RITUALISED FRIENDSHIP AND THE GREEK CITY

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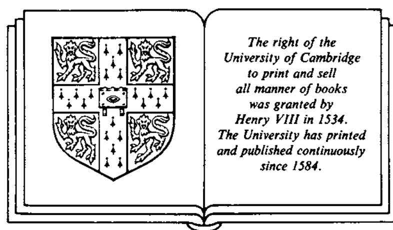

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1

INTRODUCTION

Two mighty heroes of the Homeric Iliad, Diomedes and Glaukos, were about to engage in fierce combat when they suddenly came to recognise that their grandfathers were bound by *xenia*. *Xenia* (*xenie*, *xeineie* or *xeinie* in various dialects) was the Greek term for a social institution which, in the absence of a familiar parallel, historians today render by the awkward neologism 'guest-friendship'. Diomedes was pleasantly surprised at the revelation, drove his spear into the earth, and spoke to his former rival in a friendly tone, saying, among other things:

...Therefore I am your friend and host (*xeinos philos*) in the heart of Argos;
you are mine in Lykia, when I come to your country.
Let us avoid each other's spears, even in close fighting.
There are plenty of Trojans and famed companions in battle for me
to kill, whom the gods send me, or those I run down with my swift feet,
many Achaians for you to slaughter, if you can do it.
But let us exchange our armour, so that these others may know
how we claim to be guests and friends from the days of our fathers (*xeinoi patroioi*).[1]

Later on, in the Classical world of the cities, diametrically opposed views could be pronounced on precisely the same issue. In the course of a Spartan campaign in Asia Minor in 394 B.C., the Persian satrap Pharnabazos reproached King Agesilaos of Sparta for having ravaged his private estates. He complained that Agesilaos had breached the duties of friendship. For he, Pharnabazos, had been a friend and ally of Sparta, had provided her with money, and had fought on the side of Agesilaos against a common enemy. Agesilaos should have repaid him with favours instead of wronging him. The thirty Spartiatae who accompanied Agesilaos were filled with shame at hearing this rebuke. Agesilaos, however, by a stroke of diplomacy disclaimed all personal responsibility and pleaded *force majeure*:

I think you know, Pharnabazos, that in the Greek states, also, men become *xenoi* of one another. But these men, when their states come to war, fight with their fatherlands even against their *xenoi*, and if it so happens, sometimes even kill one another. And so we today, being at war with your king, are constrained to regard all that is his as hostile; as for yourself, however, we should prize it above everything to become friends (*philoi*) of yours.[2]

[1] *Iliad* 6.224ff., translated by R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (1951).

[2] Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.1.34-5; unless stated otherwise, all translations are adapted from the Loeb series.

Only very rarely do ancient records offer such a point of vantage from which to observe perceptions of social obligations in worlds as different yet as intimately interconnected as the world of the epic poet and the world of the Greek city. Crudely, the contrast can be stated thus: Diomedes and Glaukos could exercise the rights and duties of guest-friendship freely. Agesilaos and Pharnabazos could not; they *had* to take into consideration a third, intrusive and disturbing factor, the *polis*.

A more refined explanation of this contrast will introduce us to a set of problems inherent in the civic system from its very beginning and yet almost totally ignored in modern historical research.

That the obligations of guest-friendship should be set above all other obligations was for the epic poet a part of the natural order of things. It was this assumption which allowed him to construct the situation that appears implausible to us: Diomedes and Glaukos would be friends, but their associates could continue fighting; they would avoid each other in battle, but might kill each other's fellow-warriors. There was nothing strange or immoral about this. For the poet, adherence to the code of guest-friendship was a supreme manifestation of the hero's free exercise of prowess. There was, in his world, neither overlord to demand feudal allegiance, nor communal group to claim social responsibility. The hero, the supreme pinnacle of a small social pyramid, was under no involuntary obligation to anyone; the guest-friendships he contracted were his own private affair.

But the community tamed the hero, and transformed him into a citizen. The citizen was an entirely new creation – a social type subjected to compulsory regulations. It was this power of the community to restrict individual action that provided Agesilaos with his excuse. Agesilaos invoked the communal principle, the doctrine that obligations towards the community should override all other obligations. Civic obligations had come to take priority even over guest-friendship: *xenoi* who were citizens had to fight on behalf of their cities even at the risk of killing each other. This was an obligation of a totally different, hitherto unknown order. For, unlike the obligations of guest-friendship, which arose only from morality, civic obligations were legally enforceable. And guest-friends who were citizens could sometimes find themselves accused of treason, brought to trial, banished or executed. The one-time hero thus became trapped in a severe conflict – a conflict which could only be resolved by means of painful compromises.

We are dealing not with isolated and peripheral exceptions, but with patterns recurring at the very heart of the civic system, conflicts from which ideas flowed and actions evolved. Both Agesilaos' argument, claiming prior-

ity for the civic principle, and Pharnabazos' bitter reproach, drawing its justification from a code of personal loyalty, find echoes in numerous examples from the world of the Greek *polis* itself. A few well-known cases will serve to demonstrate this proposition and pave the way for the formulation of the main arguments of this study.

Perikles in 431 B.C. foresaw the Spartan invasion of Attica and thought it necessary to reassure the Athenian assembly that his personal bond of *xenia* with King Archidamos of Sparta would not be harmful to Athenian interests. He anticipated that the Spartan king might ravage most of Attica but spare his own estates, either as a favour to a *xenos* or as an act of malice intended to stir up prejudice against himself among the Athenian *demos*. To avoid such embarrassment, and a possible public scandal, which in turn could have jeopardised his position of leadership, Perikles converted his private estates into public property.[3] The other side of the coin – the dilemma which confronted King Archidamos – has not left such clear traces in the historical record. But, as we shall see (Section 5.5), it could not have been very different from the dilemma of his Athenian partner, even if his answer to it was somewhat different.

Indeed, patriotism and guest-friendship would sometimes appear as antithetical principles structuring the dialectics of political rivalries. Demosthenes, for example, while priding himself on having preferred the common interest of Greece to the gifts and *xenia* of Philip of Macedon, accused Aeschines of having put his (that is, Aeschines') *xenia* and *philia* with Philip above the fate of the city.[4] Two competing moral systems were involved: one archaic and pre-political, and the other stemming from the *polis* structure. It was by no means clear which one would exercise the stronger appeal on the minds of the citizens. Aeschines alleged – or perhaps insinuated – that Demosthenes was guilty of an impious crime: in the name of the city, Demosthenes had arrested, tortured and put to death one of his own *xenoi*, a man whose only crime was to have come to Athens to purchase goods for the queen of Macedonia. Demosthenes retorted by saying that as a matter of fact the man was a Macedonian spy; by executing him, he had merely "held the city's salt as more important than the table of his own *xenos*". If we are to believe Aeschines, the citizens and foreigners in the assembly raised a cry of protest at this remark: the duties of guest-friendship were deemed more

[3] Thucydides 2.13.

[4] Demosthenes 18.109 (*On the Crown*) and 19.248 (*De Falsa Legatione*); cf. Demosthenes 18.284.

binding than those of citizenship.[5] The law of Athens would seem in this respect distinct from the morals of its inhabitants.

Is this a safe inference? Certainty is impossible: it cannot be ruled out that Aeschines, when commenting on the protest of the crowd, was lying. But there are other signs pointing to the same conclusion. Much still remains obscure about the fifth-century treaty between the small Locrian states of Oeanthea and Chaleon concerning the procedures by which the citizens of Chaleon were to be judged in Oeanthea.[6] But one section of the inscription is sufficiently clear to allow a compelling interpretation. It provides that if the officials (*xenodikai*) trying the suit of a foreigner (*xenos*) from Chaleon disagree, the foreigner can select a new body of men from among the Oeantheans. Only one restriction is imposed on his freedom of choice: he may choose neither a *proxenos* of his own community nor a guest-friend (*widioxenos*) of his own to act as judges in his trial.[7] These men were excluded since, clearly, they were believed to be prejudiced in the foreigner's favour on account of their special relationships with him. And such favouritism was incompatible with the principles which governed communal life. Outside the city, or before the city arose, it was one of the most sacrosanct duties of a *xenos* to succour his partner in distress or misfortune. But now this duty clashed with the communal principle of justice, and the community had to assert its precedence lest its essential principles be subverted. The archaic morality of guest-friendship could not be reconciled with communal justice.

The same conflict between old and new, individual and community, morality and law, guest-friendship and citizenship, would manifest itself in different guises in different situations. The Athenian Xenophon was invited by a guest-friend, the Boeotian Proxenos, to join the forces of Cyrus the younger and to become Cyrus' friend. But Socrates warned Xenophon that by becoming a friend of Cyrus, Xenophon might bring upon himself accusations of betrayal from his fellow-citizens. For Cyrus was known to have given the Spartans aid against Athens. Xenophon's dilemma could only be resolved by consulting the oracle at Delphi. In the end, of course, Xenophon joined Cyrus, and it was through this friendship that he became involved in

[5] Aeschines 3.224-5 (*Against Ctesiphon*) and Demosthenes 19.189-90 (*De Falsa Legatione*).

[6] Tod (1933) no. 34; for the latest extensive discussion of the inscription, see Bravo (1980) 890ff.

[7] For the term *widioxenos*, see below p.11 n.3. The connexion between *proxenos* and (*widio*)*xenos* is explained in Section 5.4.

the adventures described in the *Anabasis*. But it was also because of this friendship that he was later exiled from his native Athens.[8]

Even worse was the fate of Ismenias, the leader of the anti-Spartan faction in Thebes. In 382 B.C., the Spartan Phoibidas, acting in concert with Ismenias' political rivals, effected a *coup d'état* in Thebes and set up a government friendly to Sparta. But Phoibidas' action proved the cause of embarrassment for his home government. For one thing, the *coup* was an improvised move, carried out without authorisation from the Spartan *polis*. For another, the forceful occupation of another state constituted a violation of the King's Peace of 386 B.C. of which Sparta herself was a signatory and according to which all Greek states, small and great, were to be autonomous. The occupation, however, proved of great practical value to Sparta, and these considerations had somehow to be brushed aside. A justification was therefore concocted post-factum. The Spartan assembly first let itself be persuaded by Ismenias' Theban opponent, Leontiades, that Thebes had been hostile to Sparta in the past, and that Ismenias was mainly responsible for this. This made it morally possible for the Lacedaemonians not to withdraw their garrison from Thebes and to bring Ismenias to trial. They set up a jury composed of three Lacedaemonian judges and one from each of the allied states. The charges brought against Ismenias were as follows: "that he co-operated with the barbarians; that he had become a *xenos* of the Persian to the detriment of Greece; that he had received a share of the money which came from the King; and that he and Androkleides were chiefly responsible for all the trouble and disorder in Greece".[9] The defence made by Ismenias failed to persuade the court; he was pronounced guilty, and put to death.

Once again, the contrast with the Diomedes-Glaukos encounter is revealing. In the circumstances of that world, a similar incident would have been inconceivable. Even if we allow for a certain amount of idealisation and poetic distortion, we must concede that none of the factors involved in Ismenias' execution is present in the Homeric poems. Not only are they missing, but all we know of Homeric society would militate against any assumption of their existence. Any argument for the implausibility of the Diomedes-Glaukos episode would therefore have to demonstrate the exis-

[8] Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.1.4ff.; cf. Diogenes Laertius 2.58 (= *Anthologia Palatina* 7.98), quoting what appears to be a Corinthian funerary epigram: "Albeit the countrymen of Kraunus and Kekrops condemned thee, Xenophon, to exile on account of thy friend (*philos*) Cyrus, yet hospitable Corinth welcomed thee,...." For different interpretations of these passages in modern research, see below p. 15, n.14.

[9] Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.2.35. Whether or not Ismenias was guilty is irrelevant to the present argument.

tence in that world of a concept of communal interest; of a notion that the community is more important than the individual; of a principle of individual responsibility and accountability; of an agency capable of making and enforcing communal resolutions; and finally, of moral criteria by which guest-friendship can be judged to be 'bad'. In the world of the *polis*, such factors were actively involved in the shaping of events; in the world of the epic poet, they were totally absent. Homeric heroes seemed so completely assured of their dominance, and Homeric communities so completely paralysed in their helplessness, that effectual criticism of the former by the latter was totally out of the question.

The transition from one world to the other was effected by a radical change in social organisation and the concentration of power. In brief, the rulers of the Homeric age were supplanted by self-regulating communities. But this change did not amount to a wholesale transformation. Both inside the city and even more outside it, older social groupings and archaic ideals maintained themselves alongside the new ones with remarkable tenacity. Our incidents form only a very partial reflection of this heritage. The evidence from the age of the cities is in fact replete with similar cases appearing under different guises. To explain the entire process we must formulate a theory which, by means of one simple assumption, will make sense of the hundreds of apparently disparate instances. The theory I propose is this.

When during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. the contours of the city-state were gradually drawn, the ancient world was criss-crossed with an extensive network of personal alliances linking together all sorts of apolitical bodies (households, tribes, bands, etc.). The city framework superimposed itself upon this existing network – superimposed itself upon it, yet did not dissolve it. And when the city finally became established as the dominant form of organisation, dense webs of guest-friendship still stretched beyond its bounds. Overtly or covertly, guest-friendship continued to act as a powerful bond between citizens of different cities and between citizens and members of various apolitical bodies. And by this persistence in the age of the cities, it became involved in actively shaping the value system of the polis *and in formulating some of its most basic concepts and patterns of action.*

It is the aim of this study to explore the various facets, ramifications and consequences of the co-existence of the political communities and the archaic network of personal alliances. Several topics are brought into discussion in order to make this possible. Each follows logically from the one before, and draws on evidence from the period between Homer and the

gradual conquest of the Greek world by the Romans. Some of these topics are so richly documented, and the documentation itself is sometimes so repetitive, that I see no point in citing all the evidence: my generalisations rest therefore on examples which I assume to be typical. Other topics are overlooked in modern research, and, if necessary for the argument, I produce a collection of the relevant material (see mainly the Appendices). In some rare cases I exceed the chronological boundaries defined above and refer to examples from the Roman world: there are no good grounds to believe that guest-friendship underwent significant changes even in this period. Below I outline the main topics.

With one notable exception,[10] what has traditionally been labelled in modern scholarship as 'guest-friendship' is beset with misapprehensions. I argue that *xenia* can be located within the wider category of social relations known to anthropologists as 'ritualised personal relations'. It will then appear that details which in the absence of a suitable model have been divorced from each other (for example, the ritual of initiation, the naming of one's son after one's *xenos*, the exchange of resources across political boundaries) are in fact different manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon. What emerges at the end of this enquiry is a social institution with clear boundaries, well-defined rules, and a remarkable degree of internal cohesion – an institution which appears at first sight queer and implausible but ceases to be so once we view it in the light of similar institutions from other cultures. Indeed, to contemporaries this institution seemed self-evident even to the extent that they employed it as a metaphor for expressing their perceptions of the world. One of the side issues pursued throughout this study is the logic underlying this symbolism (see mainly the Figures).

I then explore the interaction between the city and guest-friendship at the level of ideas. Some of the most basic concepts of the city-state emerged out of the superimposition of the communal structure upon the pre-state networks of guest-friendship. For example, when seen from the perspective of the community, gift-exchange with an outsider – the essential characteristic of guest-friendship – could appear as bribery. The antithetical notion of abstinence from accepting gifts became the mark of the ideal citizen. To turn this negation of heroic virtues into a term of praise and to offer communal interest as a new standard of individual morality was probably one of the most significant victories of the community over the hero. The hero, however, remained in some respects untamed. The external ties of guest-friendship acted as a repository of heroic values, and disillusioned aristoc-

[10] Finley (1977) 100ff.

rats could always trust a friend abroad for assistance in their political struggles and refuge in defeat. Such behaviour, of course, appeared from the communal point of view as 'treachery'. Unlike its modern counterpart, however, the ancient concept of treachery was backed by a 'positive' ethos. The acts for which Alkibiades became known as the archetypal traitor in history were in fact consistent with the archaic, pre-state ideals of guest-friendship. Paradoxically, too, it was this archaic institution which provided the city with a model of its relationships with the outside world. The concepts, outlook and symbols of guest-friendship were transferred from the personal level to the level of the whole community and, invested with new meanings, they provided the city with a framework for interacting with foreign individuals and communities.

Guest-friendship served as a device for the promotion of the material and political interests of the elites engaged in it. Individuals integrated into politically separated communities exchanged substantial amounts of wealth and performed significant services for each other. Once we reveal the dynamics of these networks, it becomes apparent that the elites of the ancient world were not confined to the boundaries of their immediate communities (whether this be a city, a tribe, a petty kingdom or a Persian satrapal court). On the contrary, they participated at one and the same time both in these networks and in their immediate communities. Power, prestige and resources that could be acquired through one system could readily be transferred to the other, and at times the horizontal ties of solidarity which linked together the elites of separate communities were stronger than the vertical ties which bound them to the inferiors within their own communities.

Outside the city, guest-friendship functioned as a major device in the formation of the ruling circles of the great territorial empires. The Persian *syngeneis*, Macedonian *hetairoi*, and Hellenistic *philoi* were all composed of a narrow core of kin and a wide periphery of guest-friends drawn from an astonishing variety of localities. I explore the process of their recruitment, the structure of the new groups to which they gave rise, and the networks of agents through which they exercised their influence on the Greek city. I finally argue that the attacks of these groups on the Greek city were prompted by and large by the desire to satisfy the personal interests of the guest-friends involved in these groups.

To be able to identify guest-friendship in its manifold manifestations, I propose to employ a rigorous definition. This definition will have to meet three requirements: first, it must encompass all the variants of the archaic bond – variants of which *xenia* is but one example; secondly, it must

separate *xenia* from other, seemingly similar institutions, some of the qualities of which it shares; and, lastly, it must enable us to make controlled comparisons with similar institutions in other cultures. It is mainly in order to meet these requirements that it becomes necessary to introduce the concept of ritualised friendship.