

The Oath of Marathon

Oath which the Athenians swore when they were about to fight against the barbarians.

I shall fight while I live, and I shall not put life before being free, and I shall not desert the leaders, neither while they live nor when they are dead, and I shall not depart unless the leaders lead the way, and I shall do whatever the generals command, and I shall bury in the same place the dead of those who were allied, and I shall leave no one unburied. And when I have been victorious fighting against the barbarians, I shall totally destroy and dedicate a tenth of the city of the Thebans [who sided with the Persians], and I shall not raze Athens or Sparta or Plataea or any of the other cities that were allied [with us], and I shall not overlook those who are oppressed by hunger and I shall not keep them from running water, whether they are friends or enemies. And if I keep true to what has been written in the oath may my city be free from sickness, if not, may it be sick; and may my city be unravaged, but if not, may it be ravaged; and may my land bear, but if not, may it be barren; and may the women bear children like their parents, but if not, monsters; and may the animals bear young like the animals, but if not, monsters. *They swore these oaths, covered the sacrificial victims with their shields and at the sound of the trumpet made a curse: if they transgressed what was sworn and did not keep true to what had been written in the oath, a curse was to be upon the very people that had sworn.*

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