Plutarch’s Source for *Aristides* 11.3-8

Plutarch’s fullest account of the battle of Plataea is to be found in his *Life* of Aristides. Although this might seem unusual, since Plataea was a Spartan victory, Plutarch nevertheless finds much to say about Athenian activity in the battle, and in some cases reports events that no other source does. One of these otherwise unattested incidents involves consultation of the Delphic oracle before the battle itself by Aristides, the Athenians’ general at Plataea. Commentators, when they have not simply passed over the question of the provenance of the story, have suggested only that Plutarch must have found it in local (i.e., Plataean) tradition. This is not unreasonable since much of the detail has to do with local Plataean heroes and shrines; yet there are important connections in this passage with remarks Plutarch makes elsewhere in the *Life* and in the *Moralia*. And although scholars today are much more cautious about engaging in Quellenforschung—especially for an author as well-read and eclectic as Plutarch—a strong case can be made, I believe, that the source of this story was the Atthidographer Cleidemus. Scholars have noted the presence of Cleidemus later in this *Life*, but no one, to my knowledge, has connected that later passage with the earlier in such a way as to argue that the story in *Aristides* 11.3-8 also derives from Cleidemus’ local history of Athens.

The passage reads as follows and must be quoted in full because of the interdependence of the details:

(3) Παυσανίᾳ μὲν οὖν καὶ τοῖς Ἕλλησι κοινῇ Τεισαμενὸς ὁ Ἠλεῖος ἐμαντεύσατο, καὶ προεῖπε νίκην ἀμυνομένοις καὶ μὴ προεπιχειροῦσιν· Ἀριστείδου δὲ

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1 Calabi Limentani 1964, 52 states only, “l’iniziativa di Aristide di mandare ad interrogare l’oracolo di Delfi non è nota da altre fonti”, following this with modern discussions of its historicity, while Flacelière and Chambry 1969, 31 say nothing of the source. Sansone 1989, 189 remarks, “This account is not found elsewhere (but cf. Clem. Alex. Protr. 2.40.2), and everything from here [sc. 11.3] to 11.9 probably depends on local tradition. Plutarch was himself Boeotian and had surely visited Plataea, and he spent a good deal of his time in Delphi, where he was a priest in the temple of Apollo…”: he thus seems to suggest that Plutarch got the information for this story from Plataea or Delphi or both.

2 See, e.g., Jacoby, commentary to *FGrHist* 323 F 22 (111b Suppl., Text, p. 83) and Harding 2008, 106, both of whom cite the earlier and later passages without making the kind of connection that I am suggesting here.
πέμψαντος εἰς Δελφοὺς, ἀνείλεν ο θεὸς Ἀθηναίους καθυπερτέρους ἔσεσθαι τῶν ἐναντίων εὐχομένους τῷ Διὶ καὶ τῇ Ἡρᾳ τῇ Κιθαιρωνίᾳ καὶ Πανὶ καὶ νύμφαις Σφραγίτισι, καὶ θύοντας ἥρωιν Ἀνδροκράτει, Λεύκωνι, Πεισάνδρῳ, Δαμοκράτει, Ὀψίου, Ακταϊώνι, Πολυείδῳ, καὶ τὸν κίνδυνον ἐν γῇ ιδίᾳ ποιουμένος ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ τὰς Δάματρος τῆς Ἐλευσίνας καὶ τὰς Κόρας. (4) οὕτως ο χρησμὸς ἀνενεχθεὶς ἀπορίαν τῷ Ἀριστείδῃ παρεῖχεν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἥρωες οἷς ἐκέλευε θύειν ἀρχηγέται Πλαταιέων ἦσαν, καὶ τὸ τῶν Σφραγιτίδων νυμφῶν ἄντρον εἰς μὴ καταφυγῆν τῷ Κιθαιρώνως ἐστίν, εἰς δυσμᾶς ἡλίου θερινὰς τετραμμένον, ἐν ᾧ καὶ μαντεῖον ἦν πρότερον ὡς φασί καὶ πολλοὶ κατείχοντο τῶν ἐπιχωρίων, οὗς νυμφολήπτους προσηγόρευον. (5) τὸ δὲ τῆς Ἐλευσίνας Δήμητρος πεδίον, καὶ τὸ τῆς μάχης ἐν ᾧ ἐπετρέπτω ἀνάστασιν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις νῖκην δίδοσθαι, πάλιν εἰς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ἀνεκαλεῖτο καὶ μεθίστη τὸν πόλεμον. ἔνθα τῶν Πλαταιεῖν ό στρατηγὸς Ἀρίμνηστος ἔδοξε κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ὑπὸ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἐπερωτώμενον αὑτόν, ὅ τι δὴ πράττειν δέδοκται τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν, εἰπεῖν, “αὔριον εἰς Ἐλευσῖνα τὴν στρατιὰν ἀπάξομεν, ὦ δέσποτα, καὶ διαμαχοῦμεν τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐκεῖ κατά τὸ πυθόχρηστον.” (6) τὸν θεὸν φάναι διαμαρτάνειν αὐτοὺς τοῦ παντός· αὐτόθι γὰρ εἶναι περὶ τὴν Πλαταικὴν τὰ πυθόχρηστα, καὶ ζητοῦντας ἀνευρήσειν. τούτων ἐναργῶς τῷ Ἀριμνήστῳ φανέντων, ἐξεγρόμενος τάχιστα μετεπέμψατο τοὺς ἐμπειροτάτους καὶ πρεσβυτάτους τῶν πολιτῶν, μεθ᾽ ὧν διαλεγόμενος καὶ συνδιαπορῶν εὗρεν ὅτι τῶν Ὑσιῶν πλησίον ὑπὸ τὸν Κιθαιρῶνα ναὸς ἐστιν Δήμητρος Ἐλευσινίας καὶ Κόρης προσαγορευόμενος. (7) εὐθὺς οὖν παραλαβὼν τὸν Ἀριστείδην ἦγεν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον, εὐφυέστατον ὄντα παρατάξαι φάλαγγα πεζὴν ἱπποκρατουμένοις διὰ τὰς ὑπωρείας τοῦ Κιθαιρῶνος, ἄφιππα ποιούσας τὰ καταλήγοντα καὶ συγκυροῦντα τὸ πεδίον πρὸς τὸ ἱερόν. (8) ταύτῃ δ᾽ ἦν καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀνδροκράτους ήρωιν ἑγγύς, ὡς περιεχόμενον περιεχόμενον. ὡς δὲ μηδὲν ἔχῃ πρὸς τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς νίκης ο χρησμὸς, ἐδοξεῖ τοῖς Πλαταιεῖσιν, Ἀριμνήστου γνώμην εἰπόντος, ἀνελεῖν τὰ πρὸς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ὁρία τῆς Πλαταιίδος καὶ τὴν χώραν ἐπιδιόρθωσοι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, ύπερ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν οἰκεία κατὰ τὸ χρησμὸν ἑναγωνισασθαί.

(3) Now for Pausanias and the Greeks in general, Teisamenus of Elis was the seer, and he foretold that they would win a victory provided that they did not advance to the attack, but stayed on the defensive. And when Aristides sent to Delphi, his messengers received an answer from the god that the Athenians would overcome their adversaries on condition that they prayed to Zeus, Hera of Cithaeron, Pan and the Sphragitic nymphs; that they sacrificed to the heroes Androcrates, Leucos, Peisandrus, Damocrates, Hypsion, Actaeon, and Polyeidus; and that they risked a battle on their own territory in the plain of Eleusinian Demeter and Kore.