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Honors for the 'Other': Epigraphic Second Thoughts on the Barbarian Stereotype in Athens

Echoing the familiar stereotype of non-Greek dynasts' fascination with Greek culture, Xenophon (*Poroi* 3.11) suggested the use of grants of *euergesia* as incentives for foreign investment in Athens. 'If they were to be recorded as *euergetai* for all time', he argued, '... even kings, tyrants and satraps would desire to partake in this reward.' This simple assessment of the mechanism underlying the honorific system in Athens captures the fundamental problem of most modern interpretations of Athenian decrees for the non-Greeks. They assume that the exchanges recorded in these documents were equal only in so far as they satisfied the ambitions of each party, i.e. Athens' need for Bosporan grain or Thracian military support on the one hand, and the non-Greeks' demand for Athenian civic honors on the other. Following Xenophon, the modern readings also presuppose a degree of insincerity in the highly formulaic and laudatory language of the decrees. They simultaneously resort to the barbarian stereotype for an explanation of the honorific system, and claim that the forms of Athenian reciprocal relations with the non-Greeks attest to the applicability of this stereotype.

As an alternative approach I suggest looking at the Athenian decrees for the non-Greeks in a larger context. First, when considered against the background of contemporary decrees for the Greeks, it becomes clear that both the forms and methods in which Athens managed its reciprocal relations with foreigners were not influenced by the ethnicity of the honorands. A statistical analysis of all extant decrees from the Late Classical period reveals a uniformity in the decree types, the combinations of honors and privileges, and the recipient categories, stretching evenly across ethnic and cultural boundaries. Once we also recognize that the peculiarities of individual decrees issued by the Athenian demos for the non-Greek dynasts cannot be attributed simply to the incompatibility of their political systems, the need to consider the complete set of transactions recorded in each document and its historical context becomes clear. In the second part of the paper, I will therefore analyze the Athenian decree for the Spartocid kings of Bosphorus (IG II2 212). A close reading of the language of the decree and a consideration of its function as a public monument in light of other literary and epigraphic evidence for Athenian relations with Bosphorus reveal the potential, as well as realized, practical value of the honors for their recipients, and the long-term commitment on the part of the Athenian state, together with some of its prominent politicians, to maintain a positive and mutually advantageous relationship with the Spartocids.

Athenian decrees for the non-Greeks thus seriously undermine the applicability of the notion of Greek-barbarian polarity to interpretations of public practices. As solemn declarations about the state's positive relationships with the non-Greeks, the decrees unveil to us a world in which shared ethnicity did not guarantee compatibility of interests and where 'pro-barbarian' rhetoric must have balanced the abusive language and hostility of the proponents of alternative courses in foreign policy.