

A SUPPLIANT AT GERASA

KENT J. RIGSBY

THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS OLYMPIUS AT GERASA has yielded several inscribed dedications, which identify for us the god of the place.¹ Three texts derive from one man, Theon, who was a suppliant in the temple in A.D. 69/70. The few scholars who have tried to reconstruct his story are greatly at variance. R. O. Fink thought that he was a Gerasene who dedicated his children to the god as sacred slaves in some oriental manner.² Welles (1938: 377), who knew from another inscription (*I. Gerasa* no. 30) that Gerasa had the civic title "sacred and inviolable," thought that Theon had availed himself of a Greek privilege and taken refuge in Gerasa from some other city. Theon's case is worth exploring, as this is one of the rare episodes of temple-refuge in the documentary record.

We have two stones, which contain between them three texts inscribed by three hands.³ *I. Gerasa* no. 5:

- ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ, ἁβλρ, ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν Σεβαστῶν σωτηρίας
καὶ τῆς τοῦ δήμου ὁμονοίας ἀργυρίου Τυρίου δραχμὰς ἑπτακισ-
χιλίας ἑκατὸν ἔδωκεν Θεὸν Δημητρίου εἰς τὴν οἰκοδομὴν ναοῦ
Διὸς Ὀλυμπίου οὗ ἐστὶν ἱκέτης ὑπὲρ τε ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τοῦ . .
5 Διὸς ἱεροδούλων, αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ Θεῶνος τέκνων Σκύμνου καὶ
Ἀρτεμιδώρου καὶ Ἀρτεμισίας, προδεδωκὼς εἰς τὴν τοῦ προπύλου
οἰκοδομὴν ἄλλας δραχμὰς χιλίας πεντακοσίας.

For good fortune, year 132: for the well-being of the Augusti and the concord of the people, Theon son of Demetrius gave 7,100 drachmas of Tyrian silver toward the building of the temple of Zeus Olympius, whose suppliant he is, in behalf of himself and the temple-slaves of Zeus, and the children of the same Theon, Scymnus and Artemidorus and Artemisia; having already given toward the building of the propylon another 1,500 drachmas.

I. Gerasa no. 6:

- [- - - - δραχμὰς ἐ]πτα[κισ]χειλίας [ἐ]κατὸν ὀγ[δοήκον-]
[τα ἑξ ἀνέθηκεν? κατὰ τ]ὰ ψηφίσματα ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων κατ' εὐχή[v].
// ὁμοῦ ἁβλρ
[καὶ πρὸς αἰς ἑξ]ῶκεν δραχμαῖς ὀκτακισχειλαῖς [ἑξ-]
5 [ακοσίαις ὀγδ]οήκοντα ἑξ Θεῶν Δημητρίου ὁ τοῦ
[Διὸς ἱκέτης εὐσε]βῶν εἰς τὴν οἰκοδομὴν Διὸς Ὀλυμ-

¹For recent work and discoveries, see Seigne 1985 and 1989, with mention of the new dedications in this series, which will be published by P.-L. Gatier.

²Fink 1933: 114; followed by Bickerman 1937: 118.

³Welles's reedition (1938) replaced the partial readings of earlier editors; Seigne's reexamination (1985: 295) confirmed several letters in no. 6.

- 10 [πίου, ᾧς προσδεξ]άμενοι οἱ πολεῖται ἀνέλαβον εἰς
 [τὸ ἔργον, ἔτι] κα[ῖ] γυν εἰς τὴν μέλλουσιν χαλκῆν
 [εἰκόν]α Διὸς Φυξίου ἄλλαξ ἐπέδωκεν δραχ-
 [μὰς χειλί]αξ τριακοσσία[ς] δεκατέσσαραξ,
 [ὥστε τ]ᾶξ ἐπιδοθείσας ἀπάσας εἶναι
 [ἀργυρίο]ν καλοῦ δοκίμου δραχμὰς μυρίαξ
 // ὁμοῦ L MA

... 7,186 drachmas ... in accordance with the decrees from his own funds in fulfillment of a vow. Sum: 8,686 drachmas.

And in addition to the 8,686 drachmas which Theon son of Demetrius the suppliant of Zeus gave piously toward the building of Zeus Olympius, which the citizens have approved and taken up for the work, he now has further donated toward the intended bronze statue of Zeus of Refuge another 1,314 drachmas, so that the total donated is 10,000 drachmas of good valid silver. Sum: 10,000 drachmas.

A clue to what has happened is the money. There is a discrepancy of eighty-six drachmas between the sum in the first text and its recapitulation in the later ones. Welles considered that this eighty-six drachmas might reflect the cost of inscribing. That seems a high price. Seigne has urged instead that it represents what we would call a “cost overrun,” the difference between the amount promised and the eventual cost of construction.⁴ But work on this temple continued over decades, as we know from the dedications, with various individuals contributing “toward” construction: the eventual cost cannot have been known at any particular time.

The difference between the two sums is an increase of exactly one per cent; this should not be accidental. The most widely attested interest rate in the Roman Empire is one per cent per month—the δραχμιαῖος τόκος, one drachma per mina.⁵ I propose that the discrepancy represents accumulated interest: no other habit of monetary behavior or economic life seems likely to have added exactly eighty-six drachmas to 8,600 drachmas. This in turn establishes a date for the second and third texts: both were inscribed in the month after the first. Between the two stones *I. Gerasa* 5 and 6, one month has turned but not a second.⁶

⁴ Seigne (1985: 293), in publishing a signature found at the entrance (“Diodorus was architect” in A.D. 27/8: *SEG XXXV* 1569); I do not agree that this must date the completion of the entire temple and that the subsequent donations “toward construction” were to pay down a debt for money already spent on the building.

⁵ In the second century, e.g., Pliny *Ep.* 9.28.5, 10.54.2; in a recently published document from the region, *P. Babatha* 11 (A.D. 124); cf. *IG II*² 1104: ἑκατοστιάων τόκω[ν], and the common *usurae centesimae* (*CIL* VIII 1845; *ILS* 5686, etc.; cf. Casson 1980: 27–28). At *P. Mur.* II 114, lines 15–16 (A.D. 171?), τὸν ἐγ διατάγματος τόκ[ον] will be whatever rate was allowed by edict of the provincial governor, as at Cic. *Att.* 6.1.6 (*tota provincia singulas observarem itaque edixissem*).

⁶ We can of course think instead of two months at annual six per cent, a rate described by a contemporary as *civilis ac modica* (Pliny *NH* 14.56); but this was far less common. Babatha regarded

The final numbers recorded are revealing in a different way: 1,314 drachmas given toward the statue so as to make 10,000. This last very round number cannot be the accidental result of adding up previous donations, nor will Theon have decided to spend precisely 1,314 drachmas on a new statue. It must be the round number, the 10,000, that preceded; that is, the 1,314 drachmas was not a separate lump of money but a notional calculation, a by-product of the real transaction. What Theon actually gave to the cult was the simple figure 10,000 drachmas, and the amount devoted to the statue was calculated from the overpayment which that 10,000 represented beyond the first two sums promised. This in turn implies that the whole 10,000 drachmas changed hands on one occasion, at the end of our story, when the last text was inscribed: Theon's commitment had been for 8,686 drachmas, and when he finally could pay, he generously told the god to keep the change and use it toward a statue of Zeus of Refuge. Thus Theon arrived at the temple without this money and was taken in upon promise of donations, a promise which he was unable to keep before the month had turned. "I'm sure the gods smile when a lucky man makes a vow," wrote a man from the region.⁷ Theon, it seems, was not lucky.

The first two gifts had been vowed but were not delivered until now. They were a promise, unfulfilled until 10,000 drachmas arrived.⁸ The oddity then is only in the accounting entry at *I.Gerasa* 6, line 2, where the interest is added to the second sum rather than separated out as a third component (which probably was felt to be irrelevant information) or divided proportionally between the two (which may have been felt complex and again unnecessary): the recorder has preferred simply to add the interest to the immediately preceding amount.

Interest on a delayed payment, which becomes part of the obligation, is of course a normal part of modern dealings. It is also well attested in antiquity.⁹ A classical instance occurs at Demosthenes 41.8: for a slave purchased and delivered but not yet paid for, the obligation is two minai "and the interest" (καὶ τὸν τόκον). A parallel from the region can be recognized in *P.Dura* 25, a sale of land whose price is 500 drachmas plus τῶν γεινομένων πάντων. This last phrase has puzzled commentators.¹⁰ But this participle is normal usage for "accruing"

this return as abusively low and promised that she could bring in eighteen per cent: *P.Babatha* 15, lines 7 and 23.

⁷Publius Syrus 169, cf. 525.

⁸This need not be contradicted by *I.Gerasa* 6, line 7: the form of the money that the citizens "approved and took up" might well be a promise rather than actual cash.

⁹A sale with delayed payment is a loan that draws interest: Pringsheim 1950: 244–268, with 260–262 on *P.Oxy.* 306 and 318 (one month between possession and payment, A.D. 59). The practice was common enough to offend Plato, who would ban both delayed payment and advanced: *Leg.* 915d: μηδ' ἐπὶ ἀναβολῇ πρᾶτιν μηδὲ ὀνήν ποιείσθαι μηδενός.

¹⁰References at Welles, *P.Dura* p. 133, who thought it meant "all the produce" from the land. For that meaning, however, an unambiguous expression is at *I.Syrie* VII 4028, line 23 (= Welles, *RC* 70): σὺν τοῖς τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος ἔτους γενήμασιν. The two terms in proximity at *PSI* VIII 976, lines 4–5: someone pays the accrued tax (τελοῦντα τὸ γεινόμενον) on the crops (γενήμα[τ]α).

interest,¹¹ and the phrase here likely means any interest accruing on the base price during the time between the surrender of the land and the delivery of payment. The opposite, immediate full payment, could be worthy of notice: ἐπρίατο . . . τὴν ἱερωσύνην χρυσῶν ἐπὶ χαλ[κῶν] ἐξήκοντα, οὗς ἔδωκε παραχρ[ῆμα] (*LSCG* 87, line 17; cf. *SHA M. Anton.* 8.11: *statim reddidit*).

Naturally a god could lend money or other property and be owed principal and interest; but for interest paid on a vow I can offer no good parallel.¹² Delays before fulfillment are of course well known, especially in Roman religion. In fact one of the unpublished dedications from the temple at Gerasa shows a Roman who vowed 10,000 drachmas, paid 5,000, and now his wife pays the other 5,000; no interest accrues (though the time elapsed is not made clear).¹³

Accordingly, an ordinary vow will not explain what has happened to Theon. His mention of *hierodouloi* points the way to something more urgent. Here at Gerasa was a situation in which mortals, the temple authorities and the city, had received and approved a concrete promise and must have felt themselves responsible for guarding its fulfillment: well might they enforce it with interest. Gods can get angry, but humans can get even. And a temple that had a number of slaves¹⁴ may well have had rules about joining their number.

In fact the few regulations that survive concerning suppliants, difficult or fragmentary though they are, imply that money might be expected. At Cyrene: "If something should be proposed, whatever is proposed, he is to pay. If nothing is proposed, he is to sacrifice produce and a libation each year forever."¹⁵ At Lindos: "From [no one?] are they to collect more than [- - -] drachmas."¹⁶ So we have reason to suspect that a suppliant commonly incurred a financial obligation; the amount seems subject to negotiation, and arrangements could be

¹¹ See LSJ s.v. γίγνομαι I.2.b. It occurs both with nouns, e.g., ἀπέδωκε τὰ χρήματα [μετ]ὰ τῶν γενομένων τόκων (*Syll.*³ 1108), ἀποδεδώκεν αὐτὰ καὶ τοὺς τόκους τοὺς γινόμενους (*Syll.*³ 953, line 79), τὰς ποθόδω τὰς ἀφ' οὗτω τῷ ἀργυρίῳ γινυμένας (*BCH* 60 [1936] 179); and without, τὰς τετρ[α]κοσ[ί]ας δραχμὰς καὶ τὰ ἐπιδέκατα κ[α]ὶ τ[ὰ] γινόμενα (*P.Hib.* I 92, defining forfeiture; for the text, see Reekmans 1952: 411); (δραχμαὶ) ν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα α (ὀβολὸς) (ἡμιοβέλιον) (111: a list of fines; for the text, Reekmans 1955: 372), the interest here amounting to 2.5 per cent, whatever the rate and duration had been.

¹² Mummius' dedication to Hercules (*ILLRP* 149) affects the language of monetary debt: *pro usura, dissolvendei, verae rationis*; cf. *ILS* 3410; Macrobius 3.2.6: *reus vocetur qui suscepto voto se numinibus obligat, damnatus autem qui promissa vota iam solvit*. At *I.Ilion* 1, line 43 a donation promised but not delivered is "money owed from last year" (τοῖς πέρυσσι ὀφειλο[μέ]νοις).

¹³ At *I.Gerasa* 53 = *Nouv. choix* no. 32, a provincial priest dedicates a statue of Justice on behalf of his son, vowed by the father when the son was *agoranomos*; cf. *IG* XII.7 247 from Amorgos, a daughter completes a repair vowed by her father when he was a magistrate (both second century A.D.).

¹⁴ As occurred in both Greece and the East, with important differences of scale, status, and treatment. For an old list, see Hepding 1913; cf. Westermann 1935: 908–909; Rostovtzeff 1941: 3.1383, 1435; *SEG* XXXI 634 (Macedonia); Debord 1982: 117–124; Scholl 1985.

¹⁵ *LSCGS* 115.B.41–44, with Wilamowitz 1927: 170 ("entrance payment"); Sokolowski 1954: 177; Dobias-Lalou 1997: 265–266.

¹⁶ Kontorini 1989: 17–29, no. 1 = *SEG* XXXIX 729.

made if (as is understandable in the circumstances) he did not have money in hand.

An obscure text from classical Sicily may illustrate such an event: a man owes the goddess, with the interest ([σὺ]ν τῷ τόκοι), a stated amount of money, which is not “consumable” by him (βροτόν) but which he must use for statues and furnishings and a sum of cash for the goddess; his wife and children are also under obligation; when he has paid the money, he is to be free.¹⁷ This inscription is difficult to interpret, and might be simply a labor contract; but it may instead concern a suppliant, admitted to sanctuary on terms that the temple specified.

If this is so, Theon’s delay in payment added interest to what was a formal expectation of a donation from a suppliant. It may be that he eventually came to have the neat sum of 10,000 drachmas by borrowing that amount in his turn. This could explain not only the roundness of the figure, but also why a new month has arrived, for some days or weeks will have been required to arrange a loan—that is, to define and guarantee collateral and negotiate a monetary sum against it. More puzzling is the strange figure 7,100 drachmas. Perhaps, in order to be welcomed in the temple, he first promised the rational sum of 1,500 drachmas; this was respectable and typical for this temple, to judge from the several other dedications of that amount. In the following days pressure mounted from within or without the temple, until he made a further promise of what he felt he could come up with, arriving at the anomalous number 7,100. In any case, in finally rounding the donation up to 10,000, Theon was making a grateful gesture which matched the more generous donations that are commemorated in the temple (cf. *I. Gerasa* 2). His affairs were now in order.

The role of the city government in this affair also shows that this was no ordinary vow or dedication. The verb is lost at *I. Gerasa* 6, line 2, but line 7 implies that the city needed to authorize Theon’s “gifts.” Other men who contributed toward construction of the temple of Zeus do not mention such approval; these are mostly civic magistrates, making the donation on the occasion of their office, a piece of regular business. The plural ψηφίσματα at line 2 might imply that there was a standing policy on an action like Theon’s.¹⁸ Care was needed, for the Roman government, as we know, looked with substantial unease on this Greek custom of protecting suppliants.¹⁹

¹⁷Manganaro 1977 [= Dubois 1989: no. 177; Arena 1989: no. 118]: ἐπεὶ κ' ἀποδοῖ τοῦτο τὸ ἀργύριον τανικαῦτα ἐλευθέρος εἴσσοτο.

¹⁸A public listing of statues and structures (one for the *hierodouloi*) dedicated by an individual at Smyrna in the first century was permitted by decree: λαβὼν κατὰ ψήφισμα τὴν ἀναγραφὴν ποιήσασθαι αὐτῶν ἐν στήλῃ (*I. Smyrna* 753, line 6); but whether a decree of the city or of a cult group is not certain. Cf. the *decreto decurionum* frequent in Roman dedications (e.g., *ILS* 3181 of a statue). As Fred Naiden points out to me, in Aeschylus *Suppliant Women* the king seeks a vote of the people to authorize receiving the suppliants (and called “decrees,” 601).

¹⁹Rigsby 1996: 574–586.

All this suggests a framework within which to construe Theon's situation. Against Fink's notion of a peaceable dedication (of the children, he thought) stands Zeus Phyxios, not the god's regular epithet here but clearly Theon's coinage, reflecting his own condition and need. Welles's idea was that Theon took refuge in Gerasa from some other city. But it seems improbable that a man and perhaps his children and eventually his money might escape justice in the Roman Empire by changing cities; and if he did undertake such a move, would the further gesture of fleeing into a temple in the new city be either necessary or effective? Against whom, in this new civic jurisdiction? In the literary sources we usually find fugitives to temples when the circumstance was hot pursuit, and that would mean in our instance a local man. Theon is given no ethnic in the inscriptions; this implies that he needed none, that he was from Gerasa. Consider finally the theophoric names of two of his children: for the patron divinity of Gerasa was Artemis, their θεὰ πατρώα.²⁰ Theon probably was a resident of Gerasa.

The other pertinent number then is the date, which also should not be accidental. The year 69/70 witnessed the Jewish rebellion and the four emperors. Josephus reports both external attack and domestic strife at Gerasa during these events: it is one of the cities listed as pillaged by the Jewish rebels, and we have the unusual scene of the Gerasenes kindly undertaking not to harm Jews who remain in town and to assist those who want to leave.²¹ The terms of Theon's dedication, "for the well-being of the Augusti and the concord of the people," are unfortunately not sufficient to characterize his particular fear, though this was a year of several Augusti and of civil strife: for these were conventional at this temple, met already in the earlier dedications.²² But Jones and Welles²³ surely were right to see this turmoil as the general context of Theon's difficulty. This was the situation in which a man took refuge in a temple—and waited there for cash to be brought in order to fulfill his obligation to the god.

Were Theon's three children with him?²⁴ That he includes them in the list with himself (*biketes*) and the *hierodouloi* suggests this: perhaps as mere children they

²⁰ *I.Gerasa* 27; civic coins inscribed "Ἀρτεμις ἡ τύχη Γεράσων (Spijkermann 1978: 156–167).

²¹ Near the beginning of the troubles (late 66 and early 67): Jos. *BJ* 2.458, 480. A Gerasene Jew prominent in the resistance: 2.652, 4.503. The synagogue found by the excavators is not earlier than the fourth century. The "Gerasa" reported destroyed by the Romans in summer 68 (*BJ* 4.487) is taken to be another place: see Schürer 1979: 150.

²² *I.Gerasa* 2–4; cf. *SEG* XXVII 1008; in *I.Gerasa* 53 "Augusti" in A.D. 119/120 when there was only one.

²³ Jones 1930: 45: "Is it possible that the citizens had vowed this statue in gratitude for their escape from the perils of the Jewish war?" (Jones thought the dedicator of the statue to be the people of Gerasa.) Welles 1938: 377: "The troubled times of the Jewish war provide sufficient background for the flight to Gerasa of a man able to reward richly the city of his refuge."

²⁴ Fink (1933: 114) took the *hierodouloi* of *I.Gerasa* 5, line 5 to be Theon's sons; Welles (1938: 378) thought that Theon's wealth would keep the sons from being "permanently" *hierodouloi*, rather "survivors" and "of a high position." But δέ in line 5 would seem to introduce the children not in apposition but as a second set of persons distinct from Theon and the *hierodouloi*.

would not be labeled as either of those two statuses. If they too were in the temple, that would make rather more horrendous the picture of what has happened (one wonders then where their mother was). I have argued that Theon lived in Gerasa and had not fled there from some other city; he seems to have been there at least long enough for his two younger children to be born in Gerasa, to judge from their Artemisian names. But the name Theon is exceedingly rare in Syria, and exceedingly common in Egypt.²⁵ Was he a resident alien, originally from Egypt? Was he then mistaken for a Jew? Or in fact *was* he a Jew, notwithstanding his gifts to Zeus²⁶ and the theophoric names of two children?²⁷ I hesitate to press the question; but if he was, this would not be the only example of an assimilated Jew who found that when trouble came, assimilation did not protect him from his neighbors.²⁸

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
DUKE UNIVERSITY
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA 27708-0103
U.S.A.

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²⁵ No Theon is attested in the Dura or Babatha papyri; the hundreds attested in Egypt hardly need citation. An exception illustrates the rule: the only Theon in the volumes of *I.Syrie* is M. Aelius Aur. Theon, governor of Arabia in the mid-third century (*I.Syrie* XIII 9078-80); honored also at Ariminum (*ILS* 1192), he was no local (*PIR*² A 150).

²⁶ Compare Herod rebuilding the temple of Helios on Rhodes: *Jos. BJ* 1.424.

²⁷ For the record, the index of *C.Pap.Jud.* shows the names Theon (cf. *I.Métriques* 69), Demetrius, and Artemidorus used by Jews in Egypt; cf. *CJF* I 682 from Olbia (Demetrius, Dionysiodorus, restored Σ[άτυρον Ἀρτεμιδώ?]ρου); *SEG* XXXIII 1438, 1461d, from Cyrenaica (Demetrius, Artemidorus). A known Jewish immigrant from Egypt ca. A.D. 50 was the revolutionary of *Jos. BJ* 2.261-263, *AJ* 20.169-172; this is the man for whom Paul, another immigrant, was mistaken at *Acts* 21.38. Note *BJ* 2.463, not only Jews but also τοὺς Ἰουδαίωντας were under suspicion as rebels.

²⁸ A version of this paper was presented at the American Philological Association meeting of 1995. I am grateful for their help to Fred Naiden of Harvard and to the Editor and referees of *Phoenix*.

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