

The social practice of *xenia*, ritualized guest-friendship, emerged early in the Archaic period as a means for aristocrats in the Greek cities to create formal relationships with peers in other cities, allowing for travel, trade, and eventually mutual political support among the tyrants who came to dominate many of the cities. By the sixth century, these practices evolved into *proxenia*, and became a means for states to conduct relations among themselves using *proxenoi* as agents. From the earliest attestations of *xenia* in the Homeric epics it is clear that these relationships were considered operative not only between individuals in the various Greek *poleis*, but between Greeks and non-Greeks as well; hence they came to serve as a conduit for international relations.

It has generally been assumed (e.g. by Herman 1987, p. 12) that the institution of *xenia* closely approximated to institutions and norms among the non-Greek states of the Eastern Mediterranean. A survey of interstate relations among the states of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, particularly those of Egypt, Israel, and the other Levantine states, reveals some similarities with *xenia*: relations between heads of state were conducted in terms of fictive kinship, and involved various ritual activities, the most important of which involved gift-exchange (Cochavy-Rainey and Lilyquist, 1999). The correlation between Greek *xenia* and interstate diplomacy was not exact, however. For one thing, Greek *xenia* was grounded in the practice of reciprocal visitations, whereas in the world of international diplomacy interstate visitations were rare. Furthermore, the fictive relations were not always peer relations, but were frequently asymmetrical, put in terms of father-son relations rather than sibling relations. Finally, and most significantly, interstate relations in the larger Mediterranean world were considered temporary and contingent, whereas the ideology of the *xenia*-bond (if not always the reality) made it a permanent condition that was passed on to the descendants of the parties involved.

The lack of total correlation between *xenia* and international relations led to occasional major misunderstandings. The best attested of these involve the Samian tyrant Polykrates, who formed a *xenia* with Amasis (Ahmose II), king of Egypt (Hdt. 3. 39-43). According to Herodotus, the *xenia* ends because Amasis distrusts Polykrates' good fortune; subsequently, Polykrates is duped into visiting Oroites, and is killed (3. 120-125). His brother Syloson forms a friendship with Darius predicated on a spurious gift-exchange; he tries to use this friendship to regain power on Samos, but the expedition goes awry, and the Persians end up handing over an empty island to the would-be tyrant (3.139-149). The story of the Samian tyrants is tricked out with folkloric features, and made to fit Herodotus' theme of *hybris* and *atē*. But underneath these features is an acutely observed study of misunderstanding in interstate relations. The *xenia* relationship between Polykrates and Amasis has been questioned (König 1989); but it is best to see it as a *xenia* from Polykrates' point of view, but a conventional interstate alliance from Amasis' point of view. When the Egyptian king ends it, Polykrates seeks another; but because of his misunderstanding of international protocol, he falls into Oroites' trap. Syloson too tries to employ *xenia* to gain political support; again his misunderstanding of the norms of international diplomacy results in a negative outcome. The entire episode illustrates how Greeks might fall afoul of the disjuncture between the Greek notion of *xenia* and the norms of interstate relations as adhered to by the major powers of the Levant.