

The dynamics of honour and the enslavement of women

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Abstract/key argument

My aim in this paper is to investigate some gendered dynamics of *timê* through the lens of the captivity of women and their subsequent enslavement. On the one hand, the *timê* of men is predicated on the bodies of captive women; on the other hand, women are fully implicated in this value system in various ways. By looking at how honour is configured in and around the captive woman—by those involved in her enslavement and as focalized through the experiences of the captive woman herself—I hope to show that *timê* was not simply a value associated with a masculine elite but could be operationalized in gendered ways. Notably, this perspective allows us to explore how the intimate labour enslaved women performed within households was also governed by aspects of *timê*.

Some basic assumptions:

1. Anxieties about status change should be a rich site in which to explore notions of *timê*
2. *Timê* was not only a concern of men
3. Enslaved women also made claims to *timê*

Four texts

1. Eur. *Tro.* 634-83 (Loeb trans.)

Greek text: <https://tinyurl.com/pxy7cxaw>

ANDROMACHE: (641): Polyxena, just as if she has never seen the light of day, has perished and knows nothing of her own misfortune. But I, though **I aimed at a good name** (εὐδοξίας) and hit that mark well, failed to hit good fortune. Everything that women have discovered of **modest** behaviour (σώφρον') I practiced diligently in the house of Hector. First, whether or not there is anything blameworthy in a woman's conduct, the very fact that she goes out of the house draws criticism. I let go all longing for this and stayed in the house (ἐν δόμοις). I did not admit within my walls women with their clever talk but was content to have within myself a **good teacher** (διδάσκαλον... χρηστόν), my own mind. When the report of this reached the Greek army, it was my undoing. For when I was taken captive, the son of Achilles wished to make me his wife: I shall be a slave in the house of people who have killed my own kin. If I put my love for Hector out of my mind and open my heart to my present husband, I shall appear disloyal to him who has died. But if I loathe my present husband, I shall incur the hatred of my own master. Yet they say that a single night dispels the hatred a woman feels for her bedmate. **I reject with contempt** (ἀπέπτυσ' αὐτήν) **a woman who casts her former husband aside because of a new connection and loves another**. Why, not even a mare that has been separated from its companion bears the yoke easily. Yet a brute beast lacks speech and reason and is inferior to us in nature. In you beloved Hector, I possessed a husband that sufficed me, great in intelligence, in birth, in wealth, and in courage. You received me as a virgin from my father's house and were the first to yoke my maidenhood in love. And now you are dead, while I am going by ship to Greece as a captive to bear the yoke of slavery (αιχμάλωτος ἐς δοῦλον ζυγόν). Does not Polyxena's death, which you weep for, involve less misery than mine?...

HECUBA: (699): ...But, dear, daughter, think no longer of Hector's fate. Your tears cannot bring him back safe. **Honor instead your present master** (τίμα δὲ τὸν παρόντα δεσπότην σέθεν), giving your husband the enticements of your winning ways...

2. Dem. 19.196-8 (Yunis trans.)

Greek text: <https://tinyurl.com/h9xwchbd>

In comparison with this banquet attended by Satyrus, let's consider another banquet these men attended in Macedon. Observe whether the two cases resemble each other closely. The envoys were invited to the house of Xenophron, the son of Phaedimus who was one of the Thirty Tyrants, and so they went. I did not go. When it came time to commence the drinking, an Olynthian woman was brought in; **she was quite attractive but of free birth and modest** (εὐπρεπὴ μὲν, ἐλευθέραν δὲ καὶ σώφρονα), as the event proved. [197] At first, it seems, according to what Iatrocles told me the next day, the envoys pressured her rather gently to drink and eat a bit of dessert. But as the affair wore on and their spirits grew heated, they kept prodding her to lie on the couch and sing something as well.

The woman became distressed, for she didn't want to sing and wasn't able to (οὐτ' ἐθελούσης οὐτ' ἐπισταμένης), whereupon this man and Phryno, **declaring her behavior an outrage** (ὕβριν), said they would not allow her, a loathsome, accursed Olynthian prisoner of war (αἰχμάλωτον), to put on airs. "Summon a slave (κάλει παῖδα)," they said, and "bring a whip (ἱμᾶντά τις φερέτω)." A servant (οἰκέτης) produced a strap, and, since the men, I believe, were drunk and easily provoked, when she said something and began crying, **the servant ripped off her tunic and flogged her back repeatedly** (περιορήξας τὸν χιτωνίσκον ὁ οἰκέτης ξαίνει κατὰ τοῦ νώτου πολλάς). [198] Beside herself at this dreadful turn of events, the woman jumped up and **fell at the knees** of Iatrocles, upsetting the table. If he hadn't rescued her, she would have been killed by their drunken rage; for this piece of trash is fierce when he drinks. The story of this woman was told even in Arcadia among the Ten Thousand. Diophantus gave you a report about it, which he will be compelled to furnish under oath right now. And there was also much talk of it in Thessaly and elsewhere.

3. Homeric Hymn to Demeter, ll. 119-181 (Nagy trans. slightly modified)

Greek text: <https://tinyurl.com/enbwkne5>

[120] "Phila children! Whoever women you are among the female kind of humans, I wish you *kharis* ['I wish you pleasure and happiness from our relationship, starting now']. I shall tell you. It is not unseemly, since you ask, for me to tell you *alêthea*.

Dôsô is my name. It was given to me by my honored mother (πότνια μήτηρ).

But that was then. I am from Crete, having traveled over the wide stretches of sea against my will. Without my consent, by *biâ*, by duress,

[125] I was **abducted by pirate men** (ἄνδρες ληιστήρες). After a while, sailing with their swift ship, they landed at the harbor of Thorikos. There the ship was boarded by women

of the mainland, many of them. They [the pirates] started preparing dinner next to the prow of the beached ship. But my *thûmos* did not yearn for food, that delight of the mind.

[130] I stole away and set out to travel over the dark earth of the mainland, fleeing my arrogant (σημάντορας) captors. **This way, I stopped them**

from drawing any benefit from my worth without having paid the price (ὄφρα κε μή με ἀπριάτην περάσαντες ἐμῆς ἀποναίατο τιμῆς).

That is how I got here, in the course of all my wanderings. And I do not know what this land is and who live here.

135 But I pray to all the gods who abide on Olympus that you be granted vigorous husbands and that you be able to bear children, in accordance with the wishes of your parents. As for me, young girls, take pity.

To be honest about it, what I want is for you to name for me a house to go to, the house of someone, man or woman, who has *phila* children to be taken care of.

I want to work for them,

140 **honestly.** The kind of work that is cut out for a female who has outlived others her own age.

I could take some newborn baby in my arms,
and nourish him well. I could watch over his house.

I would make his bed in the inner recesses of well-built chambers, the royal bed. And I could teach women their work (ἔργα διδασκίσομαι γυναῖκας)."

145 So spoke the goddess. And she was answered straightaway by the unwed maiden, Kallidikê, the most beautiful of the daughters of Keleos:

"Old Mother, we humans endure the gifts the gods give us, even when we are grieving over what has to be.

They [the gods] are, after all, far better than we are.

What I now say will be clear advice, and I will name for you

150 the men who have the great control, divinely given, of *tîmê* here:

the men who stand at the forefront of the *dêmos* and who protect the citadel of the *polis* with their wise counsel and their straight *dikai*.

And then there are the wives too: of sound-minded Triptolemos, of Dioklos, of Polyxenos, of faultless Eumolpos as well,

155 of Dolikhos, and of our splendid father [Keleos].

The wives of all of these manage the palace.

Of these women, not a single one of them, when they first look at you, would deprive you of *tîmê*, the way you look, and turn you away from the palace.

Rather, they will receive you. For, right now, you look like the gods.

160 If you wish, wait for us, while we go to the palace of our father

and tell our mother, Metaneira with the low-slung waistband,
 all these things from beginning to end, in the hope that she will tell you
 to come to our house and not to seek out the houses of others.
 She has a treasured son, growing up in the well-built palace.
 165 He was born late, after many a prayer for the birth of a son: a great joy to his parents.
 If you nourish him to grow till he reaches the crossing-point of life, coming of age,
 I can predict that you will be the envy of any woman who lays eyes on you.
 That is how much compensation she [Metaneira] would give you in return for raising him
 So she [Kallidikē] spoke. And she [Demeter] nodded her assent. So they,
 170 filling their splendid jars with water, carried it off, looking magnificent.
 Swiftly they came to the great palace of their father, and quickly they told their mother
 what they saw and heard. And she told them
 quickly to go and invite her [Demeter] for whatever wages, no limits,
 and they, much as deer or heifers in the *hōrā* of spring
 175 prance along the meadow, satiating their dispositions as they graze on the grass,
 so also they, hitching up the folds of their lovely dresses,
 dashed along the rutted roadway, their hair flowing
 over their shoulders, looking like crocus blossoms.
 They found the illustrious goddess sitting near the road, just the way
 180 they had left her. Then they led her to the *phila* palace of their father.
 She was walking behind them, sad in her *philon* heart.
 She was wearing a veil on her head, and a long dark robe [*peplos*]
 trailed around the delicate feet of the goddess.

4. PSI 6.667 (C. Ptol. Sklav. 73)

Greek text: <https://tinyurl.com/dmauem3e>

I have exhausted myself by bringing wood and piling it up and I do not wish to run away from you like the other women because they were treated unjustly. Indeed, since I know you are the type that hates wickedness (μισοπόνερος εἶ), I do not do this. Farewell.