Magnesia and the Greeks of Asia

(I.Magnesia 16.16)

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In the spring of 208 B.C., teams of theoroi set out from the city of Magnesia on the Maeander in south-western Asia Minor on embassies to the most distant fringes of the Hellenistic oikoumene. Their task was to persuade the monarchs and cities of the Greek world both to recognise the city and territory of Magnesia as sacred and inviolable, and also to recognise a new stephanitic contest at Magnesia, the Leucophryena. The Leucophryena itself was an annual festival of some antiquity, in honour of the city’s patron deity Artemis Leucophryene. The aim of the embassies of 208 was to have the contest “upgraded” to stephanitic status, on a new penteteric cycle. As we have recently been reminded in a useful study of the institutions of the Leucophryena,1 status as “crowned” games was not a decision the host city could make for itself; stephanitic status was conditional on being recognised as such by other cities.

The success of the Magnesians’ appeal is attested in the form of more than sixty decrees and letters inscribed on the perimeter wall of the Magnesian agora from cities and monarchs as far afield as Sicily and Persia, recognising Magnesia as asylos and the agon as stephanitic. Even this large corpus of documents represents only a fraction of the original response; several of the decrees have the names of other cities appended, more than a hundred in number, marking their acquiescence to the Magnesians’ request. Most of the documents seem to date to 208 or the immediate aftermath, but recognitions con-

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continued to be added down to the mid-second century.\(^2\)

This note is concerned, however, not with the successful *theoria* of 208, but with an earlier, unsuccessful attempt by the Magnesians to have the festival recognised as stephanitic.\(^3\) We learn of this earlier attempt from *I.Magnesia* 16, the great narrative inscription recounting the history of the foundation of the penteteric Leucophryena. The surviving part of the inscription begins with an epiphany of Artemis, presumably at Magnesia. The Magnesians consult the oracle at Delphi, which recommends that they have their city and territory recognised as sacred and inviolable. The Magnesians accept the oracle, and vote to establish a stephanitic contest, interpreting the oracle to the effect that those who honour Apollo Pythius and Artemis Leucophryene ought to be encouraged to share in a festival at Magnesia. The rest of the Greek world apparently did not see it that way: the Magnesians were politely rebuffed, and the effort was abandoned for the time being.

The date of the failed first appeal is indicated in no fewer than four different ways: by the eponymous *stephanephoros* at Magnesia (Zenodotus); by the eponymous archon at Athens (Thrasyphon); by reference to the Pythian games (the year after an unknown Boeotian’s victory as citharode); and by Olympiad dating (the year before the 140th Olympiad):

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\text{ἐπὶ στ[έφανηφόρου] Ζηνοδότου, ἐν Ἀθήναις δὲ ἀρ[χο]ντος Θρασυφ[ῶντος, Πεθώ]-}
\text{α δὲ καθαροκικοῦ νικῶντος τὸι προτέρων ἔτ[ει - - - ca. 8 - - ]}
\text{οὐ Βοιωτίου, Ὀλύμπια δὲ τοῦ ύστερον ἔτει τήν [ἔκαστοτήν]}
\text{καὶ τετταροκοστῆν Ὀλυμπιάδα νικῶντος [τὸ τρίτον]}
\text{[π]αγχράτιον Ἀγησιδάμου Μεσσηνίου, κτλ.} \quad 16
\]


\(^3\) For the restoration [στεφανί]ῆν in *I.Magnesia* 16.16–17, see Slater and Summa 278–284.
The Olympiad dating firmly establishes the date of the first Magnesian appeal as 221 B.C.⁴

The Magnesians go on to describe the nature of the first attempt to have the agon recognised as stephanitic. The most recent edition of the relevant passage reads as follows:⁵


There are a number of puzzling aspects to these passages.⁶

First, the fact that the Magnesians chose to record their humiliating failure in 221 at all. It will not do simply to say that it is “recorded only as a rhetorical foil for the following claim to success”;⁷ the fact that the cities of the Greek world rebuffed the Magnesians once does not increase the prestige derived from being accepted later. Epigraphic parallels for such a

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⁵ Slater and Summa 289–291.

⁶ Lines 18–20, as restored by Slater and Summa, are ungrammatical: δὲ cannot co-ordinate a main clause and a participial clause. Indeed, the participial clause as it stands is suspiciously superfluous. I suggest that what we have is the subject of the verb τιμήσουσιν, namely [ὁι πρὸς] τὸ θείον εὐσε-βῶς ἔχοντες. I would restore the whole clause: τὴν ἐκδοχὴν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ταῦτην λαβόντες, [ὅτι] τιμήσουσιν οὕτως Αρτεμίν Λευκοφρυήν, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰς τὸ θείον εὐσεβῶς ἔχοντες, ἐάμ κτλ. “Understanding the meaning of the oracle thus, that those who are piously disposed towards the divine will best honour Artemis Leucophryene in this way, if (etc.).” Compare e.g. Ι.Μαγνεσία 48.11–13, πάτρων δὲ ἔστιν Ἐρετρὶ[εύ]να τῇ τῇ πρὸς τὸ θείον εὐσεβῶς διακεῖσθαι [καὶ μᾶλλον καὶ τῇ πρὸς τὴν Ἀρτεμίν]; 100a.16–19.

⁷ Slater and Summa 276.
record of failed diplomacy are scarce. Second, the fact that the earlier appeal is dated with such precision: the use of four different dating criteria for a single event is, while useful in establishing late third-century Athenian archontic chronology, to my knowledge unique in Hellenistic epigraphy. Third, and perhaps strangest of all, the suggestion that the stephanitic contest proclaimed in 221 was to be restricted to “those dwelling in Asia.” I know no other instance of a contest, let alone a stephanitic contest, at which competition was limited in this way. Even the festivals celebrated by regional koina in Hellenistic Asia Minor (the Alexandraia of the Ionian koinon, the Panathenaia of the koinon of Athena Ilias in the Troad, the Rhomaia of the Lycian koinon) regularly attracted contestants from other parts of the Greek world: they were not exclusively ἀγῶνες τῶν κατοικοῦντων τῆν Ἀσίαν. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the Greeks of Asia ever had a sufficiently developed sense of corporate identity, at this or any other period, to have taken any pride or pleasure in a festival which explicitly excluded the Greeks of “Old” Greece. The case is still further weakened by the fact that the only response which can confidently be connected to the appeal of 221 derives from the Aetolian league.

8 The great inscription from Lycian Xanthos recording the various apologies and excuses put forward by the Xanthians for not providing more financial assistance towards the rebuilding of the walls of Kytenion is not a true parallel, since it is not the Kytenians who are recording what was essentially a failed embassy: SEG XXXVIII 1476.49–65.


11 IG IX.12 4.c, with Rigsby, Asylia 190–193 (222/1 B.C.). It is possible,
the thesis of a “two-tier” theoria, with the Greeks of Asia invited to recognise Magnesian asylia and to share in the agon, and the remainder of the Greeks invited only to recognise asylia, has little to recommend it.

All three problems are solved by the alteration of a single restored letter. In lines 16–18, read:

\[ πρῶτ[οι στεφανί-] \]

\[ την ἀγῶνα θείναι τῶν κατοικοῦντων τῆν Ἀσίαν [ἐψηφίσαν]-\]

to, κτλ.

They were the first of those dwelling in Asia to vote in favour of establishing a stephanitic contest.12

Claims, justified or otherwise, to be the “first” from a particular city or region to have achieved a particular distinction have a long history in the Greek world.13 This was not merely a matter of vanity. In the second century A.D. the Magnesians’ own claim to membership of the Panhellenion rested on the fact that they had been “the first of the Greeks to cross over to Asia and settle there,” πρῶτοι Ἑλλήνων [διαβάντες εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ κατοικήσαντες]. Naturally only those Asiatics who could present a bona fide Greek genealogy were welcome in the Panhellenion; a successful claim to be the first of the mainland Greeks to have settled in Asia had practical diplomatic consequences.14

Individual victors frequently claimed to be the “first” from a city or district to have won a particular athletic contest. So a

but unprovable, that other surviving recognition-decrees pertain to the first appeal.

12 I first proposed this supplement at a workshop paper on I.Magnesia 16 delivered in Oxford by W. Slater in January 2006; it is rejected without argument by Slater and Summa 289.


Milesian athlete of the late first century B.C. was the “first and only of those from Asia” (πρῶτον καὶ μόνον τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀσίας) to be proclaimed ἄριστος Ἑλλήνων at the Plataean Eleutheria after his victory in the race in full armour; he is further designated the “first of the Ionians” (πρῶτον τῶν Ἰωάνων) and the “first of the Milesians” (πρῶτον Μιλησίων) to have won a number of other contests in both Greece and Asia.\(^\text{15}\) A much earlier example is provided by the victory monument of a boxer in the boys’ category at the Pythian games, dating to the early fourth century, the “only one of the Ionians” to have achieved this. A Pharsalan victor in the Olympic pankration of the later fourth century was the “first from the land of Thessaly” to have won this particular contest; in the same period, an individual claims to be the “first of the Cretans” to have been victorious at the Nemea.\(^\text{16}\) Instances relating to individual cities are very numerous in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods.\(^\text{17}\) Such claims were not necessarily only a matter of civic pride. The victory of Diotimus of Sidon at the Nemean games in the late third century B.C. was the first time a Sidonian had triumphed at a Greek panhellenic festival; competition and victory at the Panhellenic games helped to legitimise the Sidonians’ claims to Greek identity and ethnicity.\(^\text{18}\) In later periods, the same vocabulary came to be


\(^{16}\) J. Ebert, Griechische Epigramme auf Sieger an gymnischen und hippischen Agonen (Berlin 1972) no. 31, [μόνος Ἰωάνων; CEG II 794–793, πρῶτος γῆς ἀπὸ Θεσσαλίας; Ebert no. 48, πρῶτος Κηβητών.]

\(^{17}\) A few examples (not comprehensive): CEG II 862 (Κώιων πρῶτος, late IV B.C.); SEG XI 338.7 (πρῶτος Αχαιών: III B.C.); Ebert no. 68 (πρῶτος Τρώων: III/II B.C.); Ebert no. 71 (Messene: III/II B.C.); IG XII.1 841, with I.Lindos 699 (πρῶτον Λινδίων: II B.C.); I.Priene 268 (II B.C.); Syll.\(^3\) 1065 (πρῶτος Κώιων: early I A.D.); Robert, OMS VII 696–706 (πρῶτος Ροδίων: I A.D.); I.Lasos 107 (πρῶτος Ιασών: late I A.D.); C. Roueché, Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias (London 1993) no. 91.ii (πρῶτον Ἀφροδεισιέων: II A.D.).

applied to new spheres of inter-polis rivalry. In the mid-first century A.D., a Milesian declared himself to be the first and only individual from Miletus or anywhere else in Ionia to enter the Roman senate, and only the fifth from all of Asia: πέμπτος μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Ασίας ὅλης ἐκ το[ῦ] αἰζόνος εἰς συγκλήτου εἰσελθ[ῶν], ἀμ[ὸ]δὲ δὲ Μειλήτου καὶ τῆς Ἀλλή[ς] Ἱονίας μόν[ὸς καὶ πρώτος].

The founders of particular cults could also claim “priority” in so doing. In the late fifth century (420/19), Telemachus was the “first” to have established a sanctuary of Asclepius in Athens; in the early Hellenistic period, a certain Thymilos was the “first” to establish a cult of Asclepius at Cretan Lissos.

The same applied to athletic contests. The earliest example is certainly a sixth-century dedication from the Athenian acropolis, set up by a college of hieropoioi, the “first to establish an agon in honour of the grey-eyed maiden,” [hoi τὸν ἁγιοὺς θεὸν Πρώτος γλαυκόποις ἰδρύσαμεν, the agon here is none other than the Panathenaea. In the Athenian decree of 283 honouring the poet Philippides, he is said to have established a new contest in honour of Demeter and Kore, in commemoration of the recovery of Eleusis from the Macedonians in, most probably, 285/4: ἐπιθετον ἀγῶνα κατεσκεύασεν ἄγιος ἀνέμονιμα τῆς τοῦ δήμου ἔλευθερίας].

In all these cases, however, the chronological priority and concomitant credit are individual rather than collective. The
closest parallels to the Magnesians’ claim are furnished by two texts from Cyzicus. An oracle of the Pythian Apollo dating to the late third or early second century, and thus roughly contemporary with the Magnesian document, begins by stating that the Cyzicenes were the “first” city to celebrate a festival of Kore Soteira: ὦ ἐπιτετελέσα[ντι ἑκατέρων] τὰ Σωτήρια πρῶτοι τά· Κόραι τῷ Σωτείραν ναὸν ἐτευχέοις καὶ εὔπυκτος. More interesting still, an epigram from the Palatine anthology claims that Cyzicus was the first city in Asia to build a temple dedicated to Athena: ὑψίστᾳ Τριτωνίδι νηὸν ἔτευξεν Κύζικος ἅδ᾿ ἱρᾷ πρῶτον ἐν Ἀσιάδι, a claim very similar to that of the Magnesia text. As the Magnesians were the first in Asia to establish a stephanitic contest, so the Cyzicenes were the first in Asia to have established a cult of Athena.

The new restoration provides an explanation for the otherwise peculiar fact that the Magnesians chose to recall the humiliation of 221 B.C. at all. The point was precisely to emphasise that they had been the first city in Asia (πρῶτοι ... τόγ κατοικοῦντον τὴν Ἀσίαν) to attempt to establish stephanitic games with oracular sanction. The only state in the vicinity of Magnesia to possess a crowned contest before 221 was the city of Cos, its Asclepieia having been declared stephanitic in 242. The Hyacinthotrophenia at Cnidus were not reorganised as a penteteric festival with stephanitic status until 201, the Pergamene Nicephoria not until 182. So far as we know, the

Magnesians were indeed the first community on the Asiatic mainland to attempt to have a festival upgraded to crowned status. By 208 B.C., however, this had developed into a serious matter of prestige for the Magnesians. Between 221 and 208 a different stephanitic contest had been successfully established in Asia, at the neighbouring city of Miletus. A Milesian decree inscribed on Cos explains how the Milesians came to upgrade the Didymeia to stephanitic status. The Milesians had long celebrated a festival and games at Didyma in honour of Apollo; moreover, the city and country of Miletus had (at some indeterminate point) been declared sacred by oracular decree, in honour of the coupling of Zeus and Leto on Miletian territory. Whence, the Milesians claim, many cities, tribes and monarchs had spontaneously recognised the Milesians’ inviolability, and it was, accordingly, fitting that the Milesians should act in accordance with the afore-mentioned oracles and raise the contest of the Didymeia to stephanitic status, inviting all the Greeks to share in the games. The Milesians therefore ask the Coans to recognise the contest as stephanitic and to offer the greatest rewards to victorious athletes from Cos.  

The precise date of establishment of the Milesian penteteric Didymeia is unknown. In 218/7 the city of Seleuceia-Tralles voted to send theoroi to an annual festival of Apollo Didymeus, which suggests strongly that the penteteric festival was not yet in existence; the earliest certain reference to it comes in the context of the school-foundation of Eudemos in 206/5 (paidonomoi to provide an ox to Apollo “every fourth year at the Didymeia, and in other years at the Boiegia”).

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The crucial point for our purposes is that the establishment of the stephanitic Didymeia at Miletus almost certainly falls between the two Magnesian attempts to establish a stephanitic contest (221 and 208). During this period, relations between Miletus and Magnesia were not at their best. The settlement by Miletus of Cretan mercenaries in the Maeander delta plain in 234/3 was an act of naked aggression towards her neighbours in the delta region. A lengthy peace-treaty, dating to 196, informs us of a war between Miletus and Magnesia over the limits of their respective deltaic territories. That Miletus should also be able to claim priority in establishing an international festival and contest was an intolerable blow to Magnesian prestige.

This, in my view, is the explanation of the absurdly elaborate dating-formula in I.Magnesia 16.11–16. The Magnesians are determined to prove that it was they, not the Milesians, who were the “first of those dwelling in Asia" to have received oracular sanction to establish a stephanitic agon. The heavy-handed dating-formula is an attempt to underline to posterity that although Miletus was the first to succeed, Magnesia had been the first to receive the green light from Delphi. If it had taken the rest of the Greek world thirteen years to come round to Apollo’s point of view, that could hardly be blamed on the Magnesians.30

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