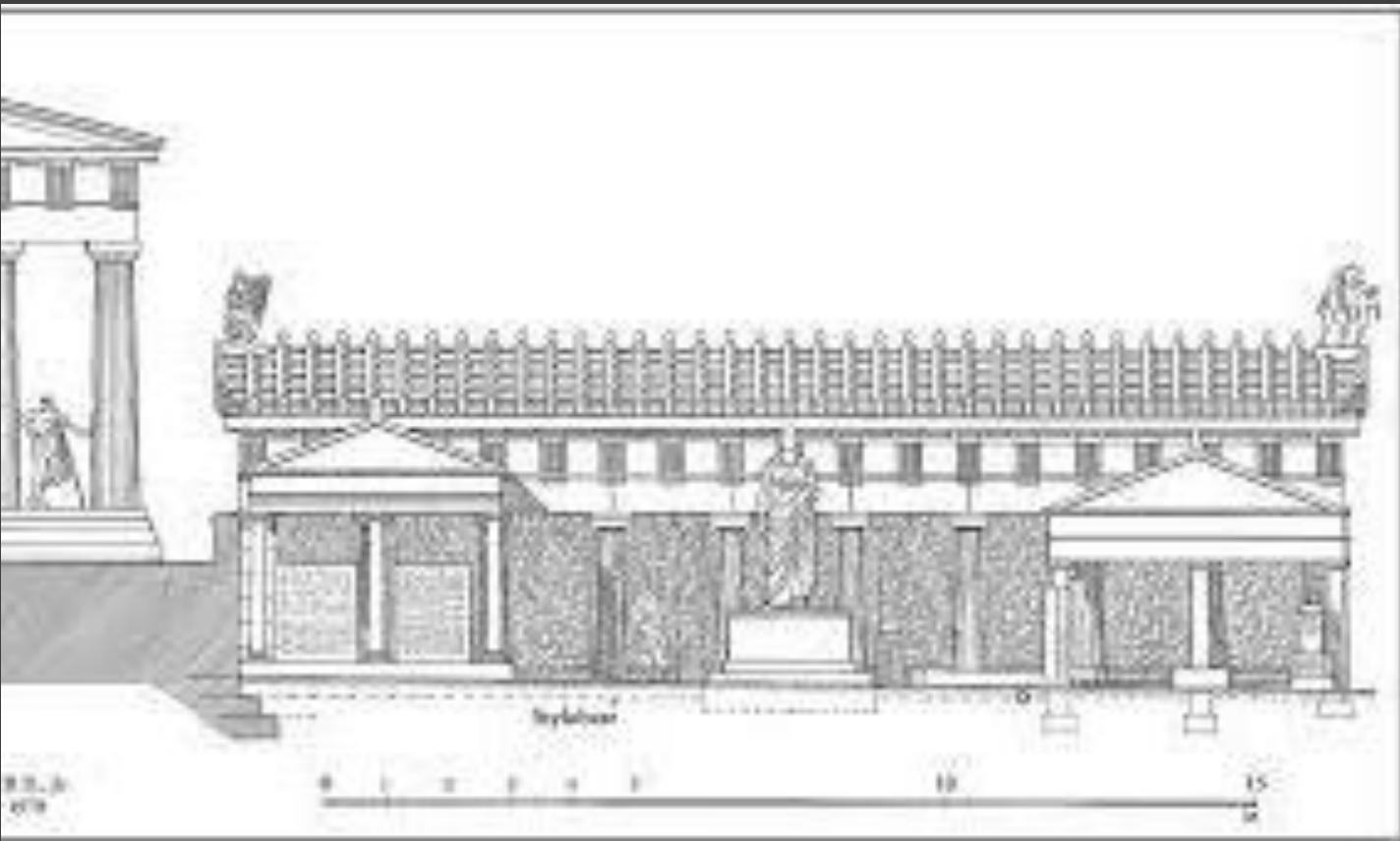
First axon.

Even if anybody kills anybody not from forethought, he shall be exiled. The kings shall pronounce responsible for homicide [the one who himself killed or the one?] who planned it; the appeal judges shall decide it. There shall be reconciliation, if

there are a father or brother or sons, to be granted by all, or the objector shall prevail. If these do not exist, then as far as cousinhood and cousin, if they are all willing to grant reconciliation, or the objector shall prevail. If none of these exists but he killed unwillingly and the fifty-one appeal judges decide that he killed unwillingly, let ten members of the phratry allow him to enter if they are willing: let these be chosen by the fifty-one on the basis of their excellence. And those who killed previously shall be liable to this ordinance. There shall be a proclamation against the killer in the agora by those as far as cousinhood and cousin; there shall join in the prosecution cousins and cousins' sons and brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law and phratry members...

Points of Dracon's law on homicide

- **Institutionalization** of the communal life - justice
- **Control** of vigilante justice by the polis (officials involved: king, ephetai, hellenotamiae)
- Distinction between planned killing (intentional homicide) and killing without forethought/unwillingly (manslaughter justifiable or accidental).
- **Restriction of the role of the family** and the relatives. Intervention of the phratries.
- **Publicity** against the killer in the community, esp. in the Agora.
- The laws would be inscribed and set up in a public place; **knowledge of the laws was made available to all citizens**, rather than to a small elite.



Royal stoa, Agora of Athens

Legislation in Athens

laws vs. decrees? – procedures

- The Athenians had no “constitution”.
- In the 4th century these words had two distinct meanings: a *nomos* was a “law,” while a *psephisma* was a “decree.”
- Laws were community-sanctioned rules with permanent and general application.
- Decrees were decisions with specific and sometimes temporary application.
- Laws were enacted through a special process of legislation, while decrees were passed by a vote of the Assembly.
- In no circumstances shall magistrates enforce a law which has not been inscribed.
- No decree, whether of the Council or Assembly, shall override a law.
- No law shall be directed against an individual without applying to all citizens alike, unless an Assembly of six thousand so resolve by secret ballot.
- Anyone who proposed a decree in the Assembly that contradicted an existing law was subject to prosecution on a charge of “Illegal Proposal” (*graphe paranomon*).

The Persian Wars

~900 BCE
Greeks settle in Ionia



~650 BCE
Ionians conquered by Lydians



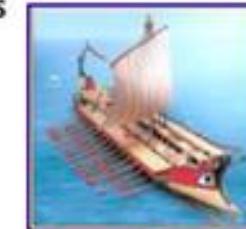
498 BCE
The Ionians burn Sardis and are defeated at Ephesus



483 BCE
Themistocles builds his boats



480 BCE
The Battle of Salamis



431-404 BCE
Peloponnesian War



~650 BCE
Ionian League created



~547 BCE
Cyrus conquers the Lydians



490 BCE
The Battle of Marathon



480 BCE
The Battle of Thermopylae



478 BCE
The Battle of Mycale



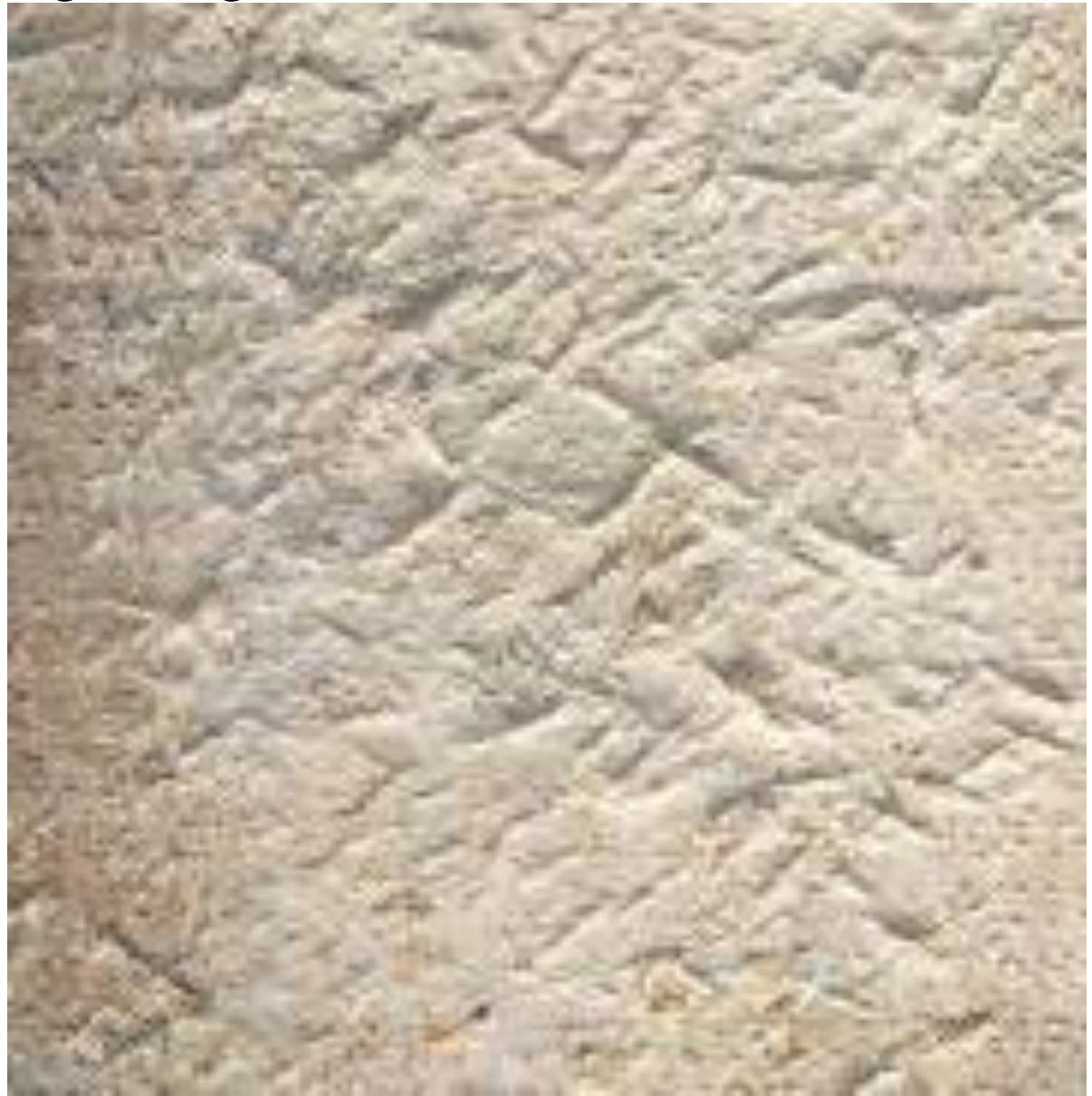
317 BCE
Collapse of Sparta



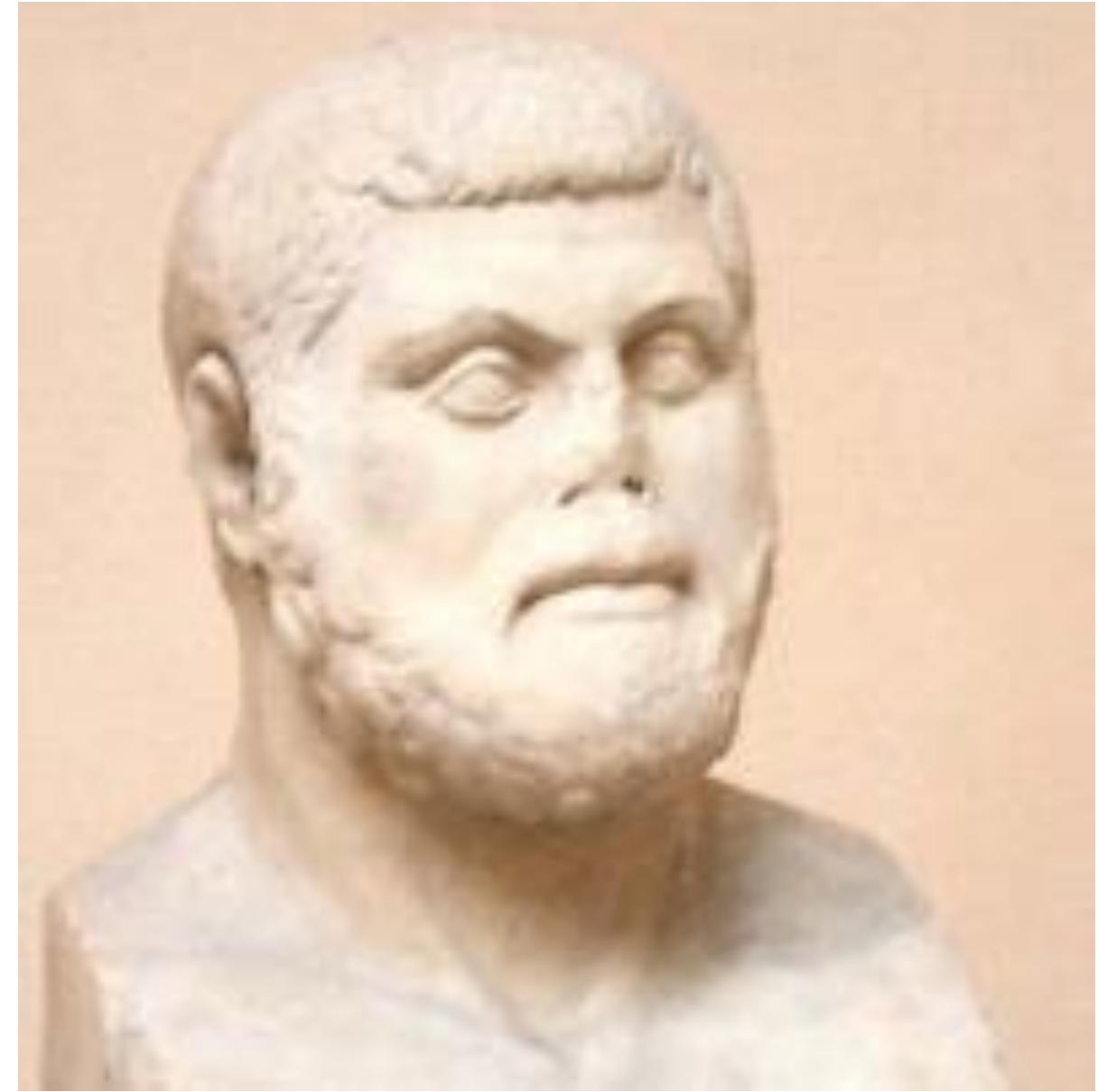


The “decree of Themistocles”

Troezen, 480/79 BC and beginning of the 3rd c. BC



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**Jameson, M., "A Decree of Themistocles from Troizen",
Hesperia 29 (1960): 198-223**

- Gods.
- Resolved by the Council and the People.
- Themistocles son of Neocles of Phrearhioi made the motion.
- The city shall be entrusted to Athena, Athens' protectress, and to the other gods, all of them, for protection and defense against the Barbarian on behalf of the country.
- The Athenians in their entirety and the aliens who live in Athens shall place their children and their women in Troezen The elderly and movable property shall for safety be deposited at Salamis. The treasurers and the priestesses are to remain on the Acropolis and guard the possessions of the gods.
- The rest of the Athenians in their entirety and those aliens who have reached young manhood shall embark on the readied two hundred ships and they shall repulse the Barbarian for the sake of liberty, both their own and that of the other Greeks, in common with the Lacedaemonians, Corinthians, Aeginetans and the others who wish to have a share in the danger.

Appointment will also be made of captains, two hundred in number, one for each ship, by the generals, beginning tomorrow, from those who are owners of both land and home in Athens and who have children who are legitimate. They shall not be more than fifty years old and the lot shall determine each man's ship. The generals shall also enlist marines, ten for each ship, from men over twenty years of age up to thirty, and archers, four in number. They shall also by lot appoint the specialist officers for each ship when they appoint the captains by lot. A list shall be made also of the rowers, ship by ship, by the generals, on notice boards, with the Athenians to be selected from the lexiarchic registers, the aliens from the list of names registered with the polemarch. They shall write them up, assigning them by divisions, up to two hundred divisions, each of up to one hundred rowers, and they shall append to each division the name of the warship and the captain and the specialist officers, so that they may know on what warship each division shall embark.

When assignment of all the divisions has been made and they have been allotted to the warships, all the two hundred shall be manned by order of the Boule and the generals, after they have sacrificed to appease Zeus the All-powerful and Athena and Victory and Poseidon the Securer. When they have completed the manning of the ships, with one hundred they shall bring assistance to the Artemisium in Euboea, while the other hundred shall, all around Salamis and the rest of Attica, lie at anchor and guard the country.

To ensure that in a spirit of concord all Athenians will ward off the Barbarian, those banished for the ten year span shall leave for Salamis and they are to remain there until the people decide about them. Those who have been deprived of citizen rights are to have their rights restored.

Is the decree authentic?

Arguments against

- The decree directly contradicts Herodotus's account of the evacuation of Attica in 480 BC.
- The great length, the numerous detailed regulations, the patronymic and the demotic after the name of Themistocles are unusual in the first quarter of the fifth century.
- Letter forms, attic alphabet.
- The first extant mention of a decree that can be identified with the one found at Troezen comes from Demosthenes, who records that Aeschines read the decree aloud in the Athenian assembly in 347 BC.

Why engraved and set up in Troizen in the first half of the 3rd c.?

Troizen, the city that offered shelter to the women and children of Athens wanted to prove its good relations with Athens.

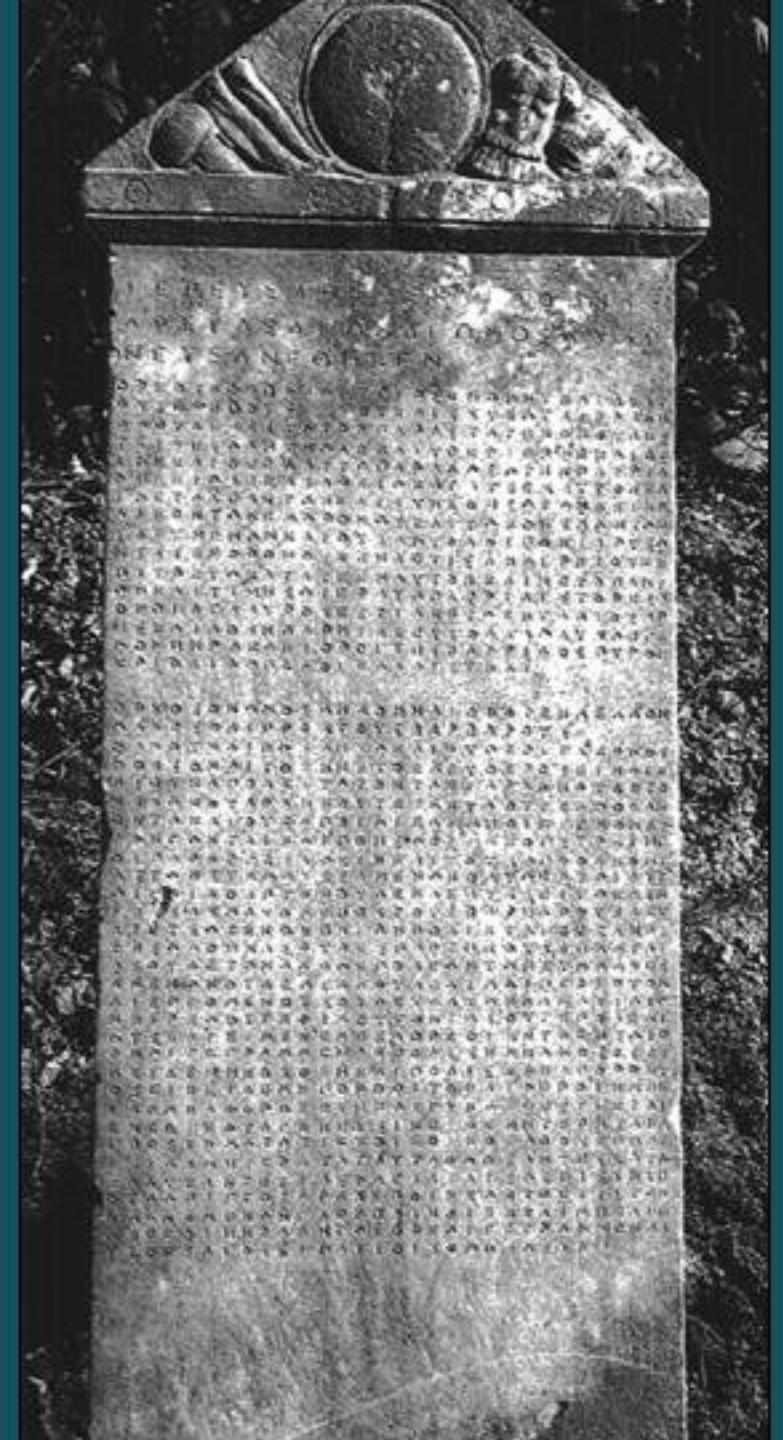
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ΑΙΝΗΣΤΑΙΚΜΕΝΕΚΑΤΟΝΑΥΤΑΝ



The events are of the 5th century even in a different order.

The decree is a compilation of the 4th century.

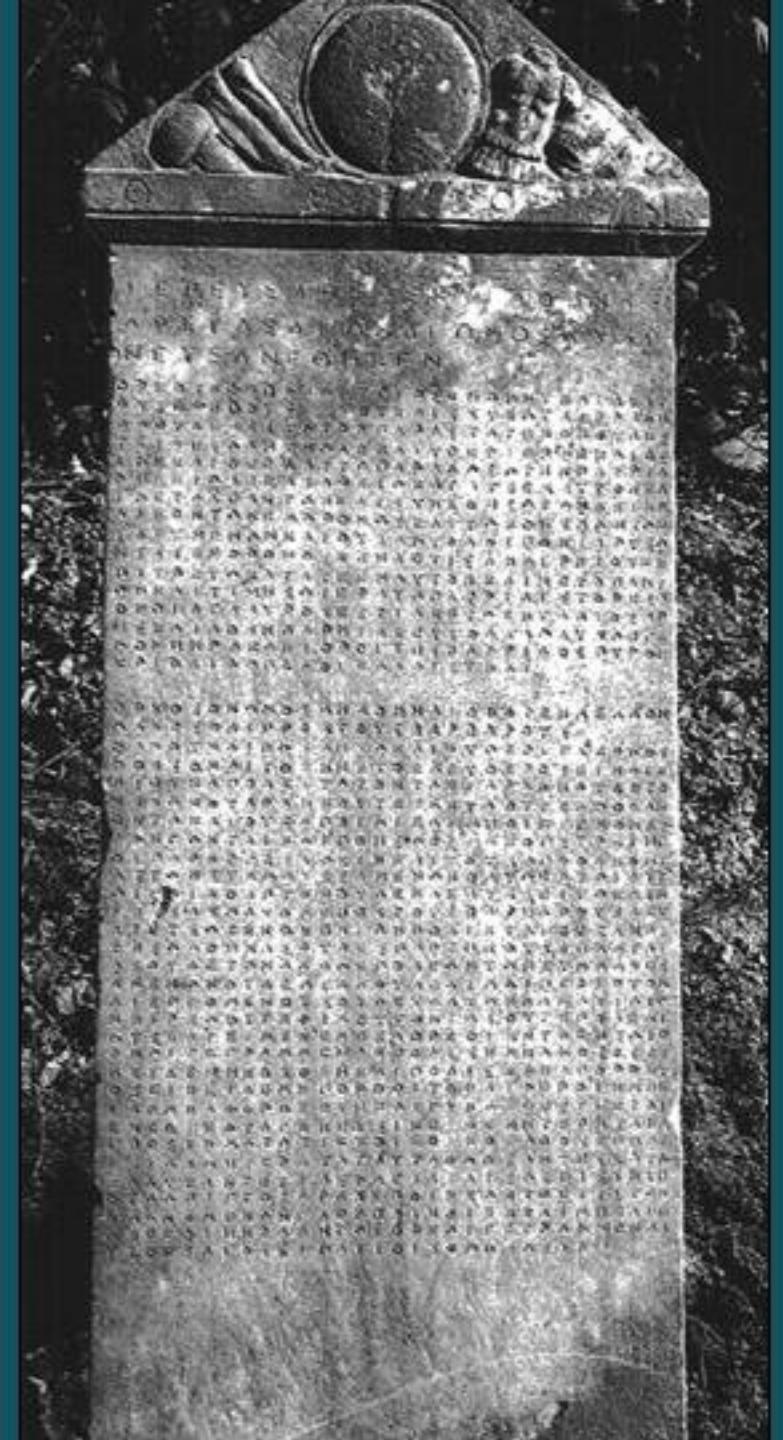
The engraving is an act of the 3rd century.



The stele dedicated at ancient Acharnae by the priest of Ares bearing the Oath of Plataea and the Oath of the Ephebes

Photo courtesy of the École française d'Athènes





The stele dedicated at ancient Acharnae by the priest of Ares bearing the Oath of Plataea and the Oath of the Ephebes

Photo courtesy of the École française d'Athènes

The Athenian ephebic oath and the oath of Plataea Dedication from Acharnae, 480/79 and 350-325 BC

- Gods. The priest of Ares and Athena Areia, Dion son of Dion of Acharnai dedicated.
- Oath of the ephebes. Ancestral oath of the ephebes, which the ephebes must swear. I shall not disgrace the sacred weapons, nor shall I desert the man beside me, wherever I stand in the line. I shall defend the sacred and the divinely sanctioned and I shall not leave the fatherland diminished, but greater and better, as far as I am able and with all, and I shall obey those in authority at any time mindfully and the laws established and those established in future mindfully; and if anyone seeks to destroy them, I shall not permit him as far as I am able and with all, and I will honour the ancestral sacred things. Witnesses: the gods Aglauros, Hestia, Enyo, Enyalios, Ares and Athena Areia, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone, Herakles, and the boundaries of my fatherland, wheat, barley, vines, olives, figs.

- Oath of Plataia. Oath which the Athenians swore when they were about to fight against the barbarians. I shall fight while I live, and I shall not reckon living of more account than being free, and I shall not desert the taxiarch nor the enomotarch, whether living or dead, and I shall not retreat unless the leaders lead the way, and I shall do whatever the generals order, and shall bury the dead of those who were allies on the spot, and shall leave no-one unburied; and having been victorious fighting the barbarians, I shall tithe the city of the Thebans, and I shall not destroy Athens or Sparta or Plataia or any of the other cities that were allied, and I shall not overlook those who are oppressed by hunger, nor shall I bar them from running water, whether they are friends or enemies; and if I adhere to what has been written in the oath may my city be free from disease, if not, diseased; and may my city be unsacked, but if not, may it be sacked; and may mine (*scil.* my land) be fruitful, but if not, may it be barren; and may the women bear children like their parents, but if not, monsters; and may the animals bear young like the animals, but if not, monsters. They swore these oaths, covered the sacrificial victims with their shields, and at the sound of the trumpet they made a curse: if they transgressed anything that they had sworn and did not adhere to what was written in the oath, those who had sworn would be accursed.