Beyond the Three-Barred Sigma: IG I3 11

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IG I3 11, long identified as an Athenian treaty with Sicilian Egesta, is best known for its role in the conflict over the dating of fifth-century Attic inscriptions by whether the mason used three- or four-barred sigma; three-barred sigma was long taken to be a sign of an early date, 446/5 BCE or previously,1 while four-barred sigma indicated a later date.2 Much of the chronology of the Athenian Empire and its development still rests on inscriptions dated on the basis of these sigmas.3 With the work of M. Chambers (1990), H. Mattingly (1996) was proven correct in his insistence that the presence of three-barred sigma did not necessarily indicate a date before 446/5 for an inscription. In this debate, however, the significance of IG I3 11 as a historical document has been overlooked, and that is my concern in this essay. I argue that the decree does not in fact represent a formal treaty between Athens and Egesta, as it has so long been taken to be, but represents a preliminary stage in negotiations between Athens and Egesta, which may not have been intended to end with a full summachia.4 That recognition of this adds to and perhaps changes our understanding not only of IG I3 11, but also of Thucydides’ Sicilian narrative.

1 All dates are BCE.
2 For a summary of the history of the debate over dating three-barred sigma, with bibliography, see Papazarkadas 2009: 67–68.
3 Although Mattingly was proven correct on the date of IG I3 11 and the three-barred sigma, it does not automatically follow that all of his redatings of inscriptions based on the three-barred sigma are correct. In many cases there are good historical reasons for retaining the traditional dates of inscriptions that Mattingly redated; furthermore, we know too little of the mason of IG I3 11 and the stele itself to confirm that three-barred sigma was commonly used by Attic stonemasons in 418/7. What Mattingly’s work achieved was to make more elastic the dating of fifth-century Attic letter-forms; it should not be seen – as some scholars appear to take it – as imposing a new orthodoxy of letter-forms upon the dating of fifth-century Attic inscriptions. Benjamin Meritt’s observation on dating inscriptions by letter-forms still holds true: “skepticism should be evidenced by everyone who wishes to use the forms of letters as a criterion for date” (Meritt 1940: 97–98).
4 Matthaiou 2004 makes a similar point, but argues that the decree is a renewal of an earlier treaty, following the model of the Athenian treaties with Rhegium and Leontini. I shall return to his arguments below.
Much of the debate over the decree stems from the fact that the stone is in unusually poor condition for an inscription whose identity has been so taken for granted. The letters are extremely worn, due to the fact that the stele was at some point during its existence used as a threshold-stone, and it even sports a circular indentation in its center where the doorpost was. To give you some idea of how much has been lost on the stone, here is the text of the decree with the IG restorations:

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\text{[χσυμμαχία καὶ ὁρκο] Ἀθηναίοι καὶ Ἐγεσταίοι.} \]

\[
\text{[Resolved by the Boule and the People, -] held the Prytany, [ } \]

\[
\text{[made the motion, -] as many victims [ ] [18-swear] the oath. That it [be] sworn [by everyone shall be the generals' responsibility [ ] with the oath-commissioners so that [ ] This decree and the oath shall be inscribed on a marble stele on the Akropolis by the Secretary of the Boule. [The P]oletai are to let out the contract. The Kolakretai are to provide [the money. Invitation shall be offered for] hospitality to the embassy of the Egestaean in the Prytaneion at the accustomed time. Euphe[mos made the motion. Let all the rest be as (resolved) by the Boule, but in future, when [ ] [19] herald [shall introduce [14-] [ - -].} \]

5 I quote C.W. Fornara's 1983 translation: [The Alliance and] Oath [of the Athenians and Egestaean]. [Resolved by the Boule and] the [People, -8-] held the Prytany, [ ] [was Secretary, -] on was Archon, Ar[...][made the motion, -] [as many victims [ ] [18-swear] the oath. That it [be] sworn [by everyone shall be the] generals' responsibility [ with the oath-commissioners so that [ ] This decree and the oath shall be inscribed on a marble stele on the Akropolis by the Secretary of the Boule. [The P]oletai are to let out the contract. The Kolakretai are to provide [the money. Invitation shall be offered for] hospitality to the embassy of the Egestaean in the Prytaneion at the accustomed time. Euphe[mos made the motion. Let all the rest be as (resolved) by the Boule, but in future, when [ ] [19] herald [shall introduce [14-] [ - -].]