

**344 BC**

**THE ORATION ON THE TREATY WITH ALEXANDER**

**Demosthenes**

**translated by Thomas Leland, D.D.**

**Notes and Introduction by Thomas Leland, D.D.**

**Demosthenes (383-322 BC) - Athenian statesman and the most famous of Greek orators. He was leader of a patriotic party opposing Philip of Macedon.**

**The Oration on the Treaty with Alexander (334 BC) - Possibly spurious. It is an address to the Athenian people, rousing them to take arms against Alexander, king of Macedon.**

## THE ORATION ON THE TREATY WITH ALEXANDER

### INTRODUCTION

To the Oration on the Treaty with Alexander

THE death of Philip, king of Macedon, was an event at first judged fatal to the interest of that kingdom, which gave the Athenians hopes of recovering their superiority, and encouraged them to form some confederacies against his successor, whose spirit and abilities were not yet completely discovered.

It is not here necessary to recount the actions of this prince on his accession to the throne; it may be sufficient to observe, that a treaty had been concluded by his father with the Greeks, and was by him confirmed, in which it was provided that the laws, privileges, and liberties of the several states should be secured and confirmed. But such engagements are seldom found sufficient to restrain a violent youthful ambition. The Macedonian was soon emboldened to discover his contempt of this treaty by acting in several instances contrary to its articles. The Athenians, who still retained some remains of their ancient spirit, resented these his infractions. An assembly was convened to take the treaty into consideration, and to determine on the proper method of procedure in consequence of Alexander's conduct. On this occasion was the following oration delivered, which contains a distinct specification of the several instances of violation now complained of.

Critics seem willing to ascribe this oration to Hegesippus or to Hyperides. It is observed that the style is diffuse, languid, and disgraced by some affected phrases, and that the whole composition by no means breathes that spirit of boldness and freedom which appears in the oration of Demosthenes. But these differences may possibly be accounted for without ascribing it to another author.

Dejection and vexation, a consciousness of the fallen condition of his country, despair and terror at the view of the Macedonian power, might have naturally produced an alteration in the style and manner of the orator's address. A great epic genius, when in its decline, is said by Longinus to fall naturally into the fabulous.

In like manner, a great popular speaker, when hopeless and desponding, checked and controlled by his fears, may find leisure to coin words, and naturally recur to affected expressions when the torrent of his native eloquence is stopped. Nor is the oration now before us entirely destitute of force and spirit. It appears strong and vehement, but embarrassed. The fire of Demosthenes sometimes breaks forth through all obstacles, but is instantly allayed and suppressed as if by fear and caution. The author, as Ulpian expresses it, speaks freely and not freely; he encourages the citizens to war, and yet scruples to move for war in form; as if his mind was distracted between fear and confidence.

In a word, I regard the oration on the treaty with Alexander as the real work of Demosthenes, but of Demosthenes dejected and terrified, willing to speak consistently with himself, yet not daring to speak all that he feels. It may be compared to the performance of an eminent painter necessarily executed at a time when his hands or eyes labored under some disorder, in which we find the traces of his genius and abilities obscured by many marks of his present infirmity.

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WE should by all means, Athenians, concur with those who so strenuously recommend an exact adherence to our oaths and treaties, if they really speak their sentiments; for nothing is so becoming the character of free states as a strict attention to honesty and justice. Let not these men, therefore, who urge the necessity of this attention embarrass our councils by harangues which their own actions contradict: let them submit to an examination; if their sentiments are approved, they will for the future influence the assembly; if not, let them give place to those whose opinions of our rights may seem more consonant to truth. Thus shall you determine, either to submit quietly to your wrongs and esteem their author as your friend, or to prefer the cause of justice to all other considerations, and to make such provisions for your interest with speed and vigor as none can possibly condemn. The very terms of our treaty, and of those oaths by which the general peace was ratified, must on the first inspection show who are the transgressors: this I shall briefly prove in the most essential articles.

Suppose this question asked: What event, Athenians, could most effectually excite your resentment? You would answer, an attempt to destroy your liberty.

Should the family of Pisistratus now revive, and should any man attempt to reinstate them in their former power, ye would at once take up arms and brave all dangers rather than submit to these masters; or, if you should submit, you would be reduced to the condition of purchased slaves; nay, to a worse condition, for no master wantonly kills his slaves; but those who are under the power of tyrants we see every day destroyed without the shadow of law, and exposed to insults still worse than death in the persons of their wives and children.

Well, then, in open violation of his oaths, of the express terms of the general peace, hath Alexander reinstated the family of Philiades in Messene. In this hath he acted from a regard to justice, or from his own arbitrary principles, in open contempt of you and of his engagements with the Greeks? If, then, an attempt to introduce arbitrary power into Athens would excite your utmost indignation, would rouse you to maintain the treaty—you ought not to be indifferent, you ought not to neglect this treaty, when, in equal violation of its sacred purport, other states are oppressed by the like power; nor should they who so strenuously recommend to you to adhere to your engagements leave those uncontrolled who have on their part violated them in a manner so notorious. Such violation cannot be suffered if you have the due regard to justice; for it is expressly declared in our treaty, that he who should act as Alexander hath now done should be deemed an enemy to all included in the peace; that all should take up arms against him and against his dominions. If, then, we have the least regard to these our declarations, we are to consider him as our enemy who hath restored this family. But, say the favorers of these tyrants, “the sons of Philiades governed in Messene before this treaty was concluded, and therefore were they restored by Alexander.” This is a ridiculous allegation: the tyrants of Sestos, established long before our treaty, were expelled from Antissa and Eresus, and this form of government declared to be in itself unjust and oppressive. It cannot, then, be a matter of indifference that Messene be exposed to the like oppression.

Besides, it is provided in the very first article of the treaty, that the Greeks shall enjoy their freedom and their laws. And if their freedom and their lives were the first points secured, what assertion can be conceived more absurd than that he who reduces them to slavery is not guilty of any violation of this treaty? If, then, Athenians, you would adhere to your oaths and your engagements, if you have a regard to justice (and this, as I have

observed, is the advice of your speakers), it is incumbent on you to take up arms, to collect your allies, and to declare hostilities against those who have really violated the peace. Have you, when some fair occasion offered, pursued your interest with vigor, even though not induced by the motive of supporting justice? And now, when justice, and a fair occasion, and your own interest, all conspire to rouse you, what other season do you wait for to assert your own liberty and that of Greece? I am now come to another point of right resulting from this treaty. It is expressly provided, that if any persons should subvert the constitutions subsisting in each state at the time of ratifying the peace, they should be deemed enemies to all included in the treaty. Consider, then, Athenians, that the Achaeans of Peloponnesus at that time enjoyed democratical governments; yet of these the Macedonian hath subverted the constitution of Pellaene by expelling most of its citizens; their fortunes he distributed among his domestics, and Chaeron, the wrestler, he established tyrant of the city. In this treaty were we included, which thus directs that they who act in this manner shall be regarded as enemies. Shall we not, then, regard them as enemies, pursuant to the tenor of those engagements by which we are all equally obliged? Or can any of those hirelings of the Macedonian—those whose riches are the wages of their treason—be so abandoned as to forbid it? They cannot plead ignorance of these things; but to such a pitch of insolence have they arrived, that, guarded, as it were, by the armies of the tyrant, they dare to call on us to adhere to oaths already violated, as if perjury were his prerogative; they force you to subvert your laws by releasing those who stood condemned at our tribunals, and in various other instances drive you to illegal measures. Nor is this surprising; for they who have sold themselves to the enemies of their country cannot have the least regard to law, the least reverence for oaths. The names of these, and but the names, serve them to impose on men who come to this assembly for amusement, not for business, and never once reflect that their present indolence must prove the cause of some strange and terrible disorders.

Here, then, I repeat what I at first asserted, that we should agree with those who recommend an adherence to the general treaty; unless they suppose that in recommending this adherence they do not of consequence declare that no act of injustice should be committed, or imagine it yet a secret that arbitrary power hath been established in the place of popular governments, and that many free constitutions have been subverted. But such a supposition is utterly ridiculous: for these are the very terms of the treaty; “The directors and guarantees appointed for the general security shall take care that, in the several states included in this peace, there shall be no deaths or banishments contrary to the laws established in each society, no confiscations, no new divisions of land, no abolition of debts, no granting freedom to slaves, for the purposes of innovation.” But far from preventing these things, these men themselves contribute to introduce them: and what punishment can be equal to their guilt who are the contrivers of these evils in the several states, which were deemed of such consequence as to demand the united care of the whole body to prevent them!

I shall now mention another point in which this treaty is infringed. It is expressly provided, that “no flying parties shall make excursions from any of the cities included in the treaty, and commit hostilities on any other of the confederated cities; and that whatever people should thus offend are to be excluded from the alliance.” But so little doth the Macedonian scruple to commit hostilities, that his hostilities are never suspended; nor are any free from them that he can possibly infest. And much more flagrant are his later hostilities, as he hath by his edict established tyrants in different places; in Sicyon, his master of exercises. If, then, we should conform to the treaty, as these men insist, the cities guilty of these actions should be excluded from the confederacy. If the truth must be concealed, I am not to declare that these are the

Macedonian cities: but if, in defiance of the truth, those traitorous partisans of Macedon persevere in urging us to observe the general treaty, let us concur with them (their advice is just and equitable): and, as this treaty directs, let us exclude those from the alliance who have been thus guilty, and consider of the measures necessary to be pursued against people so insolent and aspiring, whose schemes and actions are thus invariably criminal, and who treat their solemn engagements with contempt and ridicule. Why will they not acknowledge that these consequences are just? Would they have every article that opposes our interest confirmed? every article that favors us erased? Are these their notions of justice? If any part of our engagements provides for the interest of our enemies, in opposition to this state, are they to contend for that? but if by any other part our rights and interests are secured against our enemies, are all their utmost efforts to be directed against this? To convince you still more clearly that none of the Greeks will accuse you of infringing this treaty, but will acknowledge it as an obligation that you have arisen singly to detect those who really infringed it, I shall run over a few of its numerous articles. One article is thus expressed: "The uniting parties shall all have the full liberty of the seas: none shall molest them or seize their vessels on pain of being regarded as the common enemy." And now, my fellow-citizens, it is notoriously evident to you all that the Macedonians have done these things. To such a pitch of lawless insolence have they proceeded, as to seize the ships of Pontus and send them into Tenedos. Every pretence was invented to detain them; nor were they at last released before we had decreed to equip one hundred ships, to send them instantly to sea, and had actually appointed Menestheus to command them.

When such and so many are the outrages committed by others, is it not absurd that their friends in this assembly should not endeavor to prevail on them to change their conduct, instead of advising us to adhere to engagements so totally neglected on the other side? As if it were expressly provided that one party might transgress when they pleased, and that the other should not resist. And could the Macedonians have acted a more lawless and a more senseless part than to have so far abandoned all regard to their oaths that they had well-nigh forfeited their sovereignty of the seas? \*(1) Nay, they have indisputably forfeited this right to us, whenever we are disposed to assert it: for they are not to expect that no penalty is to be incurred from violating the treaty because they have for some time past discontinued their violations. No; they should rather be well pleased that they have hitherto enjoyed the advantage of our indolence and total aversion to maintain our rights.

Can anything be conceived more mortifying than that all other people, Greeks and Barbarians, should dread our enmity; but that these men of sudden affluence should make us contemptible; even to ourselves, by seducing and forcing us to their purposes? as if they had the conduct of affairs at Adbera or Maronaea, \*(2) not at Athens. But while they are depressing their own country and aggrandizing its enemies, they do not consider that by prescribing the rules of justice in a manner so totally unjust, they in effect acknowledge that their country is irresistible; for this is tacitly to confess, that if we have a due attention to our interests, we shall easily subdue our enemies. And in this they rightly judge; for let us take care to maintain a superiority at sea; let us but take care of this, and we shall effectually secure noble accessions to our present land force; especially if fortune should so far favor us as to crush the men now guarded by the armies of tyrants; if some of them should perish, and others discover their insignificance.

These, then, have been the infractions of the Macedonian with respect to maritime affairs, besides the others already mentioned; but we have just now seen the most extravagant instance of the pride and insolence of his people in daring to sail into the Piraeus, manifestly contrary to the treaty concluded with us. Nor is this their infraction

the less criminal because but one ship of war presumed to enter our harbor. It plainly appears that this was an experiment, whether we might not prove so inattentive as to suffer them hereafter to come in with more; and that in this, as well as other instances, they renounce all regard to decrees and conventions: for that they meant gradually to introduce and to habituate us to such encroachments appears from this, that he who then put in with his ship (which together with its convoy should have been destroyed) demanded liberty to build small vessels in our port: for this proves that their purpose was not to obtain the privilege of entering our harbor, but to gain the absolute command of it. It cannot be alleged that this demand was made because the materials for building ships are in plenty at Athens- for they are brought hither from great distances, and procured with difficulty- and that they are scarce at Macedon (where they are sold at the cheapest rates to any that will purchase). No; they were in hopes to gain the power of building and loading vessels in our port, a power expressly denied by treaty; and thus gradually to proceed to other enormities. In such contempt have they been taught to hold you by their instructors in this city, who direct their whole conduct; and thus are they persuaded that this state is irrecoverably lost in indolence, incapable of providing for its interest, and utterly regardless whether the actions of a tyrant be conformable to his treaty or no.

To this treaty I advise you to adhere; in that sense, I mean, which I before explained: and the experience of my age warrants me to assure you that your rights will be thus asserted without the least offence to others, and the occasions favorable to your interests most effectually improved. These are the terms of the treaty; we must act thus, "If we would be included." They, then who act differently are not to be included. And therefore let us now, if ever, refuse to pay an abject submission to the directions of others: else must we renounce the memory of those ancient and illustrious honors which we of all other people can most justly boast.

If you command me, Athenians! I shall now move you in form, pursuant to the tenor of our engagement, to declare war against those who have violated the treaty.

**NOTES****To the Oration on the Treaty with Alexander**

\*(1) The maritime force of Macedon seems to have been, even at this time, scarcely greater than that of Athens, notwithstanding all the attention of Philip to increase and improve it; for we shall immediately find the orator recommending to his countrymen to maintain a superiority at sea. But this sovereignty of the seas, which is here acknowledged to belong to the Macedonians, seems to have been the consequence of the treaty made with Philip immediately after the battle of Chaeronea, in which the Athenians were obliged to give up the dominion of the islands, and Samos was declared the bound of their territories and jurisdiction.

\*(2) Two cities of small consequence in Thrace. The understanding of an Abderite was a proverb to express a remarkable deficiency in point of genius and acuteness: though this despised city had produced Democritus, a philosopher of no small reputation in Greece.

**THE END OF THE ORATION ON THE TREATY WITH ALEXANDER**