

## BOOK REVIEW

*Ancient Supplication.* By F.S. NAIDEN. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 426. Cloth, \$74.00. ISBN 0-19-518341-X.

This is the first book to examine all the sources concerning supplication in classical antiquity, both Greek and Roman (with occasional reference to Hebrew and other Near Eastern traditions), from Homer down through the Roman empire (with a brief coda on Christian attitudes). On the basis of a thorough review of the evidence, informed by a mastery of the primary and secondary literature, Naiden (N.) proposes a four-step model of the supplication process, and with it a new interpretation of how supplication works. In brief, N. rejects the prevailing view, according to which the *supplicandus* is bound to accept a suppliant's plea if it is made in the proper ritual fashion, failure to do so being a violation of customary norms (the position, roughly, of John Gould). On the contrary, N. argues that the *supplicandus* is always free to accept or reject the request, and this decision constitutes the essential fourth stage of the process. N. denies too that successful supplication necessarily means that the supplicant is accepted into the community of the *supplicandus* (the hypothesis of Walter Burkert). What is more, he argues that there is no necessary contradiction between supplication as a practice and its legal regulation: for the norms that govern a suppliant's approach to the *supplicandus* (or to an altar or other stand-in), the gestures and verbal appeals the suppliant may make, and the suppliant's petition and accompanying arguments—these being the first three steps of the supplication process—along with, finally, the *supplicandus'* evaluation of the plea and decision whether or not to honor it, may all be subject to legal formalization without *eo ipso* compromising the nature of the transaction as a supplication.

N. is right, in my view, and his book, which is a major scholarly achievement, will now be the standard study of supplication in classical antiquity. Take supplicatory gestures (step 2): based on a careful tabulation of a huge number of examples, drawn from literary texts, inscriptions and images, N. reports that clasping the knees occurs in only a quarter of the personal supplications described by Herodotus, Thucydides and Diodorus Siculus (p. 45), although literary descriptions tend to dwell on this act (p. 46). Roman sources, in turn, rarely mention knee-clasping, and in supplications to Romans "only foreign suppliants kneel" (p. 50). Words may replace gestures, when the occasion requires: Odysseus could not very well clasp the knees of Nausicaa when he stood naked before her, but he is nevertheless supplicating. In addition, suppliants normally attempt to bolster their case with reasons; as N. writes: "Of all parts of an act of supplication, arguments best rebut the view that supplication is a

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ritual of contact" (p. 78). Just as merit is essential to the Greek emotion of pity, so too suppliants must show that they merit consideration; hence, in Greek supplications, the suppliant always protests innocence. Arguments may appeal to reciprocity, threats, kinship ties, fairness or pity, this last a recourse more common among women and children than adult males.

Once the merits of a case have been presented, whether implicitly or explicitly, the *supplicandus* must respond (step 4). If the request is granted, according to N., "the two of them enter into a lasting tie" (p. 105; cf. p. 129). Here I must register a disagreement. As N. shows, the "tie" is simply the obligation to live up to the *supplicandus'* pledge to the suppliant: to spare her or his life, for example. This may be done at once, and the suppliant sent packing (pp. 119–22); there is no incorporation into the group, whether as *xenos* or *philos*, and no bond arises. Of course, a suppliant may petition for citizenship, or for long-term protection; if the request is granted, a tie is established. But this consequence has nothing to do with the nature of supplication itself. I fear the notion of a bond between suppliant and consenting *supplicandus* is a holdover from Burkert's view. But the important point is that rejection of a petition is perfectly ordinary, irrespective of contact between the parties. Acceptance or rejection, in turn, is not arbitrary, but involves reasons, stated or not (the most common reason for rejection is that the petitioner is in the wrong). Thus, rejection is virtually never punished (p. 146), as one might have expected if it were considered a violation of ritual obligation.

N. next shows how legal regulations interacted with traditional practices of supplication, devoting one chapter to Greece, a second to Rome. Here he examines, among other questions, the function of magistrates and the courts, and the rules for supplication at shrines (whether under the control of particular cities or international—again, expulsion of the suppliant was by no means uncommon). N. points to fundamental differences between Greek and Roman practices, identifying three principal Roman "innovations—the *imperium* of the magistrate, mercy, and the provision of rights" (p. 220). Roman magistrates, whether in a civilian or military capacity, had powers that enabled them to decide independently whether to accept a suppliant's appeal, whereas Greek magistrates had no comparable authority: the Athenian *strategoí*, for example, had no right to punish, and hence to spare, a soldier, as a Roman general could (p. 225). By "mercy," N. renders *clementia*, and he argues that "[t]he Romans differed from the Greeks in allowing a suppliant to admit his own guilt and ask for mercy" (p. 240). *Clementia*, according to N., was an option for the Roman *supplicandus* in addition to granting pardon (*dare veniam*, *ignoscere*) or sparing (*parcere*) a suppliant: "The difference between *clementia* and pity is ethical. *Clementia* is for the pardonable

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suppliant, pity for the deserving one" (p. 243). This is not entirely accurate. *Clementia* differs fundamentally from pity in that pity is an emotion (you feel it), whereas *clementia* is a character trait (you possess it). Thus, *clementia* came to be identified as one of the main virtues of the emperor, and was never seen as a sign of condescension (contra N., p. 247), though pity might be. In Greek, the analogous trait to *clementia* is *philanthrôpia* or *epieikeia* (Aristotle gives the latter a peculiar sense in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, tangential to its ordinary use). If it is true, as N. affirms, that Greek suppliants never admit wrongdoing or appeal to the kindness of the *supplicandus*, *epieikeia* is nevertheless associated by Diodorus Siculus with a disposition to pardon (*syngnômê*, 13.24). But perhaps Diodorus was influenced by the Roman ideal of *clementia*, which was much in the air at the time he was writing. Finally, N. shows how certain Roman legal institutions, such as *appellatio* and *provocatio*, were in the process of developing into a conception of rights "that made supplication unnecessary" (p. 289).

I have given only the barest outline of N.'s argument. N. writes clearly and has a refined feeling for genre and literary context. Occasionally I differ with him; for example, when Agamemnon advises Menelaus to kill the suppliant Adrastus (*Iliad* 6.55–60), Homer's approval may be less a way "to endorse the climax of the plot of the *Odyssey*" (p. 143) and so to unify the two epics, than a nod to Agamemnon's pain at the wounding of his brother by Pandarus. But this is to quibble. This is a first-rate book, and indispensable to anyone interested in ancient supplication.

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