

4. The suppliant as threat

Implicit threat

Suppliants are at pains to emphasise that they pose no threat to the supplicated. Yet there is a threat implicit in their behaviour. When an individual supplicates someone in person, it is usual for the knees, chin and sometimes hands to be touched, even clutched. It is unlikely that sufficient force was applied to compel compliance, despite Kreon's comment that Medeia is applying force to him while she clings to his hand (Euripides, Medeia 339). Most likely the reference here is to the moral pressure that Medeia is certainly employing, not to physical constraint. Onions rightly dismisses the suggestion that the purpose of the suppliant's grip around the knees and of the chin of the would-be killer while on the battlefield is to prevent the fatal blow; indeed, for such gestures to inhibit the sword thrust the intended victim would need to be nimble beyond the range of normal human ability.¹ However, such a grip must have been something of a hindrance in the performance of the intended action, and have unsettled the warrior. At the very least, it must have arrested the attention.

More directly threatening is the behaviour of Themistokles, seeking succour from Admetos, king of the Molossians. He takes the king's son in his arms, and prostrates himself on the hearth (Plutarch, Themistokles 24.3). The threat against the life of the child, discreetly left implicit (at least, according to the silence of Plutarch), is obvious enough to guarantee Themistokles his sanctuary. Gould sees the child as a pledge to

¹ Richard Broxton Onions, The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate. New Interpretations of Greek, Roman and Kindred Evidence, also of some Basic Jewish and Christian Beliefs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 174

Themistokles of proper treatment.² However, as Csapo justly points out, there is a problem with this interpretation. For this to be the case, the child would have to have been handed to Themistokles by either parent. On this matter, there is some confusion in the way our sources describe events. According to Thucydides, Themistokles (on the advice of the king's wife) takes the child in his arms before he supplicates the king, in order to strengthen the appeal he is making (Thucydides 1.136.4). Plutarch, however, preserves a tradition that Phthia hands the child to Themistokles, but states that he himself prefers the version in which Themistokles himself takes the child, without any advice or other contribution from the queen (Plutarch, Themistokles 24.3-5).³ It is likely that there are two ideas implicit here. First, there does seem to be an unexpressed, and (assuming Phthia's participation in the staging of the ritual) probably symbolic, threat against the life of the child. After all, as Gould describes, there is no lack of precedent (certainly known to Themistokles, and presumably Admetos) for the murder of a child as reprisal for the betrayal by that child's father.⁴ Also, there is perhaps the notion that to hold the child is the equivalent of having physical contact with the father.⁵ One assumes the child is quite young, perhaps little more than an infant; neither Thucydides nor Plutarch gives any indication of age, except that the son is a child (Plutarch, Themistokles 24.5) and could be held, without, one infers, being able to wriggle free (Thucydides 1.136.3, Plutarch, Themistokles 24.5). Certainly to be able to hold and maintain that hold on the child is a decisive factor in Themistokles' supplication.

² Gould, op. cit., p. 100

³ Csapo, op. cit., p. 51

⁴ Gould, op. cit., pp. 99-100

⁵ Csapo, op. cit., p. 50

In the same way, those seeking refuge at a shrine could be seen as posing an implicit threat to the ritual heart of the community, just as those prostrating themselves at the hearth could be seen as threatening the ritual centre of the home. The suppliant is appropriating the attention of the deity, as well as the physical space of the shrine, so the normal functions of the shrine are, at the very least, disrupted. Also, there is the risk of ongoing pollution if the matter is not resolved in an appropriate manner. The shrine, or hearth, is pure and holy; the suppliant too is considered undefiled, and therefore cannot pollute the sanctuary. The pollution would be incurred by anyone who may attack the suppliant in any way.⁶ This makes the shrine vulnerable to violation. It is to protect the shrine from pollution that defendants in murder cases were debarred from entering sacred premises, until the day of trial (Constitution of the Athenians 57.4); not only was there the danger that a guilty man may pollute the shrine with his presence, but he may seek refuge and so appropriate the shrine in his bid to subvert the judicial process, and thereby threaten an essential part of the religious life of the community. Apollon is accused by the Erinyes of having polluted his own shrine by receiving a murderer (Aiskhylos, Eumenides 169-72). The very presence of Oidipous pollutes the place of the gods; he must make a purifying sacrifice (Sophokles, Oidipous at Kolonos 466-67).⁷

⁶ Henry J. Walker, Theseus and Athens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 184

⁷ Although Theseus speaks of Oidipous' presence as γῆ τῆδε κάμοι δασμόν οὐ μικρόν (635): what does he mean by δασμός? a tribute paid voluntarily, or one owed? Jebb asserts that here it means "recompense", payment of a debt incurred by Oidipous on Theseus' granting him what he wants (Richard C. Jebb, Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. With Critical Notes, Commentary, and Translation in English Prose. Part II. The Oedipus Coloneus [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900]) p. 39, note on v. 635). The only other usage of δασμός by Sophokles occurs in the Oidipous Tyrannos, v. 36. Here, it is used to refer to the penalty paid to the Sphinx by those who failed to guess the riddle. Sophokles associates the verb ἐξέλυσας with δασμόν (v. 35); Jebb notes that this verb must mean not "paid in full", but "loosed it": that the tribute was "like a knotted cord in which Thebes

Explicit threat

The implicit threat to pollute the shrine is made explicit by Menelaos. He threatens Theonoe that he will pollute the tomb of Proteus by killing Helen and himself, so that their blood may drench the grave, and thus be

ἄθάνατον ἄλγος σοί, ψόγος δὲ ἰὼ πατρί

an everlasting grief to you, a censure against your father (Euripides, Helen 987).

Theonoe, scarcely an implacable foe, though fearful for her own safety, is persuaded by this threat (ibid., 892-93; 998-1001). In poetry, of course, the threat of pollution through the suicide of suppliants can be a telling argument; in history such a threat is unlikely to lead to success. The suicides of the Kerkyraians in the temple of Hera did not appease their enemies (Thucydides 3.81.2). Pelasgos, however, makes it clear he is not made of such stern, even impious, stuff. To drag suppliants away from the shrine where they are sheltering can even be spoken of as robbing the gods; this, it is claimed, will only earn the perpetrator dispraise even among his own citizens (Sophokles, Oidipous at Kolonos 920-23). Adrastos, believing that Theseus has refused his and the chorus' supplication, requests that the chorus leave the branches over the altar, and calls the gods to witness Theseus' rejection of their plea (Euripides, Suppliants 256-62). Orestes threatens his dead father with a lack of funerary offerings if he does not lend his assistance to his children (Aiskhylos, Libation Bearers 482-83). Of course, this may not be a threat: Garvie interprets this as an attempt to

was bound" (Richard C. Jebb, Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. With Critical Notes, Commentary, and Translation in English Prose. Part I. The Oedipus Tyrannus [Amsterdam: Adolf Hakkert, 1966], p. 16, note on v. 36). Kamerbeek argues persuasively that here Sophokles' imagery suggests a play on δεσμόν (J.C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. Part IV. The Oedipus Tyrannus [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967], p. 39, note on vv. 35,36). Therefore in this context also δασμός must refer to a debt owed, one demanded from a not necessarily willing subject.

demonstrate to the dead Agamemnon that it is in his interest to grant Orestes' prayer.⁸ The element of threat seems inescapable, however (and indeed is not eliminated by Garvie's interpretation). If Orestes is not granted the power he seeks, Agamemnon will be ἄτιμος (*ibid.*, 485), a fearful fate for any shade, especially for a king.

The Danaids, too, make an explicit threat to pollute the shrine at which they are sheltering. Early in Aiskhylos' play, they point out that, unless they obtain the assistance they seek,

τὸν πολυξενώτατον

Ζῆνα τῶν κεκμηκότων

ἰξόμεσθα σὺν κλάδοις

ἀρτόναις θανοῦσαι

to the extremely hospitable

Zeus of the dead

we will go with olive branches

having died by means of nooses (Aiskhylos, *Suppliants* 157-60).

An interesting procession, arriving in Hades brandishing suppliant branches! Later, when the risk to their freedom is more immediate, they make their threat even clearer: they warn Pelasgos that they intend

ἐκ τῶνδ' ὅπως τάχιστα ἀπάξασθαι θεῶν.

to hang ourselves as soon as possible from these (statues of the) gods

(*ibid.*, 465).

That this is a potent threat is made clear by the king's immediate response,

ἤκουσα μασπικτῆρα καρδίας λόγον

I hear a threat that is a scourge to my heart (*ibid.*, 466).

⁸ A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus. Choephoroi. With Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 176 on vv. 483-84

Α μαστικτήρα καρδίας indeed, for it would incur heavy pollution (*ibid.*, 472-73). He still avoids granting them what they wish; but he does advise their father on steps to persuade the people to take pity on the suppliants (*ibid.*, 480-89).

The threat of suicide made by the Danaids is set in a context of munificent fruitfulness which is striking. A recurrent image throughout the play is the fruitfulness of the land, people, and even certain of the gods. The long exploration of the genealogy of the Danaids, which establishes their Argive origins (*ibid.*, 291-324), also emphasises the fertility of their forebears, especially the extraordinary and strangely complementary fecundity of Danaos and Aigyptos. It should be noted that this fruitful line begins with Zeus; Aiskhylos emphasises his role in the lineage most strongly (*ibid.*, 15-18, 40-45, 162-63, 168-71, 206, 295, 312, 531-77, 580-85, 592-99). It is not only Zeus who is prolific: the generous fruitfulness of the land is emphasised in a series of telling images. By the Nile there are the flowers of grief (*ibid.*, 73); here in Argos, Io grazed on the flowers (*ibid.*, 539). At the altars of the gods the Danaids hold fresh-plucked boughs (*ibid.*, 334), and as they leave this sanctuary they are advised to place these no doubt leafy boughs around the altars (*ibid.*, 506). In their joy at the promise of support from Pelasgos, the Danaids utter a prayer that the flower of Argive youth may continue to flourish (*ibid.*, 663-66), that the Argive women be protected in childbirth (*ibid.*, 676-77), and that the land may give bountifully of its fruits (*ibid.*, 688-93) - they seek to reward their benefactors with overflowing fecundity. When the ship of their enemies is seen approaching, the suppliants cry out to the earth and to Zeus the son of earth (*ibid.*, 890-92, 899-901). As a culmination to these images, and making the implicit parallel explicit, Danaos compares his daughters' virginal beauty with the ripe summer fruit that proves so attractive to men and beasts

(*ibid.*, 998-1005). Yet it is this very ripeness, the promise of fertility, that they seek to deny - the sole reason for the suppliants' presence at this shrine is their distaste for marriage with their cousins (*ibid.*, e.g. 144-50, 335, 393-95). In this way they seek to repudiate (or at least delay the fulfilment of) their ancestral fecundity, which has been made so prominent by Aiskhylos' rich imagery.⁹ In fact, their prayer for the Argives is a wish to repay Pelasgos' complicity in the nullification of their ripeness, the promise of their own fertility, with lavish abundance. When it seems they may not gain the support of the king, they threaten to hang themselves, using their *στρόφους ζώνας τε* (upper girdles and girdles),¹⁰ from those statues of the gods present in their sanctuary (*ibid.*, 457, 465). Thus, like unnatural fruits, ripened but decaying barren and unproductive, they would hang suspended from the statues, the statues of the same gods who had overseen the bursting abundance of the land and people, those same statues which had been adorned with the leafy boughs, in a frightful perversion of that divinely-ordained fruitfulness. Such a suicide would be a strong pollution; it also threatens the prosperity of the land and its people, through an attack on their fecundity.

Threat against *τιμή*

There is always an implicit threat against the reputation of the individual supplicated. Certainly in the archaic world a man was defined by

⁹ See Excursus, "The Danaids and marriage". pp. 112-15.

¹⁰ Johansen and Whittle (*op. cit.*, vol. 2 pp. 361-62 on v. 457) conclude, after a detailed discussion, that *στρόφος* must mean not a breast-band (*στροφίον*), which was worn under the clothes and which would have been difficult to remove under such circumstances, but a different kind of girdle to the *ζώνη*, or lower girdle. What Aiskhylos must have meant is a girdle which women sometimes wore just below the breasts but over the *χιτών* in addition to the *ζώνη*, which was worn above the hips.

his reputation,¹¹ so any threat to this precious possession was regarded seriously. Just such a threat is made (almost) explicit by Thetis, when Zeus seems disinclined to acquiesce in her request. Still clinging to his knees and chin, she tells him

νημερτὲς μὲν δὴ μοι ὑπόσχεο καὶ κατάνευσον.

ἢ ἀπόειπ', ἐπεὶ οὐ τοι ἔπι δέος, ὄφρ' εὖ εἰδέω

ὅσσον ἐγὼ μετὰ πᾶσιν ἀτιμοτάτη θεός εἰμι.

Nod your head and promise me unerringly

or refuse, since surely there is no fear, while I well know

how I am the most dishonoured of all the gods (Iliad 1.514-16).

This is certainly not a direct threat, as this would be inappropriate, given the circumstances and the relationship between the two players. The threat is, however, present. Thetis is indicating to Zeus that this decision he is to make, this one action, will govern their future relationship, and that his reputation could be broken by his response.

Zeus and the other gods, as well as the Greek audience of the Iliad, would be able to fit Thetis' guarded words into a context of danger prophesied and averted. Laura Slatkin has teased out the story behind Thetis' marriage to Akhilleus' father, and in a persuasive argument explains why Thetis, despite her seemingly low status among the gods, is able to coerce Zeus, apparently against his will, to give assistance to her mortal son. Akhilleus makes it clear that Zeus owes her a favour. He describes how she had set the god free when the other Olympians had bound him (ibid., 1.396-406). It is to this past service that she alludes when she supplicates Zeus (ibid., 1.504). She is also apparently referring to a favour Zeus exacted from her, one she performed unwillingly. Zeus and

¹¹ For a discussion on the importance of reputation in Homer, see S. Douglas Olson, Blood and Iron. Stories and Storytelling in Homer's *Odyssey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 16-19.

Poseidon were contending for her, when Themis prophesied that she would bear a son who was mightier than his father. This struck fear into Zeus, especially after his deposition by the other gods (from which fate Thetis herself had rescued him); he therefore decided to marry her to a mortal, selecting Peleus for her mate (Pindar, Isthmian 8.26-47). This she resisted bitterly (Pindar, Nemean 3.32-36; 4.62-65), but to no avail. She bore Akhilleus, a mortal, destined to die in battle, but certainly greater than his father. It is to this threat that Prometheus alludes, in his challenge to Zeus (Aiskhylos, Prometheus Bound 764-68). Thetis, by her very existence, threatens the divine order; she is able, through marriage, to bring about catastrophe; she poses the greatest threat to Zeus' continued hegemony.¹² One infers that the threat once posed by Thetis' existence has now passed; after all, she has already borne the son who is greater than his father. Zeus refers with sympathy to her sorrow, perhaps because of the impending death of her son, perhaps also because of the fate that tied her to a mortal, when he greets her on her arrival at Clympos (Iliad 24.104-05). Slatkin sees in Zeus' manner, and in Thetis' choice of the same kind of cloak that Demeter wore when through her grief she caused the suffering of mortals and gods, a recognition of the potential for suffering posed by Thetis' sorrow (ibid., 24.93-94; Homeric Hymn to Demeter 42; 181-82).¹³ Whatever the potential of her wrath (never overtly expressed), she has suffered the indignity of enforced marriage with a mortal, she who had performed an inestimable service for Zeus. Certainly he owes her some extraordinary service; it is of this debt that she reminds him, that he may be shamed into acquiescence to her request, that he may be reminded of the potential loss of

¹² Laura M. Slatkin, The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 72-74

¹³ Ibid., pp. 89-95

his reputation among the gods if he refuses to repay in part what he owes her.

In the same way, the public supplication of Themistokles threatens the reputation of Admetos (Thucydides 1.136-37). Likewise, the supplication of Pausanias by the daughter of Hegētorides, while the slaughter was still going on (Herodotus 9.76.1) and thus in the presence of many others, risks Pausanias' prestige while it is at its height. Orestes outlines his plan for gaining entry to the palace in order that he might avenge his father: if initially refused entry, he will sit in such a way that passers-by will wonder why Aigisthos refused a suppliant (Aiskhylos, Libation Bearers 563-68). That is, the threat to Aigisthos' reputation will force his compliance with Orestes' will. The presence of Pausanias in the temple of Athene in Sparta poses two dangers for the Spartans: given the crime, he could not be released, which is at that point the only divinely sanctioned response; and he could not be killed, or allowed to die, on sacred ground. The only solution would be for him to be persuaded to surrender, to give up the sanctuary he had reached. This of course is hardly likely. The Spartans therefore wall up the doors of the shrine, and put guards around it, in order to prevent any food being brought to him. Having removed the roof of the shrine, they are able to observe when he is at the point of death, and in an effort to avoid pollution they then carry him out to die. This still does not avoid pollution; the Delphic oracle enjoins the Spartans to move his tomb to the place where he had died (Thucydides 1.134.4). So even in death Pausanias is able, by his presence in the temple, to threaten not only the standing of the Spartan justice system, but also the relationship between the Spartans and a goddess. That the reputation of Sparta elsewhere was damaged by its action is demonstrated by the use made of the story at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (ibid., 1.135.1).

Threat against a god by a mortal

A mortal may even threaten a god. This threat is made quite deliberately by Kreousa, who when asked by Ion why she chooses to die at the altar of Apollon, replies

λυπήσομέν τιν', ὧν λελυπήμεσθ' ὑπο

I will cause harm to one, having been harmed by him

(Euripides, Ion 1311).

Interestingly, her ability to injure the god in this way is not questioned by Ion, the servant of Apollon; he merely questions her right, as a guilty woman, to use the shrine (ibid., 1312-19).¹⁴ Earlier, Ion, the loyal servant of Apollon, immediately on hearing of the god's crime against the unknown woman, denies his guilt (ibid., 341); yet within a short time he accepts that the god is guilty as accused, and himself accuses the gods of injustice, for perpetrating what they themselves condemn in humans (ibid., 436-51). Kreousa has even more reason than Ion to recognise Apollon's perfidy. Her supplication of Apollon, ironic though it is that she should supplicate her rapist, places the god under a double obligation: she is his suppliant and his victim simultaneously. His intervention, through the Pythia (ibid., 1347-55), may save her life, but it was his actions that had jeopardised it. The chorus, too, though they are ignorant of Apollon's earlier outrage upon Kreousa, indicate confidence in the power of the god to protect his suppliant,

κἄν θάνης γὰρ ἐνθάδ' οὔσα, τοῖς ἀποκτεῖνᾶσί σε
προστρόπαιον ἅμα θήσεις

¹⁴ It is difficult to agree with Freyburger's assertion that this is the voice of Euripides, criticising a privilege that denies the rights of human justice (Freyburger, op. cit., p. 511). It is merely a character that produces this argument, reasonable in the dramatic circumstances. To assert that Euripides supports the primacy of human over divine justice is to deny the cumulative weight of his use of the theme of supplication in so many of his plays - see above, pp. 77-85.

For if you die in that place, you will make your killers
blood-guilty. (ibid., 1259-60)

As Owen points out,¹⁵ in this context *προστρόπαιος* may, in combination with *αἷμα*, mean "blood-guiltiness". It may also mean "the stain of the suppliant's (i.e. Kreousa's) blood". Perhaps Euripides wished to suggest both meanings; with either one, the responsibility of Apollon either to protect or avenge his suppliant is clearly implicit. The final resolution is delivered by Athene in Apollon's name (ibid., 1556-59). Even at this point he himself does not appear. As Kuntz comments, the god attracts censure.¹⁶

Just so is Zeus shamed at the apparent victory of the tyrant over the family of Zeus' own son, according to Amphitryon (Euripides, Herakles 339-47). A human seeking sanctuary at the altar of a god places that god under an obligation; to betray that trust will prove at the very least an embarrassment to the god, in circles both human and divine. For the same reason, even Zeus could find himself charged with injustice by the gods, according to the Danaids, if they are forced to commit suicide by the god's rejection of their appeal (Aiskhylos, Suppliants 154-61, 168-74). As Mikalson notes, the wronged suppliant has cause for complaint.¹⁷ After all, the relationship between humans and gods was conceived of as being one of reciprocal obligations. Clay's incisive analysis of the nature of the gods and their relationship with humans in the Odyssey¹⁸ seems to fit the works of Euripides and Aiskhylos as well. For the reciprocal relationship between men and their gods involves more than a mutual need for services. Mortals

¹⁵ G. S. Owen, Euripides. Ion. Edited with Introduction and Commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 154 on v. 1260

¹⁶ Kuntz, op. cit., p. 60 n. 6

¹⁷ Mikalson, Honor Thy Gods, p. 76

¹⁸ Jenny Strauss Clay, The Wrath of Athena (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 238

need gods because of their sense of powerlessness, stemming particularly from their knowledge of their own mortality. Gods, however, may be perceived to need mortals just as much; they need to have their existence confirmed by people.¹⁹ Therefore any interest the gods demonstrate in justice is self-interest: justice is a concept which, at least in its abstract sense, apparently has no real meaning for them. That this is so is indicated by Apollon's treatment of Kreousa. If any god apparently acts in accordance with the dictates of justice, it is because in this way he may win the praise of mortals, and so have his existence affirmed and proclaimed. So it is possible to shame the gods into action: through the threat of shame Amphitryon attempts to manipulate Zeus into protecting Herakles' family, the Danaids try to force Zeus to protect them from their cousins, and Kreousa seeks to force from Apollon some recognition of the debt he owes her, to compel him to save her from her own son.

The knees of the supplicated

The suppliant usually grasped the knees, chin and sometimes hands of the person supplicated. Gould argues that these parts of the body are

¹⁹ Olson, however, sounds a caution (*op. cit.*, p. 216). The gods, he argues persuasively, do not need offerings or even recognition from people: there is nothing to indicate they would cease to exist if denied these indications of reverence. However, he does concede that they do want sacrifice and recognition, and that denial of these attentions to any individual god would make that god the target of some laughter from the others. Therefore the withholding of honours could be a reason for intervention in human affairs. Olson's assertion that "the god defends what is his with all the power at his disposal" (*ibid.*), given that honours are seen as the rightful dues of the gods, does not contradict, but by contrast reaffirms, their self-interest. Perhaps the gods do not need the sacrifices and other attentions from mortals, but they do desire them, and will inflict punishments on those who do not provide them. Giving succour to those under the gods' protection, such as suppliants and strangers, is one way in which a mortal may display respect for the gods (*ibid.*, p. 217).

considered sacred, part of the essential being of a person.²⁰ To support this argument he relies most heavily on the work of Onions. In his monograph, Onions details the parts of the body to which respectful references are made by Greek authors. The head, he argues, is considered supreme, even holy, and cites references from Homer to substantiate this.²¹ This evidence certainly indicates that the Greeks saw the head as important (should this be surprising?), but does not support any suggestion of its being consequently considered as holy.²²

The knees, too, are said to have been seen as incorporating sanctity, because the suppliant regularly clung to them.²³ Gould uses the authority of Onions to propose a reason why these parts of the body were those most attractive to the suppliant.²⁴ According to his argument, the knees had sanctity because the suppliant clung to them; the suppliant clung to them because they had sanctity. Such a circular argument stops short of persuading. Onions is not the first writer to assert that many peoples thought of the knees as inherently sacred; Pliny argues that knees were considered to be as sanctified as altars, because suppliants touched them and prayed to them. He attributes this notion to the peculiar fragility of the hollow on each side of the kneecap, *qua perfossa ceu iugulo spiritus fluit* (which when pierced, just like the throat, makes the breath of life flow out - Pliny, Natural History XI.250). This defies logic, and cannot have been

²⁰ Gould, op. cit., p. 96-97

²¹ Onions, op. cit., p. 97

²² Ruth Padel, however, argues persuasively that the head was not seen as the seat of intelligence (In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992], pp. 12-13, n. 3). This, however, does not preclude the recognition of its importance to the living human: simple observation must have indicated that its removal brought about instant death

²³ According to Onions, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁴ Gould, loc. cit.

supported by observation. That such a wound would elicit at least a gasp of pain from the wounded is only to be expected, but one would expect that a similar injury to any other part of the body would have the same effect. Nor could the piercing of the knees at that point be a direct cause of instant or even imminent death; the artery would not necessarily be penetrated, so the victim would be unlikely to bleed to death quickly. On a battlefield, death would probably ensue only because the victim's mobility would of necessity be impaired. Thus it is not enough that Akhilleus spears Demoukhos in the knee; he then has to kill him with his sword (Iliad 20.456-59). Pliny, moreover, does not attribute this idea specifically to the Greeks, but claims it as a general belief. Even if the reasonable inference that he includes the Greeks in this generalisation were to be made, it must be emphasised that for archaic or classical Greek culture Pliny can only be considered a secondary source. Freyburger's assertion, therefore, that Pliny's words are a valuable source of information for Greek thoughts on the knees is weakened.²⁵

Writing almost fifty years before Freyburger, Deonna, too, appears to have been influenced by Pliny's statement, though he does not cite the reference. In an ingenious discussion of the reasons for the decoration on bronze leggings during the sixth and fifth centuries, he claims that the knees were seen as a source of power, the seat of strength, of the life force (although they were simultaneously a point of weakness in need of special protection, because of the angle formed when the knees are flexed, and the inherent weakness of the joint in any structure).²⁶ As evidence for this

²⁵ Freyburger, *op. cit.*, p. 509

²⁶ W. Deonna, "Le genou, siège de force et de vie et sa protection magique", Revue Archéologique 1939, pp. 231-35. It is interesting - and perhaps significant, given his eagerness to clutch at any promise of safety - that he should be so preoccupied with the question of personal protection during warfare at this point in European history.

belief, he cites the suppliants' grasping of the knees in their pleading.²⁷ He notes also that Homer attributes strong knees to those who defeat or escape their enemies in battle.²⁸ An explanation for this image in Homer need not, however, be based in a belief in the knees being the main source of a man's strength; surely success in battle depended on speed, which was attained by running, a motion which necessitated the bending of the knees. Therefore, for Homer's warriors, the image of strength in the knees is an entirely appropriate and pragmatic one, and need not be interpreted as the product of a belief that the knees were the seat of strength and vigour. Indeed, one notes that when Menelaos kills Podes, Athene had driven strength not only into his knees, but also into his shoulders (*Iliad* 17.567f). Moreover, it is not only from the shoulders that might may be expected to spring: the heart, too, is a seat of strength (*ibid.*, 3.31, 45, 60; 21.114), as is the chest (*ibid.*, 5.125) and the limbs in general (*ibid.*, 4.23; 5.122; 16.400, 465; 18.31). Why then could not the inference be drawn that the shoulders, or chest, or heart were equally perceived as a source of vigour?

Death too may come through parts of the body other than the knees. Here Homer displays a taste for great variety. A death blow may be dealt to the neck (*ibid.*, 5.658; 16.332, 339; 20.455), the forehead (*ibid.*, 4.460; 6.10; 13.616; 16.739), the ear (*ibid.*, 13.178; 20.473), the gullet (*ibid.*, 17.47), the chest (*ibid.*, 5.19, 145; 16.597), the heart (*ibid.*, 16.481), the liver (*ibid.*, 13.412; 17.349), the belly (*ibid.*, 13.372, 397, 507), the jaw (*ibid.*, 16.405), the groin (*ibid.*, 4.492), and the back (*ibid.*, 20.414). Thus it is not only (or even primarily) through the knees that death may come: other parts of the body are equally vulnerable in battle, equally in need of protection.²⁹ The reason

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Despite Deonna, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

that knees are significant in supplications does not appear to lie in any notion of their particular importance over other parts of the body in vigour, or in their particular vulnerability to fatal wounds.

Deonna also claims that in different languages, the word for "knee" is suspiciously similar to words linked to ideas of procreation, sexuality, and lineage.³⁰ This association of ideas, he claims, is the reason why a child was legitimised by taking it onto the knees of the father or head of the household.³¹ He fails, however, to try to account for this phenomenon; it is not immediately clear why such ideas should have been associated, and some consideration of the origin of such an association would seem necessary. Onions also found the notion of an affinity between the knees and the phallus (as discussed by Deonna) attractive.³² He too asserts that the knees were thought of as the seat of generative power (again, failing even to attempt to account for the origins of this curious notion), citing Euripides and some dubious etymology, which he explores in more detail than does Deonna. The Euripides passages (Elektra 1208-15, Daughters of Troy 1305-07) fail to support his argument;³³ the similarities he notes between γόνυ and γεννώω (as well as γένειον) remain interesting, but fail to

³⁰ Ibid., p. 229

³¹ Ibid., p. 230. He cites two references from Homer in support of this. One (Odyssey 19.401) does initially seem to underpin this interpretation, as Eurykleia places the infant son of his daughter on the knees of Autolykos however, this is not so that the legitimacy of the child may be proclaimed, but so that he may be named. Surely the maternal grandfather, on a visit to his daughter's home, would be an unusual choice to proclaim the legitimacy of her child. The other passage (Iliad 9.455) is open to another interpretation. Phoenix relates how a curse was laid upon him by his father, that he might never have a son to set upon his knees. This may, perhaps, refer to a ritual of legitimisation, but could also refer to a joyful father playing with his child.

³² Onions, op. cit., pp. 175ff; Deonna, op. cit., p. 229

³³ See Onions, op. cit., p. 176

compel belief in any commonality of origin.³⁴ Not only Gould is persuaded by this argument; Freyburger also cites Onions, as well as Pliny and Deonna, and accepts their arguments that the knees were considered as sanctified above other parts of the body.³⁵ However, in the absence of contemporary Greek testimony, we must rely on inference. That suppliants usually either cling to the knees, or use verbal formulae to suggest that action, is interesting, and deserves investigation; but one need not seek an explanation in the supposed sanctity of knees.

From the many references to knees, and from the assertions of Onions, Gould develops the proposition that in the ritual gestures the suppliant is sharing in the vital force of the supplicated; this would also apply to supplication involving physical contact with an altar or statue of a god. The gesture could also be seen as a threat against the life force of the supplicated, with a symbolic aggression against an individual's most vulnerable parts.³⁶ This interpretation, admirably inventive though it is, lacks its buttress of the evidence of Onions, and thus collapses entirely.

Of what importance are the many references to knees, found particularly in Homer? Certainly suppliants clasped the knees of individuals supplicated. Tros clasps Akhilleus' knees (Iliad 20.463), as does Lykaon (ibid., 21.71). Phoinix's mother takes him by the knees (ibid., 9.451; Thetis thus clasps Zeus (ibid., 1.500, 512; 8.371); Kirke grips Odysseus' knees (Odyssey 10.323), and he hers (ibid., 10.481). Telemakhos comes to Nestor's knees, in order to learn of his father (ibid., 3.92). From this evidence alone, it may be tempting to infer that knees are seen as

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 175, 233. Comparatively rudimentary Greek understanding of physiology may have been, but such an association of ideas seems too unsophisticated to be credible.

³⁵ Freyburger, op. cit., pp. 508-09

³⁶ Gould, op. cit., p. 97

potentially a point of weakness, of vulnerability. There would seem to be corroboration of this inference: other references appear to suggest that the knees are the seat of strength, of vigour, almost of a life force. Helen is said to have unstrung the knees of (i.e. killed) many men (ibid., 14.69); Diomedes is claimed to have broken the knees of many Trojans (Iliad 5.176). The knees of Apisaon are loosened when he is mortally wounded in the liver (ibid., 11.579). The knees may be weakened by fatigue or hunger (ibid., 19.166; 21.52; Odyssey 13.34). Knees may also be loosened as a result of sexual desire (ibid., 18.212-13; 23.205-06³⁷). Surely suppliants could not be said to cling to knees, to see them as holy, because they (along with other parts of the body) feel the effects of hunger, or sexual arousal? Just as weakness may sap the strength of knees, so a renewal of vigour will restore their spring (Iliad 17.451, 569; 4.314). The spring in one's knees may even be used as a synonym for continuing life (ibid., 9.610; 10.90; 11.477; Odyssey 18.133). However, one need see in this nothing more than poetic imagery; there is no suggestion that Homer considered, or intended his readers to consider, knees as being sacred.

In an early article, Onions notes and attempts an explanation of the curious expression $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ $\theta\epsilon\omega\upsilon$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\gamma\omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}\alpha\sigma\iota$ $\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\iota\tau\alpha$ (everything lies on the knees of the gods), occurring four times in Homer (Iliad 17.514; 20.435; Odyssey 1.267; 16.129).³⁸ He relates this to the image of the gods spinning life for humans (e.g. Iliad 24.525; Odyssey 1.17; 3.208; 4.208; 8.579; 11.139; 16.64; 20.196).³⁹ From scanty and scattered evidence he postulates that spinning was generally carried out while seated, the knees playing an

³⁷ Penelope's weakened knees may be attributed to desire; on the other hand, one may also infer that her sudden decrease of vigour is because she greets confirmation that this is indeed Odysseus with (albeit unspoken) dismay. She is, after all, $\pi\epsilon\acute{\rho}\iota\phi\rho\omega\nu$.

³⁸ R.B. Onions, "On the knees of the gods", Classical Review XXXVIII (1924), 2-6

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2

important role in the process.⁴⁰ From this he develops the argument that, when one's destiny was said to be on the knees of the gods, it is to the spinning of one's fate that reference is being made.⁴¹ This is an appealing interpretation, and highly inventive; however, there is (as Onions himself acknowledges)⁴² no direct evidence for how the Greeks of this period spun thread. The argument must therefore be viewed as not proven. Stanford implicitly rejects it, when he says of the image that it is "uncertain": he suggests that the gods may be seen here as giving gifts from their laps, or it could be a reference to statues of seated gods. He concludes that the general sense is "of something lying untouched within reach of the gods' deciding hand".⁴³ The expression remains, therefore, merely a curiosity.

The question, however, remains: why do the knees figure so prominently in supplicatory rituals? It is tempting to see a parallel between the obvious sanctity of such places as the altar, the god's statue and the hearth, and the knees. After all, they seem to carry the same significance in the gestures of suppliants. Nevertheless, such an interpretation is mere inference, and places too much strain on the available evidence. Burkert offers a highly original explanation.⁴⁴ He questions the use of the suppliant branch, and suggests that it is meant to suggest the *στιβάς*, or bed of branches. Those who rest on a *στιβάς* are at ease, and give up aggression and tension. Thus, to carry a suppliant branch is to invite the person or god supplicated to surrender aggression and to look on the suppliant with

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁴³ W.B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer. Vol. 1* (2nd edn. London: MacMillan, 1959), p. 227 on 1.267

⁴⁴ Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 44-45

compassion. Just so, Burkert claims, may one interpret the clasping of the knees. He sees the touching of the knees, especially the hollow of the knee (as is unavoidable when the suppliant's arms are clasped around them) as a figurative entreaty to the person supplicated to relax and treat the suppliant with favour.⁴⁵ This is an interpretation admirable in its ingenuity, and almost persuasive. However, it too ultimately relies to an excessive degree on inference, and stops short of providing a compelling explanation.

One possible explanation for the suppliant's touching the knees and the chin of the supplicated is suggested by the relative postures of the two protagonists. In battle, when the suppliant is kneeling or crouching at the feet of the supplicated, the knees (or the back of the knees) would be the lowest part of the body that s/he could reach (assuming that the supplicated is wearing greaves and the other impedimenta of warfare). At the same time, the suppliant could attempt to reach the chin. By touching the extremes of the individual's body, flesh on flesh, s/he was figuratively touching the whole person.⁴⁶ Thus, there is no need to impose a supposed sanctity on the knees as the object of the suppliant, if they were seen as one extremity of the "envelope" that defined a person. Of course, in practical terms this explanation functions only in situations where the lower limbs were covered, while leaving part of the knees (the back) uncovered, that is, on the battlefield. Off battlefield supplications do occur, where the knees and chin were gripped, despite, one infers, the whole of the lower limbs being uncovered (at least, as uncovered as the knees must have been).

⁴⁵ Certainly Homer twice uses γόνα κάμψειν (*Iliad* 7.118, 19.72) as a synonym for "rest", but there is no suggestion of supplication in either case: rather, each passage refers to a rest from fierce fighting. Burkert's hypothesis could not be said to be proven by either reference.

⁴⁶ I am indebted to Professor Greg Horsley for this ingenious suggestion.

There are even descriptions of supplications in which the knees of women are grasped, knees which (one infers) were covered by long skirts. One may infer that, unless there were powerful traditions prescribing ritual actions, any attempt to grope under that skirt towards the knees may not have attracted a favourable response. Perhaps supplicatory ritual incorporating the clasping of the knees began, or was believed to have begun, on the battlefield, where the knees and chin were the only reachable extremities of an adversary available to the suppliant. By the time supplications were taking place in other situations, the use of those parts of the body to define the whole person had become customary. All this is, of course, speculative; however, the appeal of this explanation is that it relies less on imaginative flourishes than many others.

Conclusion

Suppliants were far from being as helpless as they might seem. Their presence, their gestures, posed threats to those they supplicated. Those threats could be implicit, though easily understood by others, or even made explicit, especially that they would take some action to pollute a shrine. The threat could be against the reputation, the honour of the object of their supplication. A mortal could even issue threats against a god - and those threats were taken seriously, both by devotees of the gods, and the gods themselves. The clasp of the knees by suppliants, however, is unlikely to have been a subtle threat against the vitality or the generative power of the supplicated; such an explanation relies too much on imagination to be plausible. However, for suppliants to make the threats that they do issue, they must have some compelling motivation.

Excursus. The Danaids and Marriage

The Danaids do not apparently have an aversion to marriage in general; it is specifically their cousins whom they fear marrying. As Johansen and Whittle demonstrate, they have no objection to marriage, provided no force is involved - indeed, they expect to marry, for they refer with acceptance to the dowry their father has provided for each one (Aiskhylos, Suppliants 978-79).⁴⁷ What is it about their cousins that so repels the Danaids? Thomson insists that they are opposed to endogamy, because in the case of any dispute the bride can find no supporters among her kin, for they are also the kin of her husband.⁴⁸ He sees further evidence of this in a reference to the Danaids in Aiskhylos' Prometheus Bound, where Prometheus comments on their fleeing to Argos to escape marriage with their cousins (Aiskhylos, Prometheus Bound 855-56).⁴⁹ Prometheus, however, is not advancing a reason for the prospective brides' distaste, merely naming those for whom they have an abhorrence. Thomson's corroborative evidence is therefore non-existent. He sees the whole trilogy (including the two plays not extant) as dealing with the theme of endogamy, as mandated by law in certain circumstances, winning out over the ancestral ban on kin-marriage.⁵⁰ This stretches the evidence in the play beyond its tolerance. Seaford too sees the Danaids as fearful that they would lose protection by marrying their cousins, as rejecting endogamy.⁵¹ However, this gives too little value to the emphasis placed on the violence of the Aigyptids. MacKinnon sees this violence as the primary motive for the Danaids' flight, with the references to incest as an emphasis of the horror

⁴⁷ Johansen and Whittle, op. cit., vol. 1 pp. 30-33

⁴⁸ Thomson, op. cit., p. 21

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 290

⁵⁰ George Thomson, "The Suppliants of Aeschylus", Eirene IX (1971), p. 30

⁵¹ Richard Seaford, "The tragic wedding", Journal of Hellenic Studies CVII (1987), pp. 117-18; Reciprocity, p. 212

the women feel at the violence of their cousins.⁵² Surely the truth lies somewhat between the two interpretations. The Danaids know their cousins, are aware of their propensity for violence. With no little justice, they fear marriage with such violent men. The fact that they are their cousins not only has enabled them to learn of this ferocity, it also means that in marriage they would be in a more vulnerable position should any dispute arise between the spouses. Thus both explanations of their motivation are correct, to a point.

Few now claim that the Danaids have an aversion to marriage itself. Caldwell, however, proposes just such an interpretation. Quoting liberally from Freud, he argues that the Danaids "are preoccupied not with acquiring the male organ but with the wound that they have suffered (i.e. castration complex) and its possible recurrence: not with becoming men themselves, but rather with reducing men to their own mutilated state". They have an obsessive attachment to their father, and are unable to love other men.⁵³ However, the Freudian theories which he accepts as irrefutable and around which his argument circles, penis envy and castration complex, have not gone unquestioned. Karen Horney, as early as 1922, pointed out that such theories are contrary to biological science.⁵⁴ In 1943, Clara Thompson pointed out that cultural factors are the explanation for any apparent dissatisfaction that women may have with their lot.⁵⁵ In 1970, Ruth

⁵² J.K. MacKinnon, "The reason for the Danaids' flight", Classical Quarterly LXXI (1978), pp. 79-80

⁵³ Richard S. Caldwell, "The psychology of Aeschylus' *Supplikes*", Arethusa VII (1974), p. 49

⁵⁴ Karen Horney, "On the genesis of the castration complex in women": paper delivered at 7th International Psycho-Analytical Congress, Berlin, Sept. 1922; published in 1923, 1924; reprinted in Feminine Psychology (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), p. 38

⁵⁵ Clara Thompson, "Penis envy in women", reprinted in Psychoanalysis and Women [New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1973], pp. 43-44

Moulton noted that many authors have commented on the inaccuracies that are consequent on a phallogentric view of women.⁵⁶ Julia Sherman offers a list of writers who have challenged Freud's theories on penis envy and the castration complex.⁵⁷ All of these writings were readily available before 1974, when Caldwell wrote his paper: a brief reading of any one of them would have alerted him to the fact that his argument may not be unassailable, may even be more than faintly ridiculous. Perhaps he was subject to the "masculine narcissism" to which Horney ascribes an unquestioning acceptance of Freud's very questionable theories.⁵⁸ As Thomas Africa comments, Freud's "nineteenth-century notions on women are not obligatory for Neo-Freudians"; "for those who venture into the underworld of the past, Freud alone is not a safe guide".⁵⁹

On the subject of cross-disciplinary studies, MacCary issues a caveat. They are, he warns, "seldom satisfying" since usually they attempt to fit "a few insights simplified from one theoretical model" into some other work, e.g. a play. Realistically, one may hope for nothing greater than "a brief perception", with neither the theory nor the other work being modified or clarified by the other. Only if it can be demonstrated that the literary work is almost incomprehensible without an appreciation of that theory may such an approach be justified.⁶⁰ Therefore, Caldwell's analysis may be dismissed

⁵⁶ Ruth Moulton, "A survey and reevaluation of the concept of penis envy", in Jean Baker Miller (ed.), Psychoanalysis and Women (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1973), p. 207

⁵⁷ Julia A. Sherman, On the Psychology of Women: a Survey of Empirical Studies. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1971), pp. 48-52

⁵⁸ Horney, loc. cit.

⁵⁹ Thomas W. Africa, "Psychohistory, ancient history and Freud: the descent into Avernus", Arethusa XII [1979], pp. 17 and 26

⁶⁰ W. Thomas MacCary, Childlike Achilles. Ontogeny and Phylogeny in the Iliad (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 66

as "simply...clever and entrepreneurial",⁶¹ unless Aiskhylos may be proved to have been a Freudian.

⁶¹ Ibid.

5. Purposes of supplication

The suppliant in distress

Most suppliants fled to an altar, or the knees of their persecutor, in fear of their lives. Thus do the Kylonians, Pausanias and Themistokles; thus too do Thyestes (Aiskhylos, *Agamemnon* 1587-93), Iphigeneia (Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis* 1214-17), and Amphitryon (Euripides, *Herakles* 967-69). However, this is not the only motive evident. Some suppliants plead for the lives of others. Hekabe pleads with Odysseus that the life of Polyxene be spared (Euripides, *Hekabe* 272-78). Klytaimestra supplicates Akhilleus that he should save Iphigeneia from the sacrificial knife (Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis* 900-16). It should be noted that in neither case is the plea successful.

Thomson makes the interesting and attractive suggestion that the suppliant is really making an appeal to be adopted. For this reason, he argues, Odysseus clasps the knees of the Phaeikan queen, and sits in the hearth. Alkinoos then takes him by the hand, raises him from his lowly position, and leads him to a seat vacated by the king's favourite son (*Odyssey* 7.142-54, 168-71). According to Thomson, this is a clear statement by Odysseus that he wishes to be, in fact is, Alkinoos' child,¹ and is therefore deserving of protection. He could also have cited as evidence for this Themistokles' supplication of Admetos. Seeking assistance from a king who had vowed to take revenge on him, Themistokles sits down in the hearth, with Admetos' young son in his arms (Thucydides 1.136.3; Plutarch, *Themistokles* 24.5). Thucydides claims that, like Odysseus, Themistokles first supplicates the queen, the mother of the king's children, and only on

¹ Thomson, *Aeschylus*, p. 69

her advice does he take the child in his arms as he sat among the ashes. In this way he associates himself with the blood kin of the king, and surely by implication affiliates himself with the royal family. Both Odysseus and Themistokles need the assistance of the men they are supplicating, if they are to survive in the hostile world in which they find themselves.

Not always is the suppliant in a life-threatening situation. At times, the plea is for assistance in revenge. Hekabe, having lost Polyxene, turns her mind to vengeance on the killer of her son. In order to gain his tacit acquiescence to this deed, she supplicates Agamemnon (Euripides, Hekabe 749-57). So too do Elektra and Orestes, at the tomb of Agamemnon. They demand his assistance in their revenge against his killers (Aiskhylos, Agamemnon 454; 498-507). There are other motivations, too. The Danaids are eager to escape an unwanted marriage (Aiskhylos, Suppliants 141-43). Thetis wants Zeus' aid for her mortal son (Iliad 1.505-10), while the chorus of Argive women beg Theseus' assistance in the burial of their sons who have fallen in battle (Euripides, Suppliants 16-19).

In fleeing to an altar, suppliants may not be seeking earthly assistance. Instead, they may ask the god whose shrine it is to act as an intermediary for them. For this reason Orestes is ordered to go to Athens and cling to the statue of Athene. She will then be expected to placate the Furies on his behalf (Euripides, Electra 1254-55).

The suppliant as manipulator

All these suppliants are sincere in their distress. Some, however, use the custom in order to manipulate situations when they are faced with no immediate and unavoidable danger. The actions of Ephialtes in seeking refuge at an altar, when he is in fact in no danger (Constitution of the

Athenians 25.1-4), may fall into this category. The anonymous man from Argilos, too, uses the practice for ulterior motives, this time to trick Pausanias into revealing to the hidden ephors what he would have preferred to remain unknown. The man was sent by Pausanias as a messenger, to carry a letter to Artabazos. Pausanias, finding Spartan horizons too narrow for his ambition, and having been relieved of his command in the Hellespont, had initiated a correspondence with Xerxes, to aid the Persian king in his defeat of Sparta and the whole of Hellas (Thucydides 1.128.3). Xerxes had appointed Artabazos as his intermediary, and it was with him that Pausanias was exchanging messages which the Spartans, and other Hellenes, would have considered treasonous. This individual from Argilos is one such messenger. Somewhat more alert than his predecessors, he had noticed that other messengers had not returned from their mission. Cautiously, he read the letter first, and found in it an order that he, the messenger, be killed by the Persian on delivery of the message. Not surprisingly, he turns informer, and participates in the charade which leads to Pausanias' self-conviction. He goes as a suppliant to the temple of Tainaros, and when Pausanias comes to him, he complains that he is ill rewarded for his faithful service. Pausanias admits his accusations, and, raising him from the suppliant position, he promises his safety. All of this the hidden ephors hear, and decide for this reason to arrest Pausanias (ibid., 1.132.5-133). This mendacious use of supplication remains, according to our sources, rare: most suppliants are faced with a real and immediate threat.

Manipulation is, however, inherent in the very nature of supplication. The suppliant attempts by means of supplicatory gestures to persuade an individual or group to change a situation unfavourable to the suppliant. At times, this may involve persuading the persons supplicated to act against

their own interests. Medeia, in despair and anger at being abandoned by Iason in favour of a new wife, plans revenge on her husband (Euripides, Medeia 112-14, 260-61). She chooses to use poison to kill her enemies; being a woman, her success in using a direct method (e.g. to stab them with a sword) would be far less assured (ibid., 376-85). The very deviousness of her plan is indicative simultaneously of her weakness and her strength, of her cowardice and her daring.² When it seems she is to be prevented from carrying out her plans by Kreon's foresight (ibid., 271-74, 282-83), she at first attempts to persuade him to reverse his decision (ibid., 313-15). This proves fruitless, so she supplicates him πρὸς σε γονάτων (by your knees - ibid., 324), finally begging for a delay in the execution of the sentence (ibid., 338). This abrupt change in her demand confuses him, and her reference to her children (ibid., 342-47) echoes his own avowed love for his daughter (ibid., 339). Pity for the children and her sudden change of tactic, the apparent suppression of the cleverness of which Kreon has expressed fear (ibid., 285-89), weakens his resolve and he is persuaded,³ though he is aware that his clemency is contrary to his own interests and those of his daughter (ibid., 348-51; cf. 163-65). Medeia's outburst to the chorus reveals her motives for this uncharacteristic humility: she will use the time gained to plot his downfall, and that of his daughter and her husband (ibid., 368-75), displaying a duplicity indicative of the strength of her outrage and purpose.⁴ This revenge she will carry out through the agency of her unwitting children (ibid., 780-89), whom she instructs, in Iason's presence, to supplicate their stepmother to permit them to stay (ibid., 969-71). Medeia

² As noted by Pucci, op. cit., p. 99. The witchcraft for which she is famed is, in this play, referred to as cleverness (Euripides, Medeia 294-97, 529); Kreon is the only character who speaks of her skill in dangerous arts (ibid., 283), but this may mean only that she is gifted with intelligence beyond what he deems proper for women.

³ Pucci, op. cit., pp. 91, 208 n. 3

⁴ McDermott, op. cit., p. 79

thus manipulates Kreon and his daughter⁵ to act, unknowingly, in a manner contrary to their interests; but of course they are the objects of her revenge.

Alkinoos too is persuaded to act in a manner that will bring disaster on him and his people, though they are hardly intended to be Odysseus' victims. He relates a prophecy that Poseidon would punish the Phaiakans for their practice of conveying shipwrecked seamen safely home (Odyssey 8.564-69). No wonder the people do not welcome strangers (ibid., 7.32-33). Odysseus, present when Alkinoos mentions the prophecy of disaster, nevertheless persists in his request for safe conveyance home, and embarks on the narration of his voyage from Troy. As Felson-Rubin comments, he tailors this narration in order to overcome any understandable reluctance the Phaiakans may feel at acceding to his request.⁶ In this manner he manipulates them to act in his interests and against their own.

Alkinoos is not the most welcoming of hosts. It has been observed that he has already violated one of the unwritten rules of hospitality: he has

⁵ Just so, argues McDermott (op. cit., pp. 36-40), does Euripides manipulate the emotions of his audience, subtly hinting at the impending destruction of Medeia's children, then suggesting that it is only the adults who will be the targets of Medeia's revenge. When she states clearly that she will kill them (Euripides, Medeia 792-93), the shock to the audience at this apparent addition to the tradition would have been great. However, McDermott's argument that Euripides adapted the mythic material available to him, adding the detail of Medeia having murdered her own children (McDermott, op. cit., pp. 9-24) is disputed by Johnston. She contends that the infanticide was not invented by any fifth century writer, but evolved out of a variant on the original myth (Sarah Iles Johnston, "Corinthian Medea and the cult of Hera Akraia", in James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (edd.), Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997], pp. 62-67).

⁶ Nancy Felson-Rubin, Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 99

asked Odysseus his identity before he has eaten (*ibid.*, 7.199-206).⁷ He also fails to respond immediately when the suppliant Odysseus seats himself in the ashes beside the hearth; he has to be prompted by the aged Ekheneos (*ibid.*, 7.153-60). This is a public slight to Alkinoos, who should have known the correct procedure (after all, Ekheneos is fully aware of the established custom).⁸ The audience too would have been familiar with the accepted response to Odysseus' actions, and Homer has even provided a paradigm in the Telemachy (e.g. Nestor: 3.33-42, 69-70; Menelaos: 4.26-36, 60-63).⁹ Odysseus later expatiates on the responsibility of the host to protect his guest, subtly reminding Alkinoos of his obligations (8.207-11). This immediately follows the king's failure to defend him from Euryalos' goading (8.159-64). Surely Odysseus would have been justified in fearing that Alkinoos may fail in the primary responsibility of the host, to provide his guest with safe passage. Why is Alkinoos so wary? Tebben postulates that Alkinoos, responsible for the security of his people, is careful to assess what danger Odysseus may pose to the Phaeacians before welcoming him as a guest-friend. His apparent fumbling at the beginning of their relationship is

⁷ So argues Gilbert Rose, "The unfriendly Phaeacians", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* C (1969), p. 396; Glenn Most ("Structure and function of Odysseus' *Apologoi*", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* CXIX [1989], p. 27) follows him. G.J. de Vries ("Phaeacian manners", *Mnemosyne* XXX [1970], p. 116) disagrees, but his arguments lack conviction.

⁸ Stanford (*Odyssey* p. 326 on v. 155) acknowledges that the effect of the pause after Odysseus' supplication must have been his (and the audience's) uncertainty about the response of Arete and Alkinoos. De Vries (*op. cit.*, p. 116) allows that Alkinoos has lapsed from the accepted standards of hospitality by not responding immediately; however, he still refuses to see this lapse as a comment on Alkinoos' failure to conform to the accepted standards of civilised behaviour, with the obvious implications concerning Odysseus' perceptions of his chances of success. Might such an inconsistency suggest some haste in the writing of his article?

⁹ Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 394-95

a result of the king's caution.¹⁰ Once Alkinoos accepts Odysseus as a traveller who poses no threat to his people, he gives him gifts, in order to cement their new relationship. Far from showing incompetence, Tebben argues persuasively, Alkinoos demonstrates guile and forethought in his handling of a potentially dangerous situation.¹¹ Alkinoos' apparent failure to protect Odysseus from the taunts of Euryalos may be significant. As Tebben points out,¹² Odysseus' reaction to Euryalos' challenge, his demonstration of not only his physical ability but also his courteous restraint towards his host (*ibid.*, 8.186-211), reassures Alkinoos of the stranger's intentions and grace. Only now does Alkinoos comment on the goading of Euryalos (*ibid.*, 8.238-40), and later prompt the Phaiekan to make both an apology and a gift (*ibid.*, 8.396-97). The words of Euryalos serve Alkinoos well in his trial of the stranger. May it not be possible that Euryalos challenges Odysseus to compete with the approval of the king, perhaps even at his prompting? Obviously, and understandably, the king considers a human threat more pressing than one from Poseidon.

Odysseus too is wary of the Phaiekans. A stranger alone in an alien land, dependent on his hosts for his survival, he behaves with caution, aware that he is being judged. His every word, every move is carefully calculated. He cannot afford to be regarded as a threat to Phaiekan security: he does not dare to reveal his name too early, as that would identify him as a warrior, one moreover with a reputation for wiliness. Nor can he demonstrate too great prowess in athletics: he is careful not to compete against the son of Alkinoos (*ibid.*, 8.207-11), but demonstrates enough ability not to disgrace himself to his hosts (*ibid.*, 8.186-98). He cannot be

¹⁰ Joseph R. Tebben, "Alkinoos and Phaiakian security", *Symbolae Osloenses* LXVI (1991), p. 33

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36

certain that he will be trusted, will be returned to his home safely. That he has distrusted the promises made to him by the Phaiekans is amply demonstrated by his railing against their supposed perfidy in failing to convey him home as they had promised, when he does not recognise Ithake immediately on his awakening (*ibid.*, 13.204-06, 209-212);¹³ certainly there is no evidence that his memories of Skheria are totally pleasant.¹⁴ Alkinoos has, by the time of Odysseus' narration, already given an undertaking to convey him to his homeland; but Homer is at pains, through these earlier violations, and through Alkinoos' relation of the prophecy of Poseidon's revenge, to indicate the possibility that the king may change his mind. Also, Odysseus has been assured by both Nausikaa and the disguised Athene that Arete's consent is necessary before he will be conveyed home. Athene repeats Nausikaa's warning almost word-for-word (*ibid.*, 6.312-15, 7.75-77).¹⁵ It is not until two days later that Arete gives Odysseus a gift (*ibid.*, 8.438-42) and calls him her guest-friend (*ibid.*, 11.338). Despite Alkinoos' assurances, Odysseus, a stranger in an alien land, must have been apprehensive that the decision may not have been Alkinoos' to make.¹⁶ This

¹³ As justly observed by Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

¹⁴ Despite Charles Segal ("The Phaeacians and the symbolism of Odysseus' return", *Arion* I.4 [Winter 1962], p. 32), who argues that Skheria marks a point of transition from Odysseus' suspension on Ogygia to his full involvement in political affairs on Ithake (see esp. p. 22).

¹⁵ Perhaps this warning is the justification for her otherwise inexplicable assertion that she was responsible for the friendliness of all the Phaiekans towards her favourite (*Odyssey* 13.302). It is interesting that she should claim responsibility for such dubious friendship.

¹⁶ It is difficult to concur here with Rose, who sees Arete's position in Phaiekan society as further proof of Alkinoos' ineptitude as a leader (*op. cit.*, p. 397). This is an alien land, a fantasy world, which bears some resemblance to Greece, but whose people do not behave under exactly the same constraints as Greeks: witness their ability to sail the oceans without effort or danger (*Odyssey* 8.557-63) and their never-failing supply of ripe fruit (*ibid.*, 7.117-18). That a queen, particularly a queen of such lineage, should have authority

is surely reason enough for such discursive eloquence. His narration of his encounter with the Kyklops could be interpreted as a warning to the Phaiekans: Odysseus has incurred the unyielding enmity of Poseidon (through the curse of Polyphemos - *ibid.*, 9.528-35), the very god who, according to the prophecy, will punish the Phaiekans for their practice of conveying suppliants home (*ibid.*, 8.564-69). The wily Odysseus, however, manages even here to insert a subtle warning of another kind. In his description of the blinding of Polyphemos, he is indicating to his audience how those who scorn the rights of suppliants may be punished.¹⁷ The Phaiekans certainly have reason to fear the wrath of Poseidon; however, they are well aware of the primacy of Zeus (*vide* Nausikaa's acknowledgment - *ibid.*, 6.187-88, 207 - and that of Alkinoos - 7.180-1). The ὕβρις of which Polyphemos was guilty, and for which he was so severely

over men, a queen who could even claim a man as her ξείνος (*ibid.*, 11.338), would surely have indicated to the Greek mind the exoticism of this culture, not the ineptitude of the king. Rose's comment reveals more about the time and culture in which he wrote than about the milieu of the Phaiekan king. On the other hand, Arete's authority must not be inconsistent with the rest of the Phaiekan episode; it cannot be merely a foreshadowing of the power of Penelope (despite Steven Lowenstam, *The Scepter and the Spear: Studies on Forms of Repetition in the Homeric Poems* [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993], pp. 214-16), although it is probable that this function of the figure of Arete is an important though minor theme.

¹⁷ Odysseus may present himself as the agent of the rightful and divinely sanctioned punishment of one who defies the canons of civilised behaviour, but, as Clay (*op. cit.*, p. 121) points out, the gods are unlikely to concur with him in his interpretation of events. Odysseus has, after all, carried out this punishment entirely by means of human cunning, without requesting or receiving divine assistance (*ibid.*, p. 125). His supplication, too, was not inspired by necessity, but by a deliberate decision to investigate this island, and to meet the inhabitant of the cave. Olson is right: Odysseus has behaved as a pirate in his dealings with Polyphemos, in that he loots the cave in the owner's absence, and the deaths of his men are a result of his wish to obtain a guest-gift (Olson, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53). No wonder Odysseus is at pains to emphasise his daring and intelligence.

punished (even if by a mortal), is not an example which the Phaeacians would wish to use as a guide for their own actions.¹⁸

Odysseus also delays telling the Phaeacians his identity, pointedly sidestepping Arete's direct question (*ibid.*, 7.237-39) until he can be sure that his name will not be received with enmity. After all, these people are the descendants of Poseidon, and therefore related to the Cyclopes that he has blinded (*ibid.*, 7.56-68; cf. 9.382-90, 502-05). Also, his reputation has gone before him: renown for being a wily schemer would not recommend a guest to his host. Odysseus tests the reaction to his identity by asking Demodokos to sing of the ruse of the wooden horse, in which the bard must praise the author of the stratagem (*ibid.*, 8.492-95). As Tebben observes, he sets up a situation in which he may test the knowledge of the Phaeacians concerning the Trojan war, and in which he may reveal his name.¹⁹ Only after this story is received well by the Phaeacians does Odysseus reveal his name (*ibid.*, 9.19-20). This delay, then, is occasioned by Odysseus' well-founded apprehension, not by his tacit refusal to assimilate,²⁰ nor is it merely a stylistic device to foreshadow the very real need Odysseus will have to dissimulate on his arrival in Ithake.²¹

¹⁸ As noted by John Peradotto, Man in the Middle Voice: Name and Narration in the *Odyssey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 91.

¹⁹ Tebben, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40. This very reasonable interpretation makes Paton's refusal to accept that Odysseus would actually ask Demodokos to sing a song which would move him to tears somewhat risible (W.R. Paton, "Book VIII of the *Odyssey*", Classical Review XXVI [1912], p. 215).

²⁰ Despite Segal, "Phaeacians", p. 28.

²¹ Steven Lowenstam (*op. cit.*, p. 220) is probably not entirely wrong: Odysseus' anxiety on Skheria does anticipate the same emotion during his early days on Ithake. However, to say that he has no reason for concealment on Skheria (*ibid.*, p. 212) is wrong.

As well, there are many hints about a possible marriage between himself and Nausikaa.²² He could be excused a certain apprehension that Alkinoos may plan to delay his departure indefinitely, like Kirke and especially Kalypso, the story of whose encounter with Odysseus is used to frame his narration (*ibid.*, 9.29-30, 12.447-50), an emphatic position underscoring his gentle but decisive refusal of Nausikaa's implicit and Alkinoos' explicit offer.²³ In fact, Alkinoos has already delayed his departure several times - he calls a meeting to discuss the matter (*ibid.*, 7.189-98 and 8.28-33), then later he asks Odysseus to stay and promises that he will be given conveyance on the next day (*ibid.*, 7.311-14 and 317-18).²⁴ In great detail, Odysseus relates the story told by the shade of Agamemnon of his murder at the hands of Klytaimestra (*ibid.*, 11.406-30), probably in an attempt to elicit pity from his audience: by taking him home, they could help him avoid just such a fate.²⁵ One notes that the story of his encounter

²² e.g. on Nausikaa's eligibility - *Odyssey* 6.271, 34-35, 66-67, 109, 158-59, 181-85. She hints that she would not be displeased if he were to be her husband, both to her companions (*ibid.*, 6. 244-45) and to him (*ibid.*, 6.276-84). Her father openly offers her hand (*ibid.*, 7.311-15). Tebben suggests, persuasively, that Alkinoos' offer is made to discover the intentions of Odysseus; he considers the offer to be part of the king's testing of the stranger, to see if he has any hopes of making his home among the Phaiakans, and so have an ulterior motive in coming to Skheria (*ibid.*, 7.311-15). Alkinoos' use of infinitives indicates that the king sees the marriage as, at best, a remote possibility. Odysseus' guarded reply, not mentioning the marriage offer, but emphasising his wish to return home, simultaneously flatters and reassures (*ibid.*, 7.331-33; Tebben, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34). Paton, however, postulates that the present text is a variation on an original in which Odysseus and Nausikaa were married, and detects residual traces of this putative original in book 8, the main part of which, he claims, is a description of their wedding (Paton, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-16). This argument, while inventive, strains the evidence beyond what is reasonable.

²³ Most argues persuasively that the prominence Odysseus gives to his steadfast refusal of Kalypso's flattering blandishments (*Odyssey* 7.253-60) is a subtle but deliberate refusal of Nausikaa's hand (Most, *op. cit.*, p. 29).

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 27-28

²⁵ As Felson-Rubin incisively comments: *op. cit.*, 100.

with the shade of Agamemnon is related after Arete's suggestion that Odysseus not be sent home immediately but that his departure should be delayed until he has been given more gifts (*ibid.*, 11. 339-40), and Alkinoos' command that his guest remain until the next day (*ibid.*, 11. 350-52). Odysseus graciously replies that he would be happy to stay even for a year (*ibid.*, 11. 356), but indirectly indicates his impatience for departure through the story of the fate of Agamemnon, and the implicit suggestion that such danger may await him. Already he has described his conversation with the shade of his own mother, and her comment that as yet Penelope has not chosen to remarry - σόν δ' οὐ πώ τις ἔχει καλὸν γέρας (up to this time, no-one has possession of your noble honour - *ibid.*, 11.184). Agamemnon himself is made to emphasise that, though Penelope appeared to be faithful, many years have passed and women should not be trusted (*ibid.*, 11.444-49; cf. 441, 455-56). Odysseus is exercising all his considerable narrative skill (recognised by Alkinoos - *ibid.*, 11.368-69) to persuade the Phaiakans to send him home immediately, to act with generosity. That generosity is self-sacrificing indeed: on its return from setting Odysseus on Ithake, the ship is turned to stone by Poseidon (*ibid.*, 13.161-64).²⁶ Odysseus, of course, is

²⁶ At the poet's last mention of the Phaiakans, the remainder of the sentence is still pending. Zeus himself has suggested the refinement of turning the ship to stone before the eyes of the people on shore (*Odyssey* 13.155-58); Poseidon had originally planned only to destroy the vessel (*ibid.*, 150-51). Poseidon's further intention, which receives prompt agreement from Zeus, is μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πύλε ἀμφικαλύψαι (*ibid.*, 13.152). This probably does not mean that he wishes to cover the city with a huge mountain, but that he wants to shut it in, that is, block the harbours and therefore its access to the sea (Peradotto, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78 n. 18). Stanford (*Odyssey*, p. 347 on 8.569) is, however, in error: this prophecy does not come to fruition in 13.159 ff., or indeed in the text at all. We have instead the expressed intention of Poseidon, and the agreement of Zeus. (Poseidon is wise to seek Zeus' approval, and to carry out his suggestions, as Zeus is quite ready to punish his brother severely for any transgressions - *Iliad* 15.222-28.) The Phaiakans, when they see the disaster overtake their ship, know what to expect next (*Odyssey* 13.177), and desperately seek to propitiate Poseidon (*ibid.*, 13.179-87). On the outcome the poet gives no information:

ignorant of their fate; but he cannot have been ignorant of the risk he was asking the Phaeians to take.

Orestes, too, plans to use supplication to force Aigisthos to give him the opportunity to avenge his father. To kill Klytaimestra and Aigisthos he must gain access to the house, but not as Orestes, for that would precipitate his own murder. Instead, he must use deception. His intention is to proceed, disguised as an alien, to the outer gate, where he expects to be welcomed into the house (Aiskhylos, Libation Bearers 560-62). If he is not treated as a guest-friend, he will take up the pose of a suppliant, so that the public comment the sight of an unsuccessful suppliant must excite would shame Aigisthos into complying with tradition and inviting the "stranger" inside (ibid., 565-70). As the play proceeds, the audience discovers that such measures are unnecessary: Klytaimestra invites Orestes and Pylades inside without hesitation (ibid., 668-71).²⁷ However, the use of supplication to manipulate Aigisthos to take an action to his own disadvantage is part of Orestes' contingency plan. Like Medea, Orestes wants revenge; like Medea, he is prepared to lie to his intended victim (even if only by gesture) in order to secure that revenge. This is manipulative supplication, but, according to the motives of the character, justifiable.

The Danaids, too, are not slow to use manipulative tactics to enforce the outcome they desire. They supplicate the gods, and especially Zeus, that

one may infer, indeed is expected to infer, that Poseidon's plan is carried out. Thus Zeus, the protector of suppliants, is seen to be an accessory in the punishment of people who have given succour to a suppliant.

²⁷ Her invitation is without hesitation, and couched in acceptable, even pious terms. She has not even discovered the stranger's message yet. However, as Garvie points out, her brief speech does hint at other meanings, and less generous motives. Agamemnon too received a welcome, and a bath, such as is offered to Orestes (Garvie, op. cit., p. 229 on v. 673).

they may be saved from a distasteful alliance (Aiskhylos, Suppliants 77-90). However, in case their plea is not successful, they issue a threat: if their appeal is rejected, they will supplicate Hades, thereby exposing Zeus to the charge of injustice (ibid., 154-61, 168-74). This threat parallels that later made against Pelasgos. When the king does not instantly offer succour to the suppliants, they attempt to convince him that justice is on their side (ibid., e.g. 395-96, 405-06, 418-22). When he is still uncertain, they present their culminating argument, a threat of suicide, given emphasis by its presentation in stichomythia, contrasting markedly with the longer speeches both preceding and following this section. They will use their girdles and breast-girdles to hang themselves from the statues of the gods at which they are suppliants (ibid., 455-67). This threat has the intended effect of horrifying Pelasgos. These are not helpless suppliants. Indeed, in their opening speech they announce that they have come to Argos

σὺν τοῖσδ' ἴκετῶν ἐγχειριδίαις

ἐριστέπτοισι κλάδοισιν (ibid., 21-22)

Johansen and Whittle argue persuasively that ἐγχειριδίαις is here unlikely to mean "thing held in the hand", its obvious etymological meaning, since in Herodotos and Attic prose of the period it always means "hand-knife" or "short sword". Thus the two verses would mean "with the weapons of the suppliants, branches twined with wool". Their suggestion that ἐγχειριδίαις also looks forward to the future, when they will stab their bridegrooms to death with daggers on their wedding night,²⁸ is not without attraction.²⁹ Here, then, we have a party of apparently helpless suppliants, making of

²⁸ The audience would have been well aware of the rest of the story, that the Danaids are eventually forced to marry their cousins, only to escape through the murder of their husbands. It must have been piquant to see these future killers as apparently helpless suppliants; however, the indications of the suppliants' resolution and ruthlessness would have confirmed the audience's prior knowledge about their character.

²⁹ Johansen and Whittle, op. cit., vol. 2 p. 21-22 on v. 21

their very helplessness and the symbols that indicate it a powerful weapon used to enforce compliance with their plea, and even announcing their willingness to do so at the very beginning of their supplication.³⁰ Danaos' instructions to his daughters concerning the proper demeanour of the suppliant (*ibid.*, 191-203) are ironic: these women have already indicated that they are anything but meek and submissive³¹ (indeed their very repudiation of the marriage with their cousins demonstrates this), and their threat to Pelasgos that they will pollute the altar with their suicide (*ibid.*, 455-67) is the very opposite of σωφροσύνη (*ibid.*, 198). Certainly, this is manipulative supplication.

The suppliant as protector

The purpose of supplication in Sophokles' *Aias* is without parallel. Menelaos has indicated that he intends to forbid the burial of his enemy Aias, who has committed suicide. Teukros, the brother of the dead man, instructs Aias' son to clasp the corpse of his father as a suppliant, holding locks of hair from the child's mother, uncle and himself (Sophokles, *Aias* 1171-75). The idea of supplication is emphasised strongly: the word or its synonym is used three times in four lines. The purpose of the supplication, Teukros asserts, is to protect the body from desecration (*ibid.*, 1180-81). Usually suppliants sought refuge in a sacred place, and were assimilated into the sacred by their contact with it. Here, the suppliant crouches near an object which is in itself not sacred, is indeed threatened with profanation. The act is intended to protect not only (or even primarily) the suppliant, as is the usual intention, but the corpse, the place of supplication,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2 p. 37

³¹ Kitto makes the interesting comment that the strength and assertiveness of the Danaids may have been central to the entire trilogy; how well, he asks, do the Danaids understand and accept the laws of Zeus, to which they make such insistent appeal? (Kitto, *op. cit.*, p. 7)

as well.³² It is not the holy place which gives protection, but the ritual, divorced (physically at least) from the holy. The ritual itself appears to confer sanctity on its place of enactment,³³ and is devised by Teukros for that very purpose. Nowhere else in Greek literature does the act of supplication have this power. This point, curiously, is missed by W.B. Stanford, who merely notes that Aias' son and wife stand beside the body in silent grief.³⁴ Kamerbeek, too, though he notes the dual purpose of the supplicatory gesture, fails to remark the singularity of this situation.³⁵ Teukros does promise his curse on any who violate this singular supplication (*ibid.*, 1175-79). Perhaps his trust in the efficacy of the ritual in these circumstances is less than complete. Certainly when he sees that Agamemnon is approaching, he hurries to rejoin his nephew in his vigil (*ibid.*, 1223-25).

The suppliant and justice

Thucydides has the Athenians point out, in an argument aimed at exculpating themselves from charges of improper and impious use of temple grounds, that the altars of the gods are the refuge of those who had committed involuntary crimes (Thucydides 4.98.6). One notes the lack of emphasis on innocence. Indeed, as Walker justly comments, in poetry suppliants were not considered to be subject to the ordinary laws, and do not have to prove their innocence.³⁶ Thucydides would appear to share that understanding about the status of the suppliant. Ion, however, does concern

³² As argued by Peter Burian, *GRBS* 13, p. 154.

³³ On the corpse as a τάφος, see above, pp. 22-23.

³⁴ Stanford, *Sophocles. Ajax*, p. xlvi

³⁵ J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. Part I. The Ajax* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), p. 225 on vv. 1171, 1172

³⁶ Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 173

himself with justice. He notes with obvious distaste the fact that Kreousa kneels at the altar of Apollon, as if she were not about to be punished justly (Euripides, Ion 1280-81; 1315-17). He is correct: she had made an attempt on his life, though the chorus have, in full knowledge of her actions, advised her to seek refuge there as her right (ibid., 1255-56). His readiness to violate the sanctuary offered by the god he serves does, however, initially appear odd, especially given his innocent piety. Blaiklock's interpretation illuminates this difficulty. Having served in the temple for the whole of his brief life, Ion has become like the object of his worship, Apollon, both radiant and quick to seek revenge.³⁷ He has been reared on stories of the god's readiness to avenge any slight - and this stranger has awoken in him painful doubt about his god (ibid., 341; 369-72; 429-34).³⁸ His vehemence, his verbal violence attest to his youthful eagerness to obliterate the person who caused him to doubt, to restore the blind trust which was his. He is young, with the youthful love of justice.³⁹ So it seems unjust to him that the god should be made to shelter not only one who has sought the murder of the god's servant, but who has also attempted to destroy that servant's faith.

The Danaids are told that, though they are suppliants, their case must be judged according to law (Aiskhylos, Suppliants 387-91). They do not enjoy automatic rights merely because they are suppliants. The suppliant Andokides too must submit to a trial (Andokides, On his return 15). The Kylonians were expected to stand trial, and persuaded to leave the temple of Athene for that purpose (Herodotus 5.71.2). Some of the Kerkyraean suppliants were coerced into leaving the temple of Hera in order to stand

³⁷ Blaiklock, op. cit., p. 143

³⁸ Ibid., p. 156

³⁹ Ibid., p. 157

trial (Thucydides 3.81.2). In the last two cases, it appears that the promise of a trial was made in order to trick the suppliants into abandoning their suppliant status, and the protection it afforded; as a result of their leaving their sanctuaries, they were killed. However, the idea that they were still subject to justice does not seem to have been regarded as unreasonable: the supplication had, at least, prevented their being murdered without any investigation of their criminality, or any chance to plead innocence or mitigating circumstances.

Worthy of note is the regulation barring those accused of murder from entering sacred premises (Constitution of the Athenians 57.4), presumably lest they seek sanctuary (as well as avoiding the pollution of sacred areas). As well, the tomb of Theseus was said to be a sanctuary for runaway slaves⁴⁰ and for the poor and downtrodden (Plutarch, Theseus 36). Thus the use of shrines as sanctuary would seem to be limited to those who might become victims of society's regulations; of course, this probably reflects the aristocratic bias of the sources. In practice, whatever the common understanding of the function of shrines, their use for shelter in times of unrest, or by those accused of capital crimes, was inevitable.

Conclusion

People became suppliants for many reasons. Typically, they feared for their lives, or those of people close to them. A desire for revenge also motivated some desperate individuals; this could prompt the supplication of

⁴⁰ In an interesting article, Kerry Christensen describes how Athens resolved the dilemma between two contradictory institutions, slavery and the right to sanctuary. For slave suppliants at the Theseion, the prize for which they fled to refuge was not freedom, but sale to a new master. In this way, the tomb allowed abused slaves to seek relief, without overturning the institution of slavery (Kerry A. Christensen, "The Thesion: a slave refuge", American Journal of Ancient History IX [1984], pp. 23-32).

intended allies, or of the intended victims. In one unparalleled case, a suppliant acts as a protector of the supplicated!

Supplication is inherently manipulative. It is not surprising therefore that suppliants should use the ritual to manipulate situations to their advantage. Both Ephialtes and the anonymous man from Argilos used deceitful supplication in order to attain a desired result. Others used the ritual to coerce others into acting to their own disadvantage. In this way Medeia supplicates Kreon, Odysseus supplicates Alkinoos and Arete, and Orestes intends to supplicate Aigisthos.

Not surprisingly, those alienated from their society also resorted to supplication. The poor and slaves took refuge at holy sites. As well, fugitives from justice sought sanctuary; innocence was not a criterion for supplication. It is not remarkable, therefore, that, in Athens at least, there should be legislation aimed at preventing those accused of murder from entering temples. This was probably an attempt to "civilise" supplication, to make an old ritual fit into civil life, with its preoccupation with another kind of justice.