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## ISMENIAS AND POLYCRATES IN THE *MENO*. NOTES ON PLATO'S ALLUSIVE ART AND THE GREEK POLITICS OF THE 380'S

*Abstract:* The *Meno's* references to Ismenias and Polycrates (as well as certain other prosopographical and factographical details) provide instructive – if incompletely understood nowadays – examples of Plato's huponoetic art. In Plato's dialogue, the two men symbolize imperfect thinking, bad education and bad policies, which included the Greek potentates' Medism, demagogy, greed, and lack of interest for true knowledge and Panhellenic ideas. Though their Platonic portraits retain certain features of their time and character, the mentality of the *Meno's* Ismenias and Polycrates seems typical of most politicians active during a brief period in the fourth century – the crisis that befell the Greek world during the 380's, to be precise. On the other hand, the politico-educational programme of the early Academy contrasted sharply with the realities of the Corinthian War; thence i. a. the *Meno* contains the implicit criticism of Anytus and the praise of Thucydides of Alopece.

In his commentaries on the *Republic* and the first *Alcibiades*, Proclus claims that Plato's choice of characters, dialogue occasions and the places of conversation tended to be symbolic (psychagogic) rather than inspired by purely literary intentions or realistic reflections of life in classical Athens and the Greek world at large<sup>1</sup>. Similar judgments are found in some other of Plato's ancient readers, e.g. Isocrates (commenting implicitly on the *Laws*<sup>2</sup>) and Hermias Alexandrinus (commenting explicitly on the *Phaedrus*<sup>3</sup>). Indeed, Plato's option for symbolic elements in the dialogue frameworks of many of his writings will have corresponded to his well attested preference for allusive procedures in general (ὑποδήλωσις, ὑπόνοια, ἔμφασις, ἐσχηματισμένος λόγος, ποικιλία, ἀμφιβολία etc.<sup>4</sup>). Interesting

<sup>1</sup> *In Rem publ.*, p. 16-19 Kroll (352 f.); *In Alc.*, p. 18-19 Creuzer (103 a). Cf. A. Ph. Seconds' notes *ad loc.* in the *CUF* edition of the work, I. 136 f.

<sup>2</sup> Isocr. XII. 78, 240, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Ad 227 b (Morychus' house) and 229 b (Boreas), p. 18, 10-23 and 28, 19 Couvreur.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Dem. Phal. *De eloc.* (ed. W. Rhys Roberts) 287 f. 290, 297. S. Dušanić, *JHS* 119 (1999) 8 n. 53.

parallels and probable sources for the devices of Plato's symbolic fiction are furnished by classical drama and the conventions of Athenian state propaganda. He himself stresses the devices' rôle by using such signals to the reader as anachronisms, topographical "impossibilities", factographical "mistakes"<sup>5</sup>, and topical themes of conversation. I hope the subject, complex as it is, will be deemed appropriate for a volume dedicated to the distinguished Nestor of our studies.

In late antiquity and modern times, most students of Plato believed that his art of allusion and symbolic message was (more or less) of a timeless and abstract nature. Other scholars are inclined to stress its Attic, realpolitical and fourth-century aspects, recommending something that might be termed a historical approach to the Platonic text. The two directions of interpretation – "abstract" and "historical" – seem reconcilable, if we assume that Plato's literature united, pyramidally, philosophical with realpolitical lessons. In the *Phaedo* (60 c ff.), Socrates is attributed a curious mixture of two kinds of poetry: "Aesop's fables" and "The Prelude" to Apollo. For obvious reasons, the latter is best taken to have dealt with (a popular form of) philosophy<sup>6</sup>, the former with *Realpolitik*, whose dangers<sup>7</sup> made Plato develop the allusive techniques recalling Aesop's literature and career – Aesop's use of symbolic speakers (talking animals) and his habit of advising politicians, to be exact. It is to be noted that Euenus the Parian, the inventor of ὑποδήλωσις<sup>8</sup>, is referred to in the same chapter of the *Phaedo* as showing a special interest in Socrates' composite lyrics (61 b).

The present paper analyzes those elements of the *Meno* which, owing to their formal features, specific position in the dialogue structure and intrinsic meaning are best taken to be "Aesopic" in the terminology just cited – though of course Plato never neglects their unity with, or dependence on the (popularly) philosophical parts of the conversation; thence the image, in the *Phaedo*, of the Socratic blend of the two kinds of verses. Such "Aesopic" elements seem to offer consistent and complex if diversified and indirect comments on public issues of a topical nature, and may be grouped into five categories, most of which are common to the *Meno* and the *Gorgias*. They are centred on Plato's choice (a) to include, in his text, seemingly

<sup>5</sup> Hostile readers of Plato blamed him for his *pseudologia* (Isocr. XII. 78, 248; Athen. V. 215 d ff.; cf. *FGrHist* 115 [Theopompus] F 529 etc.).

<sup>6</sup> Apollo as the god of music ~ philosophical inquiries: *Cratylus* 404 e – 406 a. The Delian Apollo and *Meno* 82 b ff.: below, text and nn. 55-58.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. *Laws* XII. 968 e 10, 969 a 1, 969 a 4, cf. 969 a 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Phaedr.* 267 a; cf. *Plut. Mor.* 16 c.

casual references to some of his contemporaries, i. e. the fourth-century people whose widely known activities stress the political colour of the work; (b) to compose such lists of the *dramatis personae* that rally meaningful characters from the circle of *politeuomenoi* belonging, roughly, to Socrates' generation; and to furnish the dialogues with (c) significant dramatic dates/occasions and (d) eloquent scenes of the discussion. To this the reader of the *Meno* will add, under (e), what might be called its mathematical episode (82 b ff.). It seems to display remarkable topical traits that are all the more interesting as 82 b ff., practically speaking, forms a unit for itself in the course of the dialogue; units of a similar formal structure and bearing realpolitical messages can be found, more than once, in the writings of the *corpus Platonikum*. But the mathematical episode has no proper parallel within the *Gorgias* if certain general similarities which can be observed between *Gorg.* 523 a ff. and *Meno* 85 b ff. are put aside, i.e. the imaginative rather than exact nature of some aspects of Socrates' thought as contained in the two passages<sup>9</sup>, and their having pronounced features of a non-dialectical literary composition. All five categories of Plato's allusive devices will be examined here – in a more or less compressed way. However, as (a), concerning the rôle of the fourth-century people in the *Meno*, seems particularly instructive, I propose to focus on it in the analysis that follows.

To begin with necessary explanations. Among various types of political allusions found in the *corpus Platonikum* there is one, comparatively rare, which tends to be overtly anachronistic with regard to the dramatic date of the dialogue and offered in the form of an explicit reference to a well-known Greek or "barbarian" from the circle of *Plato's contemporaries*. Although not included into the list of interlocutors such notables bear their real names in Plato's text. For instance, Isocrates, Lysias, and the Egyptian ruler Thamus in the *Phaedrus*<sup>10</sup>, and Sysiphus the Pharsalian, Stratonicus the musician and Callistratus of Aphidnae in the *Sisyphus*<sup>11</sup>, a work essentially Platonic though not genuine. Alternatively, they may have been left unnamed but their portraits by Plato include so many convincing details that no misidentification seems possible, e.g. the portrait of Isocrates in the *Euthydemus* and that of Alcidas the Eleaean in the *Phaedrus*<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> On *Meno* 86 b see e.g. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. IV: *Plato the Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period*, Cambridge 1975, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Dušanić, *Aevum* 66 (1992) 29-37.

<sup>11</sup> Id., *Chiron* 10(1980) 126-129, 144.

<sup>12</sup> Id. (n.4) 1 ff.; *CQ* 42 (1992) 347-357.

Personal references of that kind<sup>13</sup> usually reveal Plato's judgment about major issues of the Athenian and Greek affairs at the time of publication of the dialogue. This remarkable circumstance demands i. a. the use of historical method in the interpretation of the corresponding passages and their political messages, which is too often neglected by modern Platonic studies. It hardly needs to be stressed, Plato's view of contemporary politics was influenced by his Panhellenic, Attico-centric, moralizing, and aristocratic notions as well as feelings and activities<sup>14</sup>. Every attempt at the application of the historical method just mentioned must start from that fundamental fact. An analogous influence can be detected behind what was written, said, and done by the politically-minded Academics and Plato's friends among the statesmen of Athens. To put it in other terms, the same close connection the Scholarch and his circle had with the realities of public life inspired both the allusive layer of the dialogues in the *corpus Platonicum* and the Academics' engagement in *Realpolitik*.

Now, the *Meno*'s references to Ismenias and Polycrates provide instructive as well as interrelated – if incompletely understood nowadays – examples of Plato's huonoetic art. The two men are mentioned only once in the dialogue, in conjunction with Socrates' praise of Anytus' father Anthemion, "who didn't get his money out of the blue or as a gift (δόντος τινός) – like Ismenias of Thebes who has just (νῦν νεωστὶ) come into the fortune of Polycrates..."<sup>15</sup>. This unduly wealthy Theban is to be identified with the famous Medophile of the same name, Sparta's enemy (executed as such in 382 BC), who took bribes from the Persians to start the Corinthian War (395 – 386 BC)<sup>16</sup>. A parallel line in the *Republic*<sup>17</sup>, "... Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban or some other rich man who had great power in his own conceit", sustains the equation, though the identity of the *Republic*'s "Ismenias the Theban" has been disputed

<sup>13</sup> In certain cases Plato cites his contemporary under a family name (e.g., in the *Euthydemus*, Chabrias under the name of Ctesippus) or under a mythological/historical name (cf. *Phaedr.* 261 c [an instructive testimony]).

<sup>14</sup> Dušanić (n. 4) et al.

<sup>15</sup> 90 a, Guthrie's transl.

<sup>16</sup> H. Beck, "Ismenias" (no. 1), *Der Neue Pauly* 5(1998) 1136; D. Nails, *The People of Plato. A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*, Indianapolis 2002, 339 (App.II: "Peripheral Persons"); Dušanić, "Le médisme d' Isménias et les relations gréco-perses dans la politique de l' Académie platonicienne (383-378 av. J.-C.)", in: (P. Roesch ed.) *Colloques int. du CNRS "La Béotie antique"*, éd. du CNRS, Paris 1985, 227-235.

<sup>17</sup> I 336 a (P. Shorey's transl.).

by some Platonic scholars<sup>18</sup>. The links between the Ismeniases as portrayed in the *Meno* 90 a and the *Rep.* I. 336 a respectively – their Theban origin, their power and wealth, their pro-Persian attitudes – are sufficient to show that the two passages point to the same potentate, one notorious for his despot-like career, his Medism and his hostility to Lacedaemon. Though Plato does not speak, either at the *Meno* 90 a or at *Rep.* I 336 a, of Ismenias' Achaemenid leanings explicitly, he implies them clearly enough. The “gift” mentioned in the *Meno* refers unmistakably to Artaxerxes' bribes. Socrates' grouping in the *Republic* of the Theban with such tyrants and traitors/enemies of Hellenism as Periander, Perdiccas and Xerxes<sup>19</sup> suggests the same conclusion, especially with regard to the analogy of *Theages* 124 c-d, where Aegisthus, Peleus, Periander, Archelaus and Hippias, son of Peisistratus, are listed in the same capacity as despots who sacrifice Greek interests and/or freedom to the barbarian enemy from the East<sup>20</sup>. Plato's stress, à propos of Ismenias, on the condemnation of the despotic power and riches rather than that of the treason and war stemmed partly from the Philosopher's political discretion partly from his psychology, which blamed avarice and ignorance, individual as well as collective, for all wars<sup>21</sup>. But there is no doubt that, implicitly, the *Meno* bears upon the problem of Graeco-Persian relations, wherein the theme of “betrayal” was prominent<sup>22</sup>. Comparable politico-philosophical comments of the Corinthian War and its antecedents and postcedents are encountered in the allusive parts of several other dialogues of Plato, notably in the *Gorgias* ( 524 d ff.<sup>23</sup>) and the

<sup>18</sup> M. Vegetti, in: *Platone. La Repubblica* (trad. e comm. a cura di M. Vegetti), I, Bibliopolis 1998, 34. Bague (*op. cit. infra* [n. 47] 190 with n. 13) is not quite justified in qualifying the passage *Meno* 90 a as “peu clair”.

<sup>19</sup> K. J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), III, 1, Berlin – Leipzig 1922, 105 n. 1; cf. G. Glotz, *Histoire grecque*, III, Paris 1941, 110 n. 51. — As the bribes are connected with Polycrates' mediation, not that of Timocrates the Rhodian, they will have been part of the Persians' second grant, distributed in the Greek cities “some two years later (than Timocrates' mission), that is after the (Corinthian) War had begun...” (Bruce, [*op. cit. infra*] n. 30, 58-60 and 117, on *Hell. Ox.* VII. 2 and XVIII. 1 Bartoletti). Polycrates' lack of scruples and his political ties with Anytus, Conon, Thrasylulus and Evagoras(?) made him an expected choice for the mediator this time.

<sup>20</sup> I shall examine that interesting passage elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. *Phaedo* 66 c-d.

<sup>22</sup> *Menex.* 245 c ff.

<sup>23</sup> Note that Archelaus figures both in the *Gorgias* (*loc. cit.* and *passim*) and *Theag.* 124 c-d (to say nothing of Antisthenes' lost dialogue Ἀρχέλαος ἢ περὶ βασιλείας). With good reason, M. Canto (*Platon. Gorgias*, Paris 1987, 358 n. 266) calls the Ardiaeus of *Rep.* X. 615 c – 616 a “Archelaus' replica”; the two tyrants obviously shared i.a. traitorous tendencies (cf. X 615 b: “betrayed cities and armies and reduced them to slavery”).

*Republic*, V (470 b ff.) and X (615 b). Other thinkers, too, dealt with the complex phenomenon of the Medism shared by the Aeolian, Thessalian and Boeotian aristocrats, whose barbarophilia became notorious after 480 BC<sup>24</sup>. Among other things, the Socratic core and the Theban framework of Cebes' *Tabula* (esp. 40. 3 [cf. 42,3], where "treachery" figures as the *first* of the tyrants'/the ignorant's "vicious acts") sustain this conclusion<sup>25</sup>. This is all the more worthy of mention as the *Tabula* has several points of contact with Plato's dialogues of the 380's.

The circumstance itself that Plato cites the contemporary Ismenias in *two* of his works seems indicative of the Theban's impact on events of public relevance. The chronological aspects of Plato's references to Ismenias deserve a brief analysis. To begin with, the dates of publication of the *Meno* as well as Book I. of the *Republic* are likely to have preceded Ismenias' death in Sparta (382 BC); his end was such that – it is legitimate to assume – the tactful Plato would not have alluded, in a critical way, to a man who had been recently executed for his unpatriotic activities. Indeed, a variety of indications show that the *Meno* was published in about 383 BC<sup>26</sup>, while its dramatic date is 402 BC<sup>27</sup>. Its allusion (90 a) to the "present" (of the King), a term denouncing the vices of the instigators of the Corinthian War (395 – 386 BC), must be deliberately anachronistic therefore. The emphatic  $\nu\upsilon\nu$  νεωστί (loco citato), underlines the functional character of the anachronism, the type of which finds numerous parallels in the *corpus Platonicum*, e.g. in the *Laws* III. 677 d<sup>28</sup>.

As a matter of mere chronology, the "mistake" at *Meno* 90 a appears gross enough and difficult to explain. From the historico-political and historico-psychological points of view, however, it is pardonable – meaningful, to be precise, as it warns the reader of the contemporary topical renewal of the fifth-century events (cf. c, *supra*).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. notes 25 and 46 *infra*. The disgrace of Greek disunity before the Persian attack in 480 and later: *Laws* III. 692 e; *Menex.* 241 d. The subject of Glaucon's *Lysitheides* (DL II. 124; the eponym of that lost dialogue is to be identified with the wealthy friend of Xerxes from the Aeolic Aegae [Diod. XI. 56, ff.] rather than the Lysitheides of *PA* 9392 or 9395) will have been related to the Platonic comments on the Medism of Menon and Ismenias.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dušanić, *The Ancient World* 36, 1 (2005) 112–116. – Cebes' *Phrynichus* (DL II. 125) will have dealt with another type of *prodotes*, no less notorious (*PA* 15011).

<sup>26</sup> Dušanić (n. 4) 16. For a slightly earlier date (c. 386/5 BC) see e.g. R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, Cambridge 1961, 108–20.

<sup>27</sup> Nails (n. 16) 318 f.

<sup>28</sup> *Leg.* III 677d: τὸν ἀτεχνῶς χθὲς γενόμενον.

At the time of the *Meno*'s publication, the delicate Graeco-Persian relations, which had coloured both 402 and 395, were reactualized again<sup>29</sup>. An important aspect of the situation concerned the Athenian radicals' efforts to unite the "barbarian" and the Greek worlds against Sparta's hegemony. In the shadow of the dangerous Chian crisis of c. 384 BC, there were initiatives of a *rapprochement* between Susa and the Athenian extreme democrats, who will have been supported, this time, by Ismenias and Anytus' partisans<sup>30</sup> among other so-called moderate leaders of the *ekklesia*. The *Euthydemus* gives us a critical insight into the Aegean aspect of these developments<sup>31</sup>. Needless to say, Plato had little sympathy for the greed and treacherous Medism of such demagogues as Ismenias and the host of Meno, himself a hereditary guest-friend of the Great King (78 d<sup>32</sup>). W. K. C. Guthrie will have been right in believing that Anytus' house provided also the dialogue's "locality of conversation"<sup>33</sup> – a symbolic choice of Plato's suggestive topography ((d), in the list outlined *supra*), which underlined the similarity of Meno's and Anytus' characters, political attitudes, and psychological profiles<sup>34</sup>. As to the *Republic*, Bk. I, its dramatic date should be put in the summer of the eventful year 408<sup>35</sup>, while the date of publication – widely disputed – is best sought somewhere in the early 380's (389 ?)<sup>36</sup>.

Such a state of affairs seems significant, chronologically and otherwise. Through a number of elements, notably its "diplomatic" framework<sup>37</sup> and the allusion to Ismenias, *Republic* I condemns the pro-Persian, anti-Lacedaemonian and imperialist policies of the Athenian and Theban radicals at a critical moment of the Corinthian War. With its stress on the ethical and political evils of the inter-Greek

<sup>29</sup> Dušanić (n. 16) 232 f.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Aesimus who figures in both *Hell. Ox.* I. 2 (with Thrasybulus and Anytus; on the "moderate" position of the three demagogues then, see e. g. I. A. F. Bruce, *An Historical Commentary on the 'Hellenica Oxyrhynchia'*, Cambridge 1967, 52 f. 56 f. 109 f.) and *IG II* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) 34 (the Athenian-Chian alliance of 384).

<sup>31</sup> Dušanić (n. 4); id., *ZPE* 133 (2000) 21–30.

<sup>32</sup> *Meno* 78d: Μένων, ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως πατρικὸς ξένος.

<sup>33</sup> Guthrie (n. 9) 236 f.

<sup>34</sup> For the similar case of Lysias and Morychus' house see Hermias' commentary cited *supra*, note 3.

<sup>35</sup> S. A. White, *Class. Phil.* 90 (1995) 307-27; Dušanić, "Bendis' Festival and the *Realpolitik* of *Republic* I" (read at the Lille meeting of the Collegium Politicum [December, 2001]; the complete article is being prepared for publication).

<sup>36</sup> As argued for in my paper which is referred to in the foregoing note.

<sup>37</sup> Ably explained by White (n. 35). Cf. Dušanić (n. 4) 4 with n. 18, on the *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, and *Timaeus-Critias* (add the "diplomatic frameworks" of the *Eryxias* and the *Sisyphus*).

conflicts, therefore, the *Republic* has much in common with certain lessons of the *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, *Charmides*, and the *Meno* itself<sup>38</sup>. Even the “diplomatic” occasion of the conversation of the *Meno*<sup>39</sup> was tendentiously selected in the political sense recalling *Republic* I and, partly, the *Gorgias* and the *Euthydemus*.

In the *Meno* and many other dialogues, Plato implies that imperfect thinking leads to bad education and bad policies, including the policy of Ismenias-like demagogues. This conclusion defends the essence of public activities of Socrates and the Academics; no wonder that the work under discussion here, subtitled *De virtute*, variously alludes to Anytus’ rôle, detrimental as it was, in Socrates’ (future) trial and execution. Indeed, Socrates’ mention of the riches that recently became Ismenias’ property is best understood if the MS reading of the name *Polykrates* (τὰ Πολυκράτους χρήματα) is preserved at 90 a (as argued for by J. S. Morrison more than sixty years ago<sup>40</sup>); it should not be changed into a *Timokrates* or another anthroponym incongruous with the transmitted lettering or attributed to a man of a distant epoch such as the Samian tyrant. The *Meno*’s Polycrates (*PA* 12005), evidently the famous author of the *Kategoria Sokratous* and Anytus’ partisan, will have been one of those responsible for the distribution (bordering on theft in certain cases) of Persian gold *c.* 395. His career as a sophist, rhetor, and promoter of an imperialist policy which was pro-Boeotian, anti-Spartan and pro-Achaemenid, made him an ally of Ismenias, Thrasybulus of Steiria, Anytus, and Conon, who all became leaders of the anti-Spartan bloc in the Corinthian War<sup>41</sup>. The same line was followed by most of them after 386, too. It is only to be expected that Plato the aristocrat, intellectual, moralist, and patriot should offer a synoptic critique of such policies together with their champions. His critique can be understood more completely if it is studied in the context of closely connected ideas and works (e.g. Herodes’ Περὶ πολιτείας and Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Charmides*) which concern Critias, Archelaus, and the important events affecting the Thessaly and Boeotia of the late fifth-early fourth centuries<sup>42</sup>. The space at our

<sup>38</sup> See above, text and n. 23.

<sup>39</sup> J. S. Morrison, *CQ* 36 (1942) 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 76 – 78. Cf. e.g. Bluck (n. 26) 116 ff. *Aliter*, Nails (n. 16) 342 (Polycrates of Samos).

<sup>41</sup> P. Treves, “Polykrates” (no. 7), *RE* XXI (1952) 1736 – 1752. *Supra*, text and n. 19; characteristically, in his *Accusation of Socrates*, Polycrates made an (anachronistic and approving) allusion to Conon’s rebuilding of the walls of Athens (Favorinus ap. DL II. 39).

<sup>42</sup> Morrison (n. 39) 57–78; Dušanić, *Aevum* 74(2000) 53–63.



disposal does not permit me to develop an historical analysis of that side of the *Meno*.

Plato's critical comments in the *Meno*, let us stress, converge, though they bear upon a variety of things: philosophical themes, educational programmes, the mentality of prominent individuals – speaking and non-speaking alike. His observations also combine strictly topical subjects with the general lessons that recur in the *corpus Platonium*. What is said of Anytus and Socrates at the end of the dialogue<sup>43</sup> cannot be dissociated from the fact that Polycrates wrote an *Accusation of Socrates*; on the other hand, page 100 a defends (against both Anytus and Polycrates) the project of the statesmen's scientific training in a Socratic school. This implied (tacitly) an apologetic attitude to the memories of Alcibiades and Critias<sup>44</sup> – especially the latter with his pro-Spartan rôle in the Thessalian background of the *Meno*<sup>45</sup>. Menon's status of the πατρικὸς ξένος of the Great King is noted at 78 d, a status which, in the noble Pharsalian's family, goes back to the sad events of Xerxes' invasion and the northern Greeks' treachery of 480 BC<sup>46</sup>. In the final analysis the treachery – a sin recalling the real Menon's character<sup>47</sup> (cf. *b* in the list of Plato's allusive devices above) – stemmed from the (wrong) conception of life which, neglecting justice and knowledge, takes that “the acquisition of gold and silver is virtue” in itself (78 d ff.<sup>48</sup>). Such a conception squared, perhaps, with Menon's taking lessons from Gorgias<sup>49</sup> and originating in a lawless country like Thessaly<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, the reader of the *Republic* is not surprised to see that the

<sup>43</sup> P. 94 e (“harm”), 100 b (“anger”).

<sup>44</sup> Who were constantly criticized by the enemies of Plato and the Academy (see e.g. Isocr. V 57 – 67; Aeschin. I 173), including Polycrates himself (Isocr. XI. 5; cf. Xen. *Mem.* I. 2. 12 and 24-39).

<sup>45</sup> Morrison (n. 39) 65 f. On the complex of international conflicts (Sparta, Thebes, Olynthus) in the North c. 382, which probably engaged Thessaly and the Persians, see Xen. *Hell.* V. 2. 27 (with H. – J. Gehrke, *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, München 1985, 175 f.).

<sup>46</sup> W. Kroll, “Menon” (no. 4), *RE* XV(1931) 925.

<sup>47</sup> Xen. *Anab.* II. 6. 21 ff. R. Brague (*Le restant. Supplément aux commentaires du Ménon de Platon*, Paris 1978, 190) justly notes that the two passages of the *Meno* pertaining to the Pharsalian – 82 b (he has a Greek slave, though the patriots should refrain from enslaving the Greeks [*Rep.* V. 469 b-c and 471 a]) and 78 d (he is a friend of the Great King) – concur in indicating a *medizon*.

<sup>48</sup> Money and war/betrayal/Persian menace: *Menex.* 245 c; *Phaedo* 66 c; cf. *Laws* IX. 870 a-b.

<sup>49</sup> P. 70 b-c; 96 d.

<sup>50</sup> *Crito* 53 d.

line I. 336 a, just quoted, couples Ismenias with Xerxes<sup>51</sup>. The inter-Greek wars – especially those, typical, wherein the “barbarians” took sides – are qualified as a national catastrophe or disgrace at least in many of Plato’s writings<sup>52</sup>.

There are reasons to believe that, on a *Realpolitik* level, the analysis of the notion of “right opinion” in the closing part of the *Meno* was connected with the themes of Greek federalism and enlightened unity (99 b, on Themistocles et al.) – the *Gorgias* 526 b (on Aristides) et passim, provides an explicit parallel, notwithstanding remarkable differences between the two dialogues. Something similar may be said of the related problem of the teachability of virtue. The author of the *Meno* chose to examine this through the example of the leaders of the Delian League (Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, Thucydides of Alopece) and their sons (93 a ff.), not the earlier or later *politeuomenoi* or non-political notables at large. The example of Thucydides is especially eloquent, as 94 c alludes to his popularity among the *Athenian allies*. Naturally, Plato stood for Panhellenic, aristocratic, moralizing, and philosophical values such as defended by the Academy and the gentlemanly statesmen it rallied (Chabrias et al.<sup>53</sup>). Most of these ideals, particularly the programme of the Panhellenic resistance to Persia, had been realized in the early days of the Delian League<sup>54</sup>, so different from the medizing and the materialistic alliance of the Corinthian War. Thence the contrasting images, in the *Meno*, of Ismenias and Thucydides of Alopece, to cite these two as Plato’s representatives of the opposite epochs of Greek history and champions of opposite kinds of Greek federalism.

Plato’s judgment of political realities explains more elements of the *Meno* than its complex prosopography. As already announced (*e*, above), even the famous, much discussed, mathematical lesson at 82 b ff. – concerning the duplication of the square – seems to have displayed topical facets that were inspired by a branch of the Panhellenic propaganda of the closing 380’s. According to an attractive attempt

<sup>51</sup> The meaning of this has been understood by historians as early as Beloch (n. 19 above).

<sup>52</sup> *Rep.* V. 469 b ff., X 615 b; *Menex.* 241 d ff.; *Ep.* VII. 331 ff. 336 a ff.; *Laws* III. 692 d ff., etc.

<sup>53</sup> On Chabrias (Plato’s friend and relative) in the context of the Academy policy of about 382 BC: Dušanić (n. 16) 233 f.

<sup>54</sup> Dušanić, “Plato and the Two Maritime Confederacies of Athens”, in: (L. Aigner Foresti – A. Barzanò – C. Bearzot – L. Prandi – G. Zecchini) *Federazioni e federalismo nell’ Europa antica* (Bergamo, 21 – 25 sett. 1992), Milano 1994, 94 f. (on *Critias* 112 d).

at interpretation<sup>55</sup>, the passage 82 b ff. should be connected with the popular problem of doubling the cube. To be exact, the body which was in need of duplication was the Delian altar, an Apolline symbol of fifth-century Athenian federalism. As Plutarch has it in the *De genio Socratis* (developing perhaps on lost passages of other writers' works<sup>56</sup>), the Delian stereometric problem was associated with the political problem of the Greeks' liberation from their internal conflicts and misfortunes in general. The solution was sought during the late 380's, among those ready to follow Plato the Scholarch's advice, in obeying Apollo's command: "the entire Greek nation should give up war and its miseries and cultivate the Muses ... by calming their passions through the practice of discussion and *study of mathematics* they should live with one another so that their intercourse should not be injurious, but profitable"<sup>57</sup>. Doubtless, Plato expected that most contemporary readers of the *Meno* – including a number of intellectuals engaged in *Realpolitik* – would recognize the dialogue's implicit connection with that topical issue, of a politico-mathematical nature; the popular subject of Plato's deep interest in geometry had only secondary relevance here.

The need for a Panhellenic unity centred on the advantages of learning as epitomized by Plutarch must have been much spoken of in the time that saw the publication of the *Meno*<sup>58</sup>. (It hardly needs to be stressed, in possession of a unique knowledge of Plato, the Chaeronean was more likely to construct the *De gen. Socr. 7* on the basis of trustworthy historical evidence than to invent things on his own interpretation of *Meno* 82 b ff. alone.) Such a politico-educational programme clearly corresponded with the Academy's aims and methods, of which the *Meno* gives us a certain idea. On the other hand, the programme was in sharp contrast with both the mentality and the public activities of an Ismenias or a Polycrates.

<sup>55</sup> A. S. Riginos, *Platonica*, Leiden 1976, 141 – 145 (no. 99), esp. 145.

<sup>56</sup> Callisthenes' *Hellenika*, Eratosthenes' *Platonicus*, Antisthenes' *Archelaus*, or Phaedon's *Medius* ?

<sup>57</sup> *De gen. Socr. 7* fin. = *Mor. 578 e – 579 d* (transl. Ph. H. De Lacy – B. Einarson): cf. *Mor. 386 e*.

<sup>58</sup> Dušanić (n. 16) 234 f. Cf. *Phaedo* 60 e – 61 a ("the arts", "the festival of the god"[see also 58 a – c; n. 6 above]). For the complex messages of the *Euthydemus* (concerning the Ionian Apollo, the values of the anti-imperialist federalism, the Persian menace, etc.), published probably in 384/3, and the themes of the *Meno* dealt with here see my articles referred to *supra*, n. 31. For the Athenian-Delian political relations in the Aegean and Graeco-Persian context after 386 BC (relations that must have contributed to the topicality of *Meno* 82 b ff.), see Isocr. IV. 136 (M. J. Osborne, *Erano*s 72, 1974, 168 n. 3) and R. Seager, in: *CAH VI* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) 173.