

Ares & Aphrodite & Other Latro Stuff

The Urth list — 5 messages, 2 voices, 27 May 2003

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John Barach — 27 May 2003, 16:50

Earlier this month, Nutria wrote:

Add to your data his tryst with Venus/Aphrodite, lover of Mars/Ares. I brought this up to Wolfe in my looong interview, mentioning that Venus was married to Vulcan and had adultery with Mars (plug in the Greek names as you wish). He acted confused, saying that he had thought Venus married to Mars, at least in some versions. I say, "acted" confused. It's hard to believe he did not know this. Which made me wonder if perhaps "more" were not involved.

I just finished reading Soldier of Arete (for the first time) last night, and came across this passage on p. 344 of the old edition (toward the end of chapter 42):

Polos came to watch me exercise the horses. As Diokles and I rubbed them down, he asked me to explain **arete**. "I know Ares is the war god here," he said, "like Pleistorus. But this isn't war. How can anybody say that the man who runs fastest shows his **arete**?"

"It isn't the man who runs best who runs from the enemy," I told him, "and sometimes you want your men to run. When they do, you'd like to see them escape so they can fight again, on better terms or from a better position."

Diokles spat. "War isn't all blood and death, lad. And it isn't always the biggest army that wins. Pretty often it's the one that drills the best, and keeps its armor clean, and stands up best to long marches on short rations. Old Ares isn't some kind of monster, see? Think of him as a plain man that wants to win the war and get back home to Aphrodite. He's for training, discipline, and fair play with the men. And he whistles when he loses just like he whistles when he wins."

Does this passage support the idea Wolfe (claims he) has that Ares and Aphrodite were husband and wife? Diokles could simply be saying that Ares wants to get back to his mistress, but the comparison with a "plain man" suggests a husband trying to get back to his wife.

Of course, Latro doesn't have a wife -- or doesn't know if he does -- to get back to. But like Ares or a soldier, he just wants to get back home. The reference to running fits here, too, because Latro does run at the end of the book. But is he simply running away with the Crimson Men? Or,

as he says to Polos, is he running away (perhaps without realizing it) to "fight again, on better terms or from a better position"?

A couple of questions about SoA:

1. What ever happened to (the ghost of) Artembares? He follows Latro much of the way to Rope, and then disappears. Was he exorcised by Sisyphus, along with the ghostly soldiers of Riverland (ch. 32, p. 256)?

I note, by the way, that another clue that Polos is a centaur may be the way his eyes roll everytime Latro talks to the ghost of Artembares -- like a spooked horse, no?

2. Who is the woman (goddess) who waves at Latro and lo from the marble benches at the end of chapter 42 (p. 345)? My best guess right now is that it's Elata.

3. Why does Latro have blood on his fingers after seeing the armor of King Leonidas (ch. 36, pp. 290, 291)?

4. Perhaps my biggest question: What exactly happens at the end of the manumission ceremony (ch.37)?

Latro is bumped by a wiry little slave (p. 296) -- perhaps (I venture a guess) Queen Gorgo's charioteer, not, as Latro thinks "to assure himself, as well as me, that this was no dream," but to check to see if Latro is armed (Latro later bumps into the wiry slave's sponsor and discovers thereby that he is armed). It seems to me that the two nudges invite us to read them together. If the wiry slave is the charioteer, then he may be planning to kill Latro for having beaten him in the chariot race.

(If it be objected that Latro would have recognized the charioteer, well, it's dark and Latro doesn't in fact recognize the man who dies later as the charioteer until he gets him into the light. The charioteer is "short but muscular," and the guy nudging Latro is "a wiry little rogue from what I could see of him")

The prince gives Themistocles a silver chariot (p. 297), which Latro recognizes -- presumably as the silver chariot (without horses) he was in back in pp. 129-130. What is the significance of Cybele's chariot?

Pausanias twice tells Hippoxleas not to let anything evil happen to Latro, and Queen Gorgo's eyes are full of tears. Latro hears the baying of hounds (not for the first time). Suddenly the charioteer who lost to Latro comes running past, drenched with blood and holding a knife. Hippoxleas tries to stop him, gets stabbed, and *snatches away Latro's crown of flowers*. A dozen people strike down the charioteer. Latro loses sight of his party and searches for them, finally coming back to the same place where he stumbles over the charioteer, recognizes him, and tries to help him.

Why is the charioteer drenched with blood earlier? Presumably because he's already stabbed someone and/or been stabbed. Is it that he is to be killed because he lost the race to Latro (making the queen lose to the prince)? The Rope Maker sponsor of the "wiry little slave" is armed, perhaps in order to kill that slave (the charioteer) himself. But somehow the charioteer gets a priestess's knife, escapes from the guard, kills Hippoxleas, and then is struck down ... but Latro attempts to save him but fails.

So Latro's grief ("man is a wolf to man") may then include the realization that simply by winning

the race he ensured this man's death. He's being used, then, as a pawn in someone's game, which is why he later determines to get away on his own, leaving behind all his friends (even lo) ... to fight again and better?

Thinking out loud,

John

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John Barach

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Chris — 27 May 2003, 17:42 · follows John Barach

Greetings,

3. Why does Latro have blood on his fingers after seeing the armor of King Leonidas (ch. 36, pp. 290, 291)?

It's implied (I think) that Latro slew Leonidas at Thermopylae. The blood is Leonidas', and if I recall correctly Latro feels guilt, and tries to hide the blood (which no one else would probably be able to see anyway); also, he tries to rationalize just how he knows so much about the way Leonidas died. He gives a fairly rational explanation, but it's clear that this is not the real reason he knew what happened.

4. Perhaps my biggest question: What exactly happens at the end of the manumission ceremony (ch.37)?

This was extremely confusing to me as well. This is a historical event, though I have not actually seen where it's recorded originally - I know Thucydides talks about it, though. The ceremony is one in which a large number of Spartan slaves are being freed, for serving in the war. However, the Spartans had something up their sleeve. After the ceremony, the Spartans slaughtered the now-free slaves, on the pretext that slaves are prohibited by law from bearing arms (which they of course were forced to do during the war). If I had to guess, the purpose of the whole scheme was to get them all in the same place and unawares, and also to make an example to the other slaves.

Latro isn't very clear in his account of what goes on, but the reason he was in danger was that he was freed during this same ceremony. His sponsor/bodyguard tears the crown off his head because this crown identifies him as someone who took part in the ceremony, and thus a target to be killed (and Pausanias apparently did **not** want Latro killed along with the rest).

Hope that helps,
Chris

John Barach — 27 May 2003, 18:06 · follows Chris

Earlier today, I wrote

4. Perhaps my biggest question: What exactly happens at the end of the manumission ceremony (ch.37)?

... and a lot of other stuff.

Then I read Jim's interview with Wolfe and things became a bit clearer. The Spartans had armed the Helots for battle against the Persians, and then promised to reward their leaders with freedom. Wolfe says,

Then they held a ceremony which I described in detail, exactly as it was and they gave each Helot who was to be awarded his freedom as a climax of the ceremony a young Spartan as his companion to lead him through the ceremony. And at a given signal each companion killed that Helot that he was responsible for. And they were all killed except Latros who they did not intend to kill because he was not really a Helot. And he survived and all of the rest of them who had gone in the ceremony were butchered. And they really were, this took place.

So my initial theory was wrong, namely, that the charioteer was being killed because he lost to Latro. Or ... was it? Was the charioteer one of the Helots who fought against the Persians? Or are there other reasons he's there among the people being killed?

John

John Barach — 27 May 2003, 18:28 · follows John Barach

Thanks for the reply, Chris. I think you're right re. the blood on the hand (Latro killed Leonidas) and the manumission ceremony. That Latro's sponsor was keeping him safe by tearing off the crown hadn't occurred to me!

I glanced at Herodotus's Histories this afternoon, and noted to me surprise and delight that it ends where Soldier of the Mist ends and Solder of Arete begins, namely, with the Greek siege of Sestus (9.114-115), Oeobazus and the bridge cables (9.115), the attempted escape of Artayctes and Oeobazus (9.118), the Thracian sacrifice of Oeobazus to Pleistorus (9.119), the miracle of the wriggling salt fish on the fire and the interpretation Artayctes gave (9.120), and the crucifixion of Artayctes and stoning of his son (9.120).

What other sources is Wolfe drawing on here for his history? He dedicates Mist to Herodotus and Arete to Xenophon (who discusses a much later campaign).

John

John Barach — 27 May 2003, 23:09 · follows John Barach

What other sources is Wolfe drawing on here for his history?

Sparta's manumission and slaughter of the helots is recounted in Thucydides' Peloponnesian War 4.80.

John Barach