

Lives and Times of the Master Torturers I; and Sister Pia

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 Aug 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2359>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Talarican — 19 Aug 2000, 13:25

Mr Arimini:

Enjoyed your idea about Pia as Severian's lost sister, and your reasoning is intriguing. You are hereby nominated for the Borski Award. Now, if a plausible explanation can be found for Pia's presence among the lake people of Diuturna (with some solid indication she was not born among them - or that Sev WAS), and how Pia might turn out to have the true name Severa, you might blow the lid off this mystery.

Roy Lackey:

Now you've done it! You've lured Sieur Talarican from lurking and stoked his madness to fever pitch.

It so happens we had been working on a chronology of the guild and its masters prior to Severian's lifetime, such project being inspired by an exchange between Shannon Wilde and ourselves when a question regarding Palaemon's age and exile arose.

All we lack, alas, are any solid conclusions or discoveries arising from our research, other than to reinforce suspicions that the guild was organizationally a shambles and could no longer provide itself enough masters by the traditional route to sustain itself, and, possibly as a result, that Gurloes, particularly, was quite young to be a master.

In hopes other Urthlings might spot something significant, we submit the following:

The Old Masters: When Did Palaemon Begin Teaching?

Constructing a consistent sensible chronology of the torturers' guild masters in the generation immediately prior to Severian's has turned up another set of enigmas

Mantis, in *_Lexicon Urthus_* (hrta "LU"), asserts Severian is twenty years old at the time of his masking and elevation to journeyman, which of course was followed immediately by his disgrace and exile. LU uses the year Sev ascends to Autarch as the datum point for its chronology under the "history" entry. I shall stick with that convention, the "years of the Autarch Severian". Therefore as LU has it, Severian was born around 20 p.s. and his near drowning occurred during about 2 p.s.

Severian has told us of exactly three masters he knew in his lifetime, of whom two were alive at the time of his masking and subsequent disgrace. All three apparently had been masters at least since Severian was old enough to remember them. And, because of Sev's phenomenal memory which at times reaches back to his infancy, we must conclude that all of the three had been elevated before his birth, and that all other masters were dead by then or very shortly afterwards.

Any chronology of the guild and the lives of Masters Malrubius, Palaemon, and Gurloes, in the decades preceding Severian's masking, must take into account all of the following:

At the time of his masking, Severian is approximately nineteen years old, give or take a year or two (implied, Shadow I and III, et al; also see "history" entry in _Lexicon Urthus_).

Masters Malrubius, Palaemon, and Gurloes all had been masters so long as he can remember, meaning presumably since before his birth. Severian evidently remembers no other masters during his lifetime, ergo there were none, at least since his very early infancy. Ergo, the last "other" master died before 19 p.s (Shadow).

Palaemon had seemed elderly for all of Severian's life (Claw ?), ergo, he must have been at least in his fifties when Sev was born.

Malrubius died when Severian was still a boy, "several" years before Sev's masking. After Malrubius took to his bed, Palaemon succeeded him (Shadow II, XI, and XXXIII, et al).

Winnoc related that he had been whipped approximately thirty years before Severian met him in the lazaret, by "Journeyman" Palaemon, who told Winnoc he had been exiled from the guild (Citadel XII). This of course works out to about ten years before Sev's birth, or 30 p.s.

Gurloes seems to be a man in prime middle age at the time of Sev's masking. Gurloes indicates his own youth was about forty years prior to Sev's year as captain (Shadow VII).

Gurloes had evidently been taught by Palaemon, at least as an older apprentice ("Since Gurloes rose to journeyman I have had no better scholar" Shadow XIV), in spite of the fact Malrubius was clearly the teacher of at least the younger apprentices for so long as he was able, well into Sev's lifetime. It was only after Malrubius took to his deathbed during Sev's boyhood that Palaemon assumed the title 'master of apprentices' (Shadow XXXIII).

Autarch Maruthas closed the roads when Palaemon was about twenty, that is, about the same age as Severian when he lectured him on the morning of Sev's departure to exile (Shadow XIV). Unfortunately, so far as I could tell, there doesn't seem to be any independent corroboration of the date on which this occurred. LU's assertion of c. 70 p.s. seems based on LU's estimate of Palaemon's age, about ninety, at the time of Sev's expulsion. (Mantis - ?)

Further speculations require some conjectures about the norms of seniority and promotion in the guild.

For an apprentice who has demonstrated competence in the Art, chooses to take up the vocation, and otherwise has comported himself tolerably, elevation to journeyman seems to be almost automatic at around age 19 to 21. A journeyman might remain so for the rest of his life.

There is, however, a small corps of what might be termed "specialists" who seem to be journeymen whose vocation is in non-torture service to the guild. Examples include such personages as Brother Corbinian the apothecary, Brother Aybert the cook, and "Brother Porter" who guards the Corpse Door (assuming this isn't merely a functional title whose incumbent could be any journeyman). One might speculate that these could be 'civilians' who gained their employment through some connection to the guild (such as being ex-apprentices who rejected masking but went to work for the guild in one of these capacities instead?), but then why would they be referred to as "Brother"? One might speculate that Palaemon might have served, prior to his own elevation to master, a term as a specialist in research and scholarship, a "graduate

assistant" if you will.

Elevation of the journeyman to mastership is a rare honor bestowed only on a chosen few (Shadow). Mastership doubtless traditionally followed many years of unimpeachable craftsmanship in the practice of the mystery of the guild. The Seekers presumably followed the Earth medieval model in bestowing mastership on one who has not merely accumulated seniority and become highly competent, but who has advanced the art in some way, producing for his guild 's approval the proverbial "masterpiece". What a "masterpiece" in the Torturer's Guild might consist of, I'd rather not imagine. Once so elevated, one is a master for life, unless there is some provision for revoking mastership for misbehavior. It is seriously doubtful that masters normally were elevated younger than about fifty or so. However, the results of an attempt to systematically construct a chronology of the guild's recent history strongly implies Palaemon and especially Gurloes were elevated at significantly younger ages than was probably customary.

Severian states plainly that the major policy decisions of the guild, particularly the elevation of new masters, are made by consensus of the incumbent masters. Probably it would be very awkward and embarrassing for there to be only a single master ruling as a dictator rather than a committee of at least two masters (as with Gurloes and Palaemon). For there to be no masters would of course spell the effective extinction of the guild, absent some kind of fudging.

One master holds the office of "head" of the guild, a sort of first-among-equals executive, who makes the day-to-day administrative decisions. Gurloes clearly had occupied this office at least since Sev's birth. But how long could Gurloes possibly have been a master and "head" of the guild ?