ANDREAS FOUNTOULAKIS

Ω ΠΑΡΕΟΝ[ΤΕΣ IN HERONDAS 8.61


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Towards the end of Herondas’ mimiamb 8 the narrator, who is identified as the poet himself, recounts to his slave Annas a dream he had in which his goat, which is considered as a gift from Dionysus, was mutilated by some goatherds. Then the same goatherds led him in front of a young man, identified as Dionysus, where he participated in the ritual of the ἐσκλαβίσμων, but was eventually threatened by an angry and abusive old man who turned out to have been the iambographer Hipponax. At Her. 8.59–63 the description focuses on the old man’s threatening words and movements as well as on the narrator’s reaction:

ερρ’ ἐκ προσώπου μή σε καίπερ ὠν πρέσβυς
οὐλὴν κοτ’ ὥθ’ τῇ βατρήτη κόψω.’
κῆγω μεταύτις’ ὁ παρεῶν[τες]
θανεῖμ’ ὑπέρ γῆς, εἰ ὁ γέρων μ’
μαρτύρομαι δὲ τὸν νεηγή[ήν]

Who the παρεῶν[τες] of 61 might be is not indicated by the text in a more specific manner, but since the narrator’s exclamation follows the phrase κῆγω μεταύτις, it is fairly clear that this vocative belongs to the narrative concerning the dream. It is therefore neither an address to a supposed audience of Herondas’ mimiams nor a reference to the narrator’s slaves who are addressed in the opening lines of mimiamb 8 in second person singular and whose names are mentioned at 1–15. Following the aggressive words and the violent movements of the old man the vocative ὁ παρεῶν[τες] is the verbal reaction of the narrator who tries thus to ask for some assistance as well as to secure witnesses to the threatened act of violence. For this reason it becomes obvious that the παρεῶν[τες] of 61 are the people who happen to be present at the Dionysiac ritual described in the preceding lines (38–49) as well as Dionysus himself (the νεηγή[ήν] of 63).

The exclamation ὁ παρεῶν[τες] of 61 is an unnoticed case of Not- und Hilferuf. Wilhelm Schulze in his seminal study “Beiträge zur Wort- und Sittengeschichte II” has demonstrated that in archaic, classical and post-classical times during a violent attack in a social context the injured party ought to cry for help so as to have immediate assistance as well as witnesses who could later testify on behalf of the injured party. Wilhelm Schulze, Beiträge zur Wort- und Sittengeschichte II, Sitzb. d. Preuß. Akad. d. Wiss. 1918, 481–511 = W. Schulze, Kleine Schriften, 2nd edn., Göttingen 1966, 160–189.
victim if the case was brought to court. The need for witnesses is stressed by Eduard Fraenkel who notes that in descriptions of such incidents the verb usually employed is the verb μαρτύρεσθαι which reflects the consideration of those, who are present at a violent incident so as to help the victim, as witnesses. Since the victim of the old man’s aggression appears to believe that he might be murdered, it follows that the vocative of 61 aims at the securing of assistance, whereas the μαρτυρ[ο]μαι of 63 pertains to the consideration of Dionysus as a witness, satisfying thus the requirements of a Not- und Hilferuf. Instances of violent incidents, which involve the use of such cries in various forms, are depicted in a great number of both literary and non-literary texts from Homer to the end of the Hellenistic period and beyond.

Although the participle παρόντες is not a word normally employed in invocations described as Not- und Hilferufe, it is worth noting that it is used so as to denote those people who happen to be present at a certain incident and could be later used as witnesses in Menander, Samia 488. On these grounds it would not be unreasonable to assume that Herondas may in terms of phrasing have followed Menander. Yet David Bain has drawn attention to a number of Ptolemaic non-literary papyri recording petitions in which both content and phrasing are strikingly similar to Herondas 8.61–63 in the sense that the word παρόντες is used so as to describe those bystanders who are called by the victim of an aggressive occurrence and the verb μαρτύρεσθαι – and more specifically its compound ἐπιμαρτύρεσθαι – in order to refer to their function as witnesses. It appears, therefore, more likely that Herondas might have adopted the phrasing employed in accounts of real-life incidents rendering thus his style more lively and bringing his descriptions closer to occurrences of everyday life which were often thematically exploited by both the literary and the non-literary mime.

University of Crete

Andreas Fountoulakis