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GELON'S WIFE AND THE CARTHAGINIAN AMBASSADORS

After Gelon had defeated the Carthaginians at Himera in 480 they fell into a state of deep despair, and immediately despatched ambassadors to Gelon in order to prevent him from invading Carthage. The ambassadors beseeched Gelon with tears and he gave in. After a favourable peace-treaty had been concluded, the Carthaginians proved to be especially grateful to Demarate, the Gelon's wife, who "at their request had contributed the greatest aid toward the conclusion of the peace" ¹⁾ and promised her a golden crown ²⁾. The aim of this note is to suggest that the three major elements in this event-supplication, intervention of the wife, magnanimity-fit into a pattern which has also been recognised elsewhere.

The anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers has recently, in a very stimulating study ³⁾ called attention to the prominence of women in cases of supplication, comparing Odysseus' approach of Arete ⁴⁾ in Scheria with the fact that among the Bedouin of Cyrenaica the word for sanctuary is of the same root as the word for womenfolk. "By entering the women's quarters", Pitt-Rivers explains, the suppliant "tacitly renounces his power to affront. To enter them other than as a suppliant would be the gravest offence and a desecration of female, but a suppliant cannot affront for he throws himself upon the mercy of his host, and thereby forfeits all claim to the kind of honour by which he might impugn another man's. Having placed himself 'in balk', he cannot then challenge anybody until he resumes his liberty and with it his vulnerability".

Although Odysseus does not literally enter the women's quarters, the two cases show, as John Gould ⁵⁾ has argued, enough structural similarity to accept the validity of Pitt-Rivers' argument. Gould, in addition, compared Telephos' supplication of Agamemnon through Clytaemnestra and Themistocles' supplication of Admetos through his wife. I suggest that two other instances from Themistocles' life can be added. When he came into trouble with the satrap of Lydia Themistocles εἰς τὴν γυναικωνῆτιν κατέφυγε ⁶⁾ although it is not stated explicitly that he addressed as a suppliant, the situation shows a clear structural resemblance considering the precarious situation Themistocles must have found himself to be in. Similarly, when he came as a suppliant to the Persian king ⁷⁾ he obtained entry by approaching the concubine of Artabanos ⁸⁾. A very clear example of this kind of supplication we also encounter during the aftermath of the Cylonian coup: the archons spared the lives of those only who had supplicated their wives ⁹⁾.

In our story we evidently meet the same pattern. The suppliants (Carthaginians) approach the wife (Demarate) of the supplicated (Gelon). However, this is not the end of the matter. Abou Zeid ¹⁰⁾, Pitt-Rivers' original source of inspiration, also noted that the man who displayed his magnanimity towards the enemy who had entered the woman's quarters acquired the greatest honour. This, too, we find with Gelon, for he let the Carthaginians go with only a relatively minor sum to pay, so that they, as Diodorus notes, παραδόξως acquired their deliverance. Surely, this magnanimity must also have greatly contributed to Gelon's honour. The story therefore is another illustration of Pitt-Rivers' ¹¹⁾ observation that especially with regard to the concept of honour the Mediterranean communities had and have much in common.

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- 1) DS XI 26, 2 (tr. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb).
- 2) Tim. FGH 566 F20; DS XI 24, 4, XI 26, 1-3; cp. H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen* (München 1967), I, 146, 11, 602.
- 3) J. Pitt-Rivers, *Women and Sanctuary in the Mediterranean*, in J. Pouillon-P. Maranda, *Échanges et communications: Mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss* (The Hague-Paris 1970), II, 862-875 = J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem* (Cambridge 1977), 113-125, 181 f. For a parallel from ancient Egypt, cp. C. Grottanelli, *Notes on Mediterranean Hospitality*, DArch 9/10 (1976/7), 186-194.
- 4) Is it a mere coincidence that, as Professor Verdenius points out to me, the name Demarate resembles the one of Arete?
- 5) J. Gould, *Hiketeia*, JHS 93 (1973), 74-103.
- 6) Plut. *Them.* 31.
- 7) Cp. Plut. *Them.* 28 **σώσεις μὲν γὰρ ἰκέτην σόν.**
- 8) Eratosthenes FGH 241 F27.
- 9) Plut. *Sol.* 12 **μόνοι δ' ἀφείθησαν οἱ τὰς γυναῖκας αὐτῶς ἰκετεύσαντες.**
- 10) A. H. Abou-Zeid, *Honour and Shame along the Bedouins of Egypt*, in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society* (London 1965), 7-23.
- 11) Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem*, XI.