

*Martí Duran (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya)*

## HIPPOLYTOS, OR THE NECESSITY OF HAVING INTERCOURSE WITH WOMEN

*Für Bernd Gonner,  
den ich mehr als meine Augen liebe*

The story of Hippolytos, of Phaidra's love for him, and of his unhappy end, was one of the best known of all the legends popularised by the Attic theatre: it is familiar, says Pausanias six centuries later, even to ὄστις βαρβάρων γλώσσαν ἔμαθεν Ἑλλήνων. But despite, or rather because of, his celebrity it took on in its time a number of different forms. The essentials are always the same: Phaidra, wife of Theseus, falls in love with her stepson Hippolytos; when he rebuffs her, she accuses him to Theseus of rape or attempted rape; Theseus prays to Poseidon to kill him, and he is killed; Phaidra herself commits suicide. Hippolytos is also destroyed at the end. But around this traditional framework the fifth-century tragedians constructed three very different plays; and of these three the sole survivor, Euripides' second *Hippolytos*, produced in 428 B. C., was probably the last to be written and certainly the most novel in its treatment of the legend.

Hippolytos offers the image of a young Greek, whose education, in its double form –gymnastic and music–, has converted him into a perfect model of humanity. He likes hunting in forests and breeding horses. At the same time, he plays the lyre. Above all, however, he likes the crown of the great panhellenic games. But this is not all. This son of a hero is an aristocrat, who disregards power and is surrounded by friends, chosen by him, who share his aspirations<sup>1</sup>. His greatest interest is virtue, but for him, σωφροσύνη does not mean moderation and equilibrium: he places it into an absolute chastity. Love scares him as a dirty act, and for him women are enemies. This rigorous asceticism is the last effort of an aristocratic spirit, which finds its pleasure in contemplating itself and feeling removed from the world because of his perfection. This ideal, which is strange to 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian society, appears in Hippolytos as a form of devotion: it is a piety that goes so far that Hippolytos sacrifices his life in order to respect an oath that was taken by surprise. He goes to Athens to attend the Eleusinian mysteries, as an *epoptes*<sup>2</sup>. He is consecrated to Artemis, because as the virgin *par excellence*, she corresponds to his ideal of perfect purity. He not only faithfully follows her law and decorates her altar, but also, in the solitude of the forest, he hears with joy the voice of the goddess. Absolute purity and narrow union with the goddess make us conceive of Hippolytos as a god of virginal youth.

### **A traditional interpretation: Hippolytos as a model of rewarded virtue**

G. E Dimock<sup>3</sup> considers that Euripides' Hippolytos communicates the following: “no goodness of man (or state) can prevent the forces that rule the world from destroying us, if that is the way they

---

<sup>1</sup> V. 1180.

<sup>2</sup> Vv. 952 and following.

<sup>3</sup> YCS, vol. 25, Greek Tragedy, pp. 240-241.

are tending; but that does not mean that men should stop trying to realise the height of goodness in their lives. Even in the midst of ruin, goodness brings its reward. To put it more briefly, Euripides' play *Hippolytos* is an eloquent statement of the proposition that virtue is its own reward".

According to Dimock, even if Hippolytos is destroyed (by horses, as his name suggests), "the myth with which Euripides began is a variant of the 'virtuous youth' story which we see in the Bible in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and in the *Iliad* in the story of Bellerophon and Proetus' wife Anteia. In both those stories the point is that the sexually tempted young man refuses to violate a sacred bond of loyalty to a superior, and as a result eventually survives in some brilliantly successful way the wife's attempt to incriminate him. Heaven rewards him for being good<sup>4</sup>".

An interpretation like this classifies Euripides' *Hippolytos* as "semi-tragic". Only Phaidra is headed for disaster. Hippolytos dies, it is true, but he succeeds in keeping his virtue untouched until the end.

Indeed, according to Dimock, the play opposes the fate of Phaidra to that of Hippolytos. Although both of them are destroyed, Phaidra dies in an unheroic and rather shameful manner: not only does she fall in love with a young man who has taken an oath of chastity, thus indirectly disregarding the respect due to Artemis, but she also denounces Hippolytos to Theseus, her husband, accusing him of trying to rape her. She is also Hippolytos' stepmother, and thus for the Greeks her love for him is clearly incestuous. The result of this conduct can only be death –therefore, she commits suicide. In opposition to this, Hippolytos keeps his oath to Artemis; he is never sexually tempted because he is faithful to the oath he has taken. Although he also dies, he does so in a different manner.

According to Dimock<sup>5</sup>, this kind of moral lesson must be interpreted in the light of contemporary events: Athens had been fighting Sparta and her allies for three years, and a great plague was devastating the population. In this situation, authors like Sophocles (*Oedipus the King*) and Euripides, in the *Hippolytos*, asked themselves what it might mean, for an essentially innocent man, or city, to be doomed to destruction by the gods. Euripides' answer is clear, and has been reproduced above: although men can be destroyed by gods, they must continue being virtuous.

### **Hippolytos' attitude: virtue or *hybris*?**

In contrast with the preceding interpretation, I consider that Euripides' play is more tragic than it seems, in the real sense of the word: the tragedy presents two extreme attitudes towards love, and shows that there is no way out for either of the characters. Both Phaidra, who brings her passion to the limit (incestuous love) and Hippolytos, who brings his chastity to the limit (refusal to have sexual intercourse with any woman) are destroyed by goodness<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>6</sup> See for a partially similar interpretation R. Minadeo, "Speech, Silence and Ethics in the Hippolytos", *Dioniso. Rivista di studi sul teatro antico*, Siracusa, vol. LXIV, 1994, pp. 61-62: "Our passage indicates that he [Hippolytos] is reduced to a position where he might learn even more. In the same place where he admits abusing his *sophrosyne*, he says of Phaedra that, being unable to be chaste, she was chaste. Barrett is surely right in interpreting this paradoxical statement to mean that, barred from chastity by her passion, she nonetheless did the chaste thing by committing suicide. Ironically, Hippolytos is in an analogous position when he decides to keep his pledge of silence. In the eyes of Theseus, the only judge that matters, he is unchaste. Like Phaedra, therefore,

First of all, we will try to demonstrate that Hippolytos' attitude is not as praised as it initially seems to be, but rather treated with sarcasm (indeed, Hippolytos' refusal of women is presented as unhealthy, even a result of his homosexuality<sup>7</sup>). Secondly, we will analyse how Euripides demonstrates that this refusal to have contact with women is unnatural, since all human beings are sexual, and Hippolytos is no exception; thirdly, we will read some significant passages from the play as an indirect hint of Hippolytos' deflowering. The gods destroy whom they will. Although Hippolytos refuses the power of Aphrodite, hiding himself behind Artemis' rules of chastity, nobody can escape her, and thus Hippolytos is torn into pieces (this will be interpreted as a sign of deflowering) when he takes part in what are clearly initiation ceremonies to Artemis.

### Hippolytos' refusal to women

We know that the first version of Hippolytos was a failure. Its lack of success is normally attributed to the way Phaidra was presented, i. e., too audacious for a contemporary Athenian<sup>8</sup>. This seems rather strange, because Medea –who admittedly is a barbarian, and therefore was essentially different from Phaidra– also behaved in an excessive way for a women and the play was nevertheless considered a masterpiece by Euripides. The reason for scandal in the first play may be that Hippolytos was presented as “too” homosexual. Indeed, Hippolytos' misogynist speech<sup>9</sup> might be a vestige of the first version, since it hardly fits into the general reasoning of the play<sup>10</sup>.

It is true that Hippolytos is presented as a follower of Artemis, but Euripides doesn't insist upon this point very much. Apart from the melodrama at the end of the play (vv. 1283 and following), which was probably inserted in his second version of the tragedy, references to Artemis are scarce.

---

he is unable to be chaste, and, like Phaedra, therefore, he proceeds to do the chaste thing –maintain his sacred oath. Both salvage what they can of virtue. The resultant equality between the two, we must be certain to mark, is morally absurd. Hippolytos remains blameless, Phaedra steeped in iniquity; but the inherent lesson in *sophrosyne*, especially in regard to chastity as an absolute birthright, is clear to see. It may not overstate the case to observe that in the play's final perspective *sophrosyne*, far from an attribute of *physis*, is a plaything of circumstance”.

<sup>7</sup> On Hippolytos' homosexuality, see for exemple N. S. Rabinowitz, “Female Speech and Female Sexuality: Euripides' Hippolytos as Model”, *Helios* 13.2, 1986, pp. 127-140.

<sup>8</sup> See on this Euripides *Hippolytos*. Edited with Introduction and Commentary by W. S.Barrett, Oxford, p. 12: “The first *Hippolytos* met with disfavour: the ordinary conventional Athenian disapproved of the portrayal of illicit passion in a woman, and we may surmise that Euripides had done nothing to spare him in his depicting of Phaidra's psychology”. According to Barrett (op. cit., p. 14) “the fundamental change lies in the treatment of Phaidra's character. She is no longer the abandoned and wicked woman of the earlier *Hippolytos*: she is a virtuous woman who attempts to conquer her love, and when she finds herself too weak to conquer it determines to die rather than involve herself and her children in dishonour; even her calumny of Hippolytos acquires an honourable motive, as her one means of defending her children against a disgrace they do not deserve”.

<sup>9</sup> See below.

<sup>10</sup> According to Barrett (op. cit., pp. 274-275) “Hippolytos breaks away from the Nurse and delivers himself of an indignant denunciation of the whole female sex. He begins with a protest to Zeus against their very existence; from this he moves on to a general condemnation, addressed to empty air, of their worthlessness and wickedness. But as the generalities proceed they narrow themselves down more and more to fit Phaidra and the particular wickedness which he regards as hers (the Nurse he treats as a mere go-between); until finally, in the thirtieth line (651), he abandons the generalities and turns and addresses the Nurse with an explicit denunciation of the wrong that she has furthered”. It is true that the verses narrow themselves progressively to fit into Phaidra's attitude, but they remain, nevertheless, very broad. Thus, they do not fit into the plot of the play.

Probably the most important one is in vv. 15-16: Φοίβου δ' ἀδελφὴν Ἴαρτεμιν, Διὸς κόρην, τιμᾶ, μέγιστην δαιμόνων ἡγούμενος. This might not seem strange, because, if Hippolytos is a true priest of Artemis, he must remain chaste and he doesn't need to make all these misogynist speeches which are one of the most salient features of the work.

On the other hand, no reference is made neither to the fact that Phaidra was the stepmother of Hippolytos, although this simple fact would justify Hippolytos' refusal to marry her (a marriage between a stepmother and a stepson was considered to be incestuous in ancient Greece). Thus it is clear that Euripides wanted to emphasise another aspect of Hippolytos: his refusal to get married stems from an internal predisposition, and only *a posteriori* is this attitude justified with religious considerations.

Indeed, Hippolytos' misogyny is striking and has nothing to do with his devotion to Artemis. The key passage, on this point, is vv. 616 to 668, one of the most misogynist speeches in Greek literature. Hippolytos breaks away from the nurse and delivers himself of an indignant denunciation of the whole female sex. He begins with a protest to Zeus against their very existence; from this he moves on to a general condemnation, addressed to empty air, of their worthlessness and wickedness. He says that life would be better if there were no sex with women, and men could buy children from the gods. He says to Zeus that, if he wished to propagate mankind, it was not from women that he should have provided for this. He adds that the proof that a woman is a great misfortune is the fact that parents are very happy when they give their daughters away. According to Hippolytos, the more intelligent a woman is, the worse she is for a man; Hippolytos goes on to say that women should only have contact with wild animals, because, when they can speak with each other, they prepare terrible plots against mankind. Hippolytos considers women incapable of σωφρονεῖν, a very important verb in the play, since Hippolytos considers himself, and the young people he is with, as a model of σωφροσύνη.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that some ancient authors considered Hippolytos' denial of women a consequence not of his devotion to Artemis, but rather of his inability to have intercourse with them. The following passages can be quoted:

a) Asklepiades of Tragilos, *F. Gr. Hist.* 12 F. 28, cited by schol. V on *Od.* II. 321 as the authority for his account of Phaidra:

Θησεὺς ὁ Αἰγέως ἔχων παῖδα Ἴππόλυτον ἐξ Ἀμαζόνος ἔγημε Φαίδραν τὴν Μίνωος θυγατέρα τοῦ τῶν Κρητῶν βασιλέως. εὐλαβούμενος δὲ μητριᾶς ἐπιβουλήν πέμπει ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν τὸν υἱὸν Ἴππόλυτον Τροιζηνίων ἄρχειν, ἦν γὰρ αὐτῷ διὰ τὴν Πιτθέως Αἴθραν μητρώια τις ἀρχὴ δεῦρο. Φαίδρα δὲ ἐρωτικῶς διατεθεῖσα τοῦ Ἴππολύτου σφοδρῶς ἐπ' αὐτῷ πηκομέμη τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἱερὸν Ἀφροδίτης ἐν Ἀθήναις ἰδρύσατο τὸ νῦν Ἰππολύτειον καλούμενον, εἰς Τροιζήνα δὲ ὕστερον παραγενομένη διανοεῖτο πείθειν τὸν νεανίσκον ὅπως αὐτῇ μιγείη. *χαλεπῶς δ' ἐκείνου προσδεξαμένου τὸν λόγον λέγεται φοβῆσαν αὐτὴν ἀντιστρέψαι τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ πρὸς Θησέα διαβάλλει ὡς Ἰππολύτου πειρώντος αὐτὴν. ὁ δὲ τριῶν ὡς φασιν αὐτῷ παρὰ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος εὐχῶν οὐσῶν, ὁμολογήσαντος ὅτι ἂν εὐξήται συντελεθῆσθαι, πιστεύσας τῇ Φαίδρᾳ μίαν τούτων ἠτήσατο παρ' αὐτοῦ τὸν τοῦ παιδὸς ὄλεθρον. ἐκείνου μὲν οὖν ὁμολογοῦσι τὸ ἄρμα γυμνάζοντα παραφανέντος ἐξαίφνης ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάσσης τὰς ταραχθέντων τῶν ἵππων ἐλκόμενον ἀποθανεῖν, τὴν δὲ Φαίδραν φανερᾶς γενομένης τῆς διαβολῆς ἀπάγξασθαι. ἡ δὲ ἱστορία παρὰ Ἀσκληπιάδῃ.*

b) Ps.-Apollodoros, *epit.* I. 18-19:

Φαίδρα δὲ γεννήσασα Θησεῖ δύο παιδιά Ἀκάμαντα καὶ Δημοφῶντα ἐρᾷ Ἰππολύτου καὶ δεῖται συνελθεῖν. ὁ δὲ μισῶν πάσας τὰς γυναικας τὴν συνουσίαν ἐφυγεν. ἡ δὲ Φαίδρα δείσασα μὴ τῷ πατρὶ διαβάλλῃ κατασχίσασα τὰς τοῦ θαλάμου θύρας καὶ τὰς ἐσθῆτας

σπαράξασα κατεψεύσατο Ἴππόλυτον διαφθαρῆναι· ὁ δὲ θεόντος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἄρματος καὶ παρὰ τῆι θαλάσσει ὀχουμένου ταῦρον ἀνήκεν ἐκ τοῦ κλύδωνος· πτοηθέντων δὲ τῶν ἵππων κατεάχθη τὸ ἄρμα, ἐμπλακεῖς δὲ <ταῖς ἡνίαις> Ἴππόλυτος συρόμενος ἀπέθανε. γενομένου δὲ τοῦ ἔρωτος περιφανοῦς ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε Φαίδρα.

Thus, it is not strange to propose that Euripides, mostly in his first version, presented Hippolytos as a pathologic character who refused sex because of an internal disorder, which could eventually be called homosexuality. This presentation was not accepted by the Athenian public, and thus Euripides felt himself obliged to stress Hippolytos' devotion to Artemis. Finally, it is important to note how strange it is that a man be consecrated to Artemis, a women's goddess *par excellence*. The only explanation for this, as will be developed below, is that Artemis acts as an initiation goddess. It is also strange, from an anthropological point of view, that a man prides himself in being chaste and refusing intercourse with women.

### Hippolytos as a sexual being

Another point to be stressed is the very name of Hippolytos. "Hippolytos" derives very clearly from ἵππος, "horse". But what does "horse" mean, in this context? It is obvious that a first meaning has to do with the way Hippolytos is destroyed: by horses. This point will be analysed below and interpreted, as already suggested, as the deflowering of our hero.

But, simultaneously to this (and not at all in contradiction), the word "hippos" has another meaning, which was no doubt present in the mind of every Athenian. It meant penis and had, more generally, a clear sexual connotation. The following passages, mostly by Aristophanes, can be quoted in reference to this:

- a) ἵππασία: This term, which in Xenophon<sup>11</sup> designates a cavalry manoeuvre, is used with an erotic significance in Ar. *Ach.* 1165. Here the chorus wishes a series of mishaps upon the poet Antimachos when he returns from a cavalry manoeuvre, that is to say, from having sexual intercourse. In Aristophanes, the terms related with horses are normally used in relation with heterosexual relations<sup>12</sup>;
- b) ἵππικός: This adjective is used in Aristoph. *Eccl.* 846 to make reference to the condition of ἵππεύς of a certain Esmeos, whose sexual affection was *cunnilingus*, even if a possible reference to a concrete sexual position is not to be excluded (cf. *Lys.* 677, where an evident allusion is made to a coital position).
- c) Ἴππόβινος: Aristophanes deforms the true name of Kalias' father, Hipponikos, to make evident the son's affection for women; this deformation contains a clear erotic reference, as shown by its composition from ἵππος and βινέω. Henderson<sup>13</sup> points out that in the *redender Name* Hipponikos is clearly a play on the erotic significance of the term "horse", although the scholiast maintains that ἵππο- means "big" or "excessive" and glosses the term as ἵππόπορνος or

---

<sup>11</sup> *Eq.* 8, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ar. *Lys.* 676-678; *Vesp.* 500-502.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

πορνομάχης. According to Baldwin<sup>14</sup>, the name Hipponikos is deformed into Ἴπποκίνου, from the verb κινέω, “to excite”.

- d) The language related to horses and horse-riding is used in Greek erotic slang to designate a special sexual position widely known in Aristophanic Athens (cf. *Vesp.* 500-502, where Aristophanes establishes a double meaning from the name of the tyrant Hippias in relation to ἵππος). The passage *Lys.* 192 has been interpreted to mean (from the scholion *ad locum*) so that the sacrifice of a white horse refers either to a sacrifice practised by the Amazons<sup>15</sup> or to the penis<sup>16</sup>.

Hippolytos' name, interpreted like this, clearly shows that he is a sexual being. Even his name contains a reference to his sexual character. Therefore, it is impossible for Hippolytos to escape the human constitution, which sexual relationships as an essential part. Hippolytos, the sexual being *par excellence*, as his name demonstrates, refuses to admit to his own nature. But, since nobody can run away from their nature, nature itself takes revenge upon him: he is destroyed by horses (the second meaning of his name) and as a consequence of the first meaning of his name.

### Hippolytos' deflowering

Until now, we have assumed that Hippolytos is deflowered, that he is a victim of his own attitude, like Phaidra, and, finally, that he cannot escape of mankind's destiny, and is, therefore, also a tragic character. We have also pointed out that Euripides treats him with a scornful attitude. We will now see how all this is expressed in the play.

The relevant verses here are 1173 to 1254, where, in one of the most touching passages of the Greek tragedy, the *aggelos* describes how Hippolytos is destroyed while taking part in an equestrian competition with some friends of his age.

A. Brelich has described Greek initiations in a very detailed manner<sup>17</sup>, with special attention to the Spartan ones. From his rich analysis, and considering what is relevant for our reasoning, we can take two ideas: first, that Artemis played a very important role in these initiations; second, that equestrian competitions were very usual in these kinds of ceremonies. The scene in verses 1173 to 1254 can easily be understood as an initiation ceremony (whose aim, we can recall, was mainly to introduce the child to manhood, that is to say, to teach him the mysteries of sex<sup>18</sup>).

Ceremonies dedicated to Artemis are so rich and multifarious that one cannot but make a brief summary of Brelich's analysis. Here, three aspects have to be taken into account:

---

<sup>14</sup> B. Baldwin, “The use of BINEIN KINEIN”, *AJPh* 102, 1981, pp. 79-80.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. R. II 1175-6. See also J. Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> Hsch. τ 845.

<sup>17</sup> A. Brelich, *Paidēs e Parthenoi*, Roma, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> See, for Creta, Brelich, *op. cit.*, p.199. Some elements of the cult of Hippolytos also reflect the character of initiation. Pausanias (2, 32, 1-4) speaks of a conspicuous precinct, with a temple and ancient statue, a priest whose office was lifelong, and annual sacrifices; he tells that Trozenian girls before their marriage cut their hair and dedicated it to Hippolytos; local tradition, according to Pausanias, regarded the cult as founded by Diomedes, i. e. as pre-Dorian. It seems originally to have been a hero-cult (centring on a grave where the hero was thought of as living on, and with forms derived from the rites paid to the dead). See, on this, Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

- a) Most of our inscriptions on ritual fights and competitions in Sparta come from the temple of Artemis Orthia<sup>19</sup>. These inscriptions are normally dedications in which the winners of the competitions devoted their trophies to the goddess<sup>20</sup>.
- b) A lot of votive statuettes, found in the shrine of a goddess, who almost certainly was Artemis Orthia<sup>21</sup>, are images of this goddess or of a πότνια θηρῶν, which is identified by Brelich<sup>22</sup> with Artemis Orthia.
- c) Other statues found in the temple represent a deer, the classical animal of Artemis.
- d) A particular ceremony seems to be especially interesting<sup>23</sup>: that of the whipping of youths before Artemis' altar, as a proof of resistance<sup>24</sup>. From data from Roman times<sup>25</sup>, it seems that it was a yearly ritual, in which the character of "resistance proof" was modelled in an agonistic fashion (cf. the terms ἀμιλλα and νίκη in Plutarch<sup>26</sup>, ἀγών in Lucian<sup>27</sup>, and a significant passage by Hyginus<sup>28</sup>). The one who resisted the whips the longest was declared "winner before the altar" (βωμονίκας), and some of the inscriptions of the sanctuary of Orthia mention this title<sup>29</sup>, whereas in another inscription<sup>30</sup> the καρτερίας ἀγών is expressly mentioned. Pausanias<sup>31</sup> says that the priestess attended the whipping ceremony, holding an image of Artemis in her hand.

---

<sup>19</sup> On these excavations, see the collective work *Artemis Orthia* (AO), ed. by R. M. Dawkins, London, 1929.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, AO n. 9 = IG 5/1, 265; AO n. 4 = IG 5/1, 264.

<sup>21</sup> See on this Paus. 3, 16, 7; Plut. *Inst. Lac.* 239 C; Strab. 8, 362 and Philostr. *u. Ap.* 6, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> See on this pp. 133-135 of Brelich's work.

<sup>24</sup> According to Brelich (*op. cit.*, p. 124) "i maltrattamenti che i ragazzi spartani dovevano subire, avevano, almeno apparentemente, soprattutto uno scopo disciplinare: ma all'*agoge*, nel suo complesso, non mancava l'elemento della 'prova di resistenza', frequente, come si è visto, nelle iniziazioni".

<sup>25</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* 2, 34: *Spartae uero pueri ad aram sic uerberibus accipiuntur 'ut multus a uisceribus sanguis exeat' non numquam etiam, ut, cum ibi essem, audiebam, ad necem; quorum non modo nemo exclamauit unquam, sed ne ingemuit quidem.*

<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Inst. Lac.* 239 D: οἱ παῖδες παρ' αὐτοῖς ξαινόμενοι μάστιξι δι' ὅλης τῆς ἡμέρας ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ τῆς Ὀρθίας Ἀρτέμιδος μέχρι θανάτου πολλάκις διακαρτεροῦσιν ἴλαροι καὶ γαῦροι, ἀμιλλώμενοι περὶ νίκης πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ὅστις αὐτῶν πλέον τε καὶ μάλλον καρτερήσῃε τυπτόμενος· καὶ ὁ περιγενόμενος ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα ἐπίδοξός ἐστι, καλεῖται δὲ ἀμιλλα διαμαστίγωσις· γίγνεται δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος.

<sup>27</sup> Lucian., *Anach.* 38: μάλιστα δὲ ἦν ὄραξ μαστιγούμενους αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τῷ βωμῷ καὶ αἵματα ῥεομένους, πατέρας δὲ καὶ μητέρας περεστώσας οὐχ ὅπως ἀνωμένας ἐπὶ τοῖς γιγνομένοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπειλούσας, εἰ μὴ ἀντέχοιεν πρὸς τὰς πληγὰς, καὶ ἵκετευσάσας ἐπὶ τοῖς γιγνομένοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπειλούσας, εἰ μὴ ἀντέχοιεν πρὸς τὰς πληγὰς, καὶ ἵκετευσάσας ἐπὶ μήκιστον διαρκέσαι πρὸς τὸν πόνον καὶ ἐρκαρτερῆσαι τοῖς δεινοῖς. Πολλοὶ γοῦν καὶ ἐναπέθανον τῷ ἀγῶνι . . .

<sup>28</sup> Hygin. *Fab.* 261: *ad Lacones Diana translata est ubi sacrificii consuetudo adolescentium uerberibus seruabatur, qui uocabantur Bomonicae, quia aris superpositi contendebant qui plura posset uerbera sustinere.*

<sup>29</sup> AO n. 142 = IG 5/1, 653<sup>a</sup>; AO n. 143 = IG 5/1, 653b, AO 144.

<sup>30</sup> AO 37 = IG 5/1, 290.

<sup>31</sup> Paus. 3, 16, 7.

Although some elements of this description probably come from the late Antiquity, others show that whipping ritual before the altar of the Orthia already existed in Classical times, probably in the form described by Xenophon<sup>32</sup>: some boys had to steal cheese from the altar of the Orthia, while other, probably older boys whipped them. It is not clear from our texts, since they are contradictory on this point, if the whipping could extend until death, but this point is unimportant for our purposes, since Hippolytos' death has a mythical character, and does not need, therefore, an exact parallelism in practices actually carried out in Euripides' times.

We will turn now to the presence of horses in initiation ceremonies. Here again, Brelich's considerations will be of great help<sup>33</sup>. Only Panathenaia and their antecedents will be analysed, since I agree with Brelich, that these games presented important elements of initiation. To judge from the victories of Athenians in Olympia in the period before the foundation of the Panathenaia, the most prestigious agonistic genre was the horse race. Alcmaion won with his chariot in 592, and there is a tradition according to which Erichonios himself founded the hippic games. Indeed, relying on the archaeological evidence, different scholars have highlighted the great antiquity of chariot races in Athens, and have considered them an antecedent to the Panathenaic game. In Sparta, the *hippeis* constituted a particular group of neo-initiates<sup>34</sup>. It is clear, in any case, that the gymnastic and hippic games of the Panathenaia were different from all others in historically documented times, considering the special prize which was awarded to the winner: the oil of olive trees sacred to Athena. This prize was, therefore, very singular and different from the most widespread agonistic prizes (valuables or crowns) and connected with a religious use –the subtraction of a part of the alimentary product and its use in sacred rather than profane situations– which much ethnological evidence defines as very old. As an alimentary prize there is an immediate parallelism to the grain of the Raros field given as a prize for the Eleusinia in Attica. Although it is very difficult to propose an interpretation of these kind of agonistic prizes, it is clear that the admission for consumption of certain foods frequently constitutes an element of initiation rituals<sup>35</sup>. These entire elements make Brelich think that the Panathenaia could have an origin connected with initiations. As a natural consequence, chariot and horse races were also important elements in initiation ceremonies.

We have tried to show that Hippolytos participated in an initiation ceremony, whose aim was to introduce him into the adult world, which inevitably includes a sexual maturity. In this ceremony, he is a victim of his own *hybris*, of his refusal to become adult and, therefore, the ceremony is for him a complete failure: he is torn to pieces by his horses, in a way similar to Pentheus', who also committed a sexual transgression and who was also destroyed in a kind of initiation ceremony<sup>36</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Resp. lac.* 2, 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>34</sup> Brelich, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>35</sup> Brelich, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> It is true that Pentheus participates in a *myesis* rather than in a tribal initiation. However, both types of initiations have elements in common, as pointed out by Brelich, *op. cit.*, p. 459: "dal punto di vista delle nostre ricerche, è importante mettere nel massimo rilievo due fatti, del resto tutt'altro che nuovi: 1) che le forme della *myesis* eleusina erano largamente analoghe a quelle delle iniziazioni di tipo tribale; gli 'iniziandi?', appositamente riuniti, si recavano in un luogo particolare e venivano separati dal resto della gente; tenuti a divieti alimentari e perfino a un periodo di digiuno, partecipavano o assistevano a riti su cui –pena la morte (secondo la legislazione ateniese)- dovevano mantenere il più assoluto segreto".