

# A LETTER OF TRAJAN TO A SYNOD AT ISTHMIA

(PLATE 89)

A fragment of a letter from the emperor Trajan<sup>1</sup> was excavated on June 11, 1965, in a level of destruction debris overlying an ancient quarry directly opposite Hill House on the south side of the road running west from the site of Ancient Corinth. A coin of Aurelian was associated with the inscription. The destruction debris apparently represents the remains of a building constructed over the quarry. The letter is inscribed on a stele of white marble with a blue grain running vertically through it. The top and both the left and right sides are broken away, but the bottom and the smoothly dressed back are preserved. The surface is somewhat worn, but the neatly cut letters are easily legible. Punctuation marks separate the words except after the definite article and in a few instances indicated below.

Height, 0.355 m.; Width, 0.102 m.; Thickness, 0.065 m.

Height of letters, (lines 1-3) 0.009-0.01 m., (remainder) 0.006-0.008 m.

Corinth Inv. No. I 2642.

a. 98/9 p.

ca. 41 (lines 2-3)

ca. 43 (remainder)

*vacat*

[Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσ]αρ θεοῦ Νέ[ρωνα υἱὸς Νέρονος]  
 [Τραιανὸς Σεβαστ]ὸς Γερμανικ[ὸς ἀρχιερεὺς μέγιστος]  
 [δημαρχικῆς ἐξου]σίας τὸ τρίτο[ν ὑπατος τὸ δεύτερον]  
 [πατὴρ πατρίδος τ]ῆι Ἰσθμικῆι σ[υνόδοι τῶν περὶ τὸν Διό]-  
 5 [νυσον τεχνειῶν ὕ]αc. χαίρειν. ὕ[acat ]  
 [-----]βειαν οὔτε ὑπολ[-----]  
 [-----ει]ν καὶ φυλάττε[ιω -----]  
 [-----]σθε οὖν καὶ ὑμε[-----]  
 [-----]ς ὅσον τῶν θυσι[ῶν -----]

<sup>1</sup> Reported by G. Daux, "Chronique des Fouilles 1965," *B.C.H.*, XC, 1966, p. 753, with photograph, fig. 5; J. and L. Robert, *Bull. Ep.* in *R.E.G.*, LXXX, 1967, p. 489, no. 255. I would like to thank Professor Henry S. Robinson, former director of the Corinth Excavations, for permission to edit this text, Charles K. Williams, II, the current director, for his assistance, and Professor James H. Oliver for his comments and corrections. Examination of the stone was made possible through the assistance of a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies in 1969/70.

*Hesperia*, XLIV, 4

10 [----- Ποσε]ιδῶνος ποιέισθα[ι-----]  
 [πρεσβευτῆς --]ούιος Φιλιάδελφο[ς-----]  
 [----- ἄξιο]ν κρείνω ἐφόδιο[ν εἰ μὴ προῖκα ὑπέσχη]-  
 [ται πρεσβεύσει]ν vac. ἐρρώσθαι ὑμ[ᾶς βούλομαι. vacat]  
 [-----] v a c a t [-----]  
 15 [----- ἐρ]ρώσθε. v a c [ a t ]

vacat

0.12 m.

to bottom

Line 1: the letters are slightly more widely spaced than those of the subsequent lines. The lower corner of the epsilon laps over the break. Line 2: the vertical bar of the kappa is clear. Line 3: about half the omicron is preserved. Line 4: the final vertical of the eta is clear on the break. Line 6: the lower extremity of only one leg of the lambda is preserved. Line 8: the only punctuation preserved is that between οἶν and καί. Both the upper and lower corners of the epsilon are preserved. Line 11: about half the circumference of the corroded omicron is preserved.

#### DATE AND IMPERIAL TITLES <sup>2</sup>

The letter was written during Trajan's third tribunician power, that is, between December 10, 98 and December 9, 99 according to the chronology worked out by Mason Hammond. The second consulship had been held in A.D. 98, and the third would fall in A.D. 100. *Consul designatus*, which is a part of the imperial titulature from October of A.D. 99, does not appear in this heading. The restoration of τὸ δεύτερον rather than an abbreviation coincides better with the estimated length of line and is in keeping with τὸ πρῶτον shortly before. The second imperial salutation did not occur until A.D. 100, and no reference is made to imperial salutations in line 4. *Dacicus* was not awarded until A.D. 102. After an initial refusal, *Pater Patriae* was accepted and added from late spring of A.D. 98.

Trajan did not journey to Rome immediately on his succession, but remained on the Danube. He was probably wintering in Moesia at the beginning of his third tribunician power. It is likely that he delayed his entry into Rome until late in the following summer. There is no way of knowing for certain whether the embassy

<sup>2</sup> For the chronology of Trajan's early years see R. Hanslik, "M. Ulpius Traianus," *R.E.*, Supplement X, 1965, cols. 1044-1050. For the tribunician dates M. Hammond, "The Tribunician Day during the Early Empire," *Mem. Am. Ac. Rome*, XV, 1938, pp. 39-43, and "The Tribunician Day from Domitian through Antoninus. A Reëxamination," *Mem. Am. Ac. Rome*, XIX, 1949, pp. 45-55. Two letters from Delphi offer examples of the titulature shortly before and shortly after the date of this letter: A. Plassart, *Fouilles de Delphes*, III, iv, Paris, 1970, pp. 33-37, nos. 287-288. Regarding the probable date of Trajan's *adventus* to Rome I have had fruitful conversations with Professor E. Togo Salmon and Dr. John Evans; see also Hanslik, *op. cit.*, col. 1050 and A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny. A Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 571-575.

of Philadelphus was received in Moesia, or whether it awaited the emperor's advent to Rome; the latter seems more probable to this editor.

#### THE ADDRESSEE

G. Daux referred to the addressee of this letter as "l'assemblée de l'Isthme"<sup>3</sup> without specifying the nature of such a board. The Isthmian games were under the direction of the city of Corinth, and the officials immediately responsible for conducting the games were the *agonothetes* and the *hellenodikai*<sup>4</sup>; there was therefore no assembly like that of the Amphyctiones at Delphi to direct the festival. If the addressee were a political league of Greek cities which met at the Isthmus, its proper title would have been *koinon* or *synhedrion*, not *synodos*<sup>5</sup>; further, the only such league represented in Corinthian documents under the Roman Empire is the *koinon* of the Achaeans,<sup>6</sup> whose appearance is to be expected in the city which was the seat of the Roman government of Achaea.

Under the Roman Empire the title *synodos* was used most frequently to designate organizations associated with games: the guilds of victors in the sacred games, of the Dionysiac *technitai*, and of athletic competitors. The synod of *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* were granted *privilegia* in 33/2 B.C. by Marcus Antonius.<sup>7</sup> The word *synodos* does not always occur in their title; the more usual forms are *οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱερονεῖκαι* or *οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱερονεῖκαι καὶ στεφανεῖται*. A parallel for the adjective modifying *synodos* does not occur until the late third century after Christ.<sup>8</sup> The only other reference to this group on the Greek mainland is in an undated document from Olympia whose letter forms are not inconsistent with a date in the late second or early third century after Christ.<sup>9</sup> The lack of testimonia for the *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* as an independent group during the major portion of the second century,<sup>10</sup> a period of significant documentation for the Dionysiac *tech-*

<sup>3</sup> See note 1, above.

<sup>4</sup> Pausanias, II, 2, 2; Dio Chrysostomos, IX, 10; D. J. Geagan, "Notes on the Agonistic Institutions of Roman Corinth," *Gr.Rom.Byz.St.*, IX, 1968, pp. 69-76.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. O. Larsen, *Representative Government in Greek and Roman History*, Berkeley, 1955, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> A. B. West, *Corinth*, VIII, ii, *Latin Inscriptions: 1896-1926*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1931, pp. 29-31; D. J. Geagan, *A.J.A.*, LXXI, 1967, p. 423, for a list of the documentation in J. H. Kent, *Corinth*, VIII, iii, *The Inscriptions: 1926-1950*, Princeton, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> On the *hieronikai* see C. A. Forbes, "Ancient Athletic Guilds," *Class.Phil.*, L, 1955, pp. 238-242. For Antony's letter see R. K. Sherck, *Roman Documents from the Greek East*, Baltimore, 1969, pp. 290-293, no. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *C.I.G.*, 2931, from Tralles: ἡ Ὀλυμπικὴ σύνοδος τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱερονεϊκῶν καὶ στεφανεϊτῶν. See Forbes, *op. cit.* (above, note 7), p. 241.

<sup>9</sup> *Olympia*, V, *Die Inschriften*, Berlin, 1896, no. 469, possibly more correctly to be restored *οἱ ἀπὸ τῆ[s οἰκουμένης] ἱερονεϊκα[ι καὶ στεφανεϊται]*. The inscriber used lunate forms for epsilon and sigma.

<sup>10</sup> But a dedication edited by W.-H. Buckler, "Monuments de Thyatire," *Rev. Phil.*, XXXVII, 1913, pp. 317-319, no. 12, may be datable to this period.

*nitai* and athletes, and the inclusion of their names in the titles of the organized *technitai* and athletes during this same period indicates a reorganization of the various synods; but this would have occurred at a date later than that of Trajan's letter (see below). Therefore it is possible to restore the title of the addressee as τ]ῆι Ἰσθμικῆι σ[υνόδωι τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς οἴκου|μένης ἱερονικῶν υ].

The Isthmian and Nemean guild of Dionysiac *technitai* had been one of the four major organizations of stage personnel in the Hellenistic world.<sup>11</sup> At the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C. groups of its members became distributed among the cities of Greece; in documents they are usually identified as members of the guild resident in this or that city. There is no evidence of the re-establishment of the guild at Isthmia after the settling of the Roman colony at Corinth, although it is likely that at least a portion of the members would have returned. Under Hadrian and probably under Trajan the theatrical personnel of the empire were organized into a universal guild.<sup>11a</sup> The *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* regularly are included among the membership in the official title of this guild; we may assume that the *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* no longer had their own organization, but were divided between the guild of Dionysiac *technitai* and that of the athletes.<sup>12</sup> By the third century after Christ this organization had broken down again. The *privilegia* of the *technitai* date back to Hellenistic times, and they were renewed by various emperors.<sup>13</sup> It is possible then to restore the addressee as τ]ῆι Ἰσθμικῆι σ[υνόδωι τῶν περὶ τὸν Διό|νυσσον τεχνειτῶν υ], a title possible before the reorganization of local guilds into the universal guild.

Synods of athletes also antedate the coming of the Romans, and these synods also were recipients of *privilegia* renewed by various emperors.<sup>14</sup> A group of documents indicate the incorporation of *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* during Hadrianic times.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> F. Poland, "Technitai," *R.E.*, V, 1934, Nachträge, cols. 2473-2557. Of the Isthmian and Nemean guild see cols. 2474-2477 for testimonia and cols. 2500-2507, 2517-2518 for the history.

<sup>11a</sup> See most recently J. H. Oliver, "The Empress Plotina and the Sacred Thymelic Synod," *Historia*, XXIV, 1975, pp. 125-128.

<sup>12</sup> Poland, *op. cit.* (note 11, above), cols. 2515-2517; D. J. Geagan, *T.A.P.A.*, CIII, 1972, pp. 146-147, 155-156. The following documents have been incorrectly restored: *I.G.R.R.*, III, 23 (as recognized by Poland) should read τεχνειτῶν [ιε|ρονεικῶν] στεφανει[τῶν]; G. E. Bean, *Side Kitabeleri, The Inscriptions of Side* (= *Türk tarih kurumu yayımlarından*, V seri, sa 20; *Researches in the Region of Antalya*, no. 5), 1965, pp. 48-51, no. 148, which is surely an imperial letter renewing *privilegia* addressed [τῆ συνόδω τῆ ἱερᾶ θυ]|μελικῆ τῶ[ν ἐν Σίδῃ περὶ τὸν]| Διόνυσσον τ[εχνειτῶν ἱερονι]|κῶν καὶ στεφ[ανειτῶν]. In two documents the *hieronikai* and *stephanitai* are grouped with the *technitai* as early as the reign of Claudius: *Klio*, VIII, 1908, pp. 413 ff.; *Milet*, I, Berlin, 1914, 3. Both of these are grants of *privilegia*.

<sup>13</sup> Poland, *op. cit.* (note 11, above), cols. 2489-2492, 2516-2520. To these add the text edited by C. E. Bean, *loc. cit.* (above, note 12).

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.* (note 7, above), pp. 242-252.

<sup>15</sup> See the examples of titles of the guild cited by L. Robert, *Hellenica*, XIII, 1965, p. 139.

The spacing of the letters of Trajan's letter would permit the restoration of τ]ῆι Ἰσθμικῆι σ[υνόδοι τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ἀθλητῶν<sup>16</sup>], but this is not consistent with the terminology for temporary local organizations,<sup>16</sup> and the athletes appear to have been organized internationally from the very beginning;<sup>17</sup> the letter could be addressed to a local chapter of the international guild, but the evidence for such local chapters is tenuous, and there is no firm evidence of a tradition of local organizations on the Greek mainland like the organizations of *technitai*.<sup>18</sup>

It is unlikely that the addressee is an athletic organization. It is possible that the letter was sent to a synod of *hieronikai*, but the tradition of such organizations on the Greek mainland is weak and late; there is no other evidence of such a group at Isthmia. In the light of the long tradition of Dionysiac *technitai* associated with Isthmia and of the evidence from Athens that such organizations may have continued without interruption down to the reorganization into the universal guild,<sup>19</sup> this letter of Trajan ought to be considered as evidence of the return of the *technitai* to Isthmia at some time after the foundation of the Roman colony at Corinth. The synod no longer includes in its title the Nemea, and it may be that a guild at Argos was organized around that festival. The debris in which the stone was found possibly represents a building which housed the headquarters of the *technitai* at Corinth.

#### THE SUBJECT MATTER

The wording of the letter does not indicate anything certain about its contents. A confirmation of *privilegia*<sup>20</sup> would be a distinct possibility in a letter to any of the synods discussed above. Such a letter might open with the acknowledgement of an embassy (πρεσ]βεΐαν, line 6), followed by a statement that the emperor is not ignorant of what his predecessors have granted (οὔτε ὑπολ[είπω --, line 6); he therefore permits the synod to preserve (φυλάττε[ι --, line 7) what *privilegia* were previously granted. But the preserved words could equally well be restored as a refusal of divine honors,<sup>21</sup> an unlikely possibility in view of the addressee. Such a letter could open with an acknowledgement of the good will and great honor conveyed to the emperor (*e. g.*, [ἐπαινώ δὲ τὴν εἰς ἐμὲ εὐ]νοίαν καὶ τὴν εὐσέ]βειαν or [τὴν δὲ εἰς

To them add *I.G.*, XIV, 1054b, and a very fragmentary unedited letter found at Isthmia addressed [— — συνόδῳ ξ]υστικῆ [περιπολιτικῆ τῶν πε | ρὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ἀθλητῶν] ἱερονεικ[ῶν στεφανειῶν].

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.* (note 7, above), pp. 242-243, 247-248.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242, 244.

<sup>19</sup> Geagan, *T.A.P.A.*, CIII, 1972, p. 146, note 6, but see also note 7.

<sup>20</sup> M. Hammond, *The Antonine Monarchy* (= *Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome*, XIX), Rome, 1959, pp. 339-345; A. Plassart, *op. cit.* (note 2, above), pp. 34-35, and the references cited above, notes 7, 12, and 13.

<sup>21</sup> M. P. Charlesworth, "The Refusal of Divine Honors, an Augustan Formula," *B.S.R.*, XV, 1939, pp. 1-10. On Trajan's attitude see Sherwin-White, *op. cit.* (note 2, above), pp. 572-573.

ἐμὲ εὐσέ]βειαν οὔτε ὑπολ[είπων), followed by a very succinct formula of refusal with the explanation that such honors are more suitable to divinities (*e. g.*, φυλάσσειν . . . τὰς θεοῖς προπούσας τιμάς, *S.E.G.*, XI, 922, or φυλάσσειν τῷ μεγέθει τῶν . . ., H. Seyrig, *Rev. Arch.*, XXIX, 1929, pp. 101-106). Lines 8-10 would be an exhortation to use the monies and the devotion to further the cult of Poseidon,<sup>22</sup> the patron divinity of the Isthmian sanctuary. There are sufficient other possibilities to suggest that no certain conclusion can be reached; the editor inclines toward interpreting the document as a renewal of *privilegia*.

#### THE FORMULA FOR THE *VIATICUM*

The letter closes with the formulae which name the ambassador and provide for his *viaticum*.<sup>23</sup> I have not attempted a complete restoration of the formula; a thorough study by J. H. Oliver is due to be published shortly. Philadelphus must certainly have been a member of the synod, and therefore a person associated with theatrical presentations. Most probably he would have been a man who could compose and express himself well. I have been unable to identify him in other documents.

The repetition of a formula of farewell two lines below that of the letter is a peculiarity. At the end of a letter such as this one might expect the Roman date. Further the formula is the imperative ἐρ]ρώσθε rather than the more customary infinitive which appears above. Since line 14 seems to be uninscribed and there are only about 10 letter spaces lost at the beginning of line 15, it is difficult to say to what formula the farewell is appended.

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<sup>22</sup> As Germanicus makes specific references to his adoptive father (Seyrig, *loc. cit.*, line 9) or his adoptive father and grandmother (V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1955, no. 320(b); see J. H. Oliver, "On the Edict of Germanicus declining Divine Acclamations," *Rivista Storica dell' Antichità*, I, 1971, pp. 229-230).

<sup>23</sup> See W. Williams, "Antoninus Pius and the Control of Provincial Embassies," *Historia*, XVI, 1967, pp. 472-473; Plassart, *op. cit.* (note 2, above), pp. 33-34.



DANIEL J. GEAGAN: A LETTER OF TRAJAN TO A SYNOD AT ISTHμία



SUSAN I. ROTROFF: AN ATHENIAN ARCHON LIST OF THE LATE SECOND CENTURY AFTER CHRIST

