

LEENA MARI PELTOMAA

Herodias in the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist

This is an essay about emotionality and motivation. Through Romanos the Melodist I hope to explore the mental life of Herodias who, according to tradition, was responsible for the beheading of Christ's prophet.¹ I am interested in Romanos' characterization because it is bound to his time and yet universal. I will investigate the subject by focusing on Herodias' motivation, to that which moves her to act as she does, but will make no analysis on the author's objectives. In my interpretation, the author's intention to describe his character in Christian tradition as a model for immorality is a minor, though by no means insignificant, point. In addition, I will consider the motivation of Herodias in light of the theories of Viktor E. Frankl, well-known in meaning-oriented psychiatry.

It is of crucial importance to remember that Herodias, the object of my analysis, came into existence in the mind of Romanos, when he was authorized to compose a suitable work in honour of John the Baptist. As his vantage point, he used the pericopal texts of Mark and Matthew.² The evangelist Mark tells the course of events as follows:

(17) For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. (18) For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your

¹ Greek text edition: No. 38 "On the Beheading of John the Baptist", in: P. MAAS-C. A. TRYPANIS, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*. Oxford 1963. Greek text edition with Italian translation: No. 38, in: R. MAISANO, *Romano il Melode II*. Turin 2002. English translation: No. 38, in: M. CARPENTER, *Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist II. On Christian Life*. Columbia 1973; German translation: No. 16, in: J. KODER, *Romanos Melodos, Die Hymnen I (Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur 62)*. Stuttgart 2005. The Greek passages quoted in this paper are from Maas-Trypanis and the English translation follows Carpenter.

² Mk 6,17–28; Mt 14,3–11. Cf. Lk 3,19–20.

brother's wife.' (Οὐκ ἔξεστί σοι ἔχειν τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.) (19) And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, (ἡ δὲ Ἡρῳδιάς ἐνείχεν αὐτῷ καὶ ἠθέλεν αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδύνατο.) (20) for Herod feared John, knowing that he was righteous and holy man, and he protected him. ... (21) But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. (22) When his daughter Herodias came in and danced (εἰσελθούσης τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρῳδιάδος καὶ ὀρχησαμένης), she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl (τῷ κορασίῳ), 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it. ... (23) even half of my kingdom.' (24) She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' (25) Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the baptizer on a platter.' (26) The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not refuse her. (27) Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, (28) brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.

Romanos' version commences with the banquet, at the very moment when the head of John the Baptist is brought into the midst of the drunken Herod and his guests. Having reflected on the situation for a moment, the narrator turns to the circumstances which lead to this abominable act. He presents a long dialogue, conducted between Herodias and her daughter in seven strophes (2–8). In it Herodias reveals her plan to kill John the Baptist, which fills her daughter with terror. She tries to persuade her mother to abandon the idea and bury it for ever. Having no success, the daughter refuses to co-operate and resorts to silence. Herodias then contrives a plot and coaxes her husband to celebrate his birthday with a banquet (9–10). She calculates that by offering her daughter's dance as a gift to Herod, she will entice him to promise to do the girl a favour in return. Everything goes according to plan and, this time without demur, the daughter hastens to seek her mother's pleasure.

Romanos' story about Herodias' plot, which results in the execution of John the Baptist, is unique in early Byzantine literature, and original in that there does not appear to be any ancient standard for Herodias as a plotter. Apart from the question of the influence of patristic tradition, Romanos' firm psychological touch in dealing with Herodias' emotions gives the impression that there is some truth in his account, even though it cannot be proven. For instance, the reader can easily imagine on the basis of this text alone that Herodias was familiar with her husband's drunken behaviour, and could count her plan on that habit. Or, that long before the opportunity presented itself, the entire

court and its people of noble birth and high rank had been aware of Herodias' desire to get rid of the inconvenience the Baptist caused her in her social setting (since to Herodias John was hardly more than a religious fanatic). It would appear that the hymn writer aimed at producing the greatest possible emotional effect, for at least one homilist must have preached on the basis of the same pericope at the same feast. In order to attract the audience, a hymn writer who carried the same message, used different means from the homilist to awaken their interest – he appealed to their sensibility by means of poetry and music.³ The hymn composer's artistic liberty had its limits, however, for the outcome had to be in harmony with Christian ethic and social mores. It could not be otherwise, since the hymn was sung in public and thus – at least indirectly – controlled by those in power, the Church and the Emperor.

Plausibility sets another limit to the artistic liberty of the poet. When reading the work carefully, I get the impression that what Romanos imagined to have taken place in the mind of Herodias must also have been psychologically credible to his listeners. This is due to the simple reason that, were Herodias not credible, her character would have had no effect on the audience. As we know from theatre, every unsuccessful character is lifeless and boring. If Herodias were dull, also I as a reader would lose interest. Here, however, my impression of the poet's reconstruction of the events before Herod's birthday banquet is that such events could have taken place in real life. Thus, the text provides evidence of what Romanos took for the mental processes of another human being. In other words, what Romanos imagines to have happened in Herodias' mind, though fictitious, must have been plausible to him (and his listeners). In this sense, the plausible equates with reality. This is the historical evidence that brings forth the authentic Constantinopolitan mentality of Romanos. At the same time, it serves as testimony to the poet's emotional strength, which he transfers into the mental dynamics of his Herodias:

Come, my child, come to agree with your mother,
for I have a secret word to you: I desire to destroy

³ About the musical effect, cf. CH. HANNICK, *Zur Metrik des Kontaktion*, in: Βυζάντιος, Festschrift für Herbert Hunger (eds. W. HÖRANDNER – J. KODER – O. KRESTEN – E. TRAPP). Vienna 1984, 107–119. About the effect through refrain, cf. J. KODER, *Romanos Melodos und sein Publikum. Überlegungen zur Beeinflussung des kirchlichen Auditoriums durch das Kontaktion*, in: *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 134/1. Vienna 1999, 64–94, loc. cit. 81–83.

the son of Zechariah, for he gave me a blow that was lasting and not just temporary.⁴

The mother talks to her child gently (Δεῦρο μοι, τέκνον) and her words give the impression that their relationship is intimate. An atmosphere of companionship is created through the sharing of a secret. To win the girl over, Herodias appeals to her own vulnerability; the heavy blow should justify her desire to kill John. The daughter shudders at the thought and foresees the tragedy that is to unfold from such passion (πάθος): “If John dies, all things become dead, and we are buried alive, leaving behind an evil memory, which is eternal and not temporary.”⁵ Herodias is puzzled by her daughter’s response (παιδίσκη), but is willing to explain the matter from her own viewpoint:

What has happened to you, my child? What suddenly is the matter with you?
Why did you spare John and prefer to your mother
the one who hates our life?
Perhaps, my child, you are ignorant of what he suggested to Herod about me,
when he said, ‘It is not allowed that you have the wife
of Philip, your brother; put her away!’
Therefore I wish to cut the inconvenient freedom of speech
of the daring fellow, if I have the opportunity.
I shall destroy his tongue or, rather, his head,
and then I shall not grieve, for I possess in safety
my life, which is transitory.⁶

⁴ (2.7–11) Δεῦρο μοι, τέκνον, συναίνεσον τῇ μητρί σου·
λόγον γάρ κρύφιον ἔχω γυμνώσαι πρὸς σέ·
φανερῶ σοι τὴν βουλήν μου· ἐπιθυμῶ ἀνελεῖν
τὸν υἱὸν Ζαχαρίου· ἔδωκε γάρ μοι πληγὴν
αἰωνίαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

⁵ (3.9–11) ἐὰν θάνῃ Ἰωάννης, γέγονε πάντα νεκρά,
καὶ ἐτάφημεν ζῶντες μνήμην λείψαντες κακίην,
αἰωνίαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

⁶ (4) Τί ἐγένετο σοί, ὃ παιδίσκη; Τί σοι συμβέβηκεν αἰφνίδιον;
Πόθεν ἐφείσω Ἰωάννου καὶ τῆς μητρὸς ὑπερηγάπησας
τὸν μισοῦντα τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν;
Ἄγνοεῖς πολλάκις, τέκνον, ἃ ὑπέθετο Ἡρώδη ἔνεκεν ἐμοῦ,
“Οὐκ ἔξεστί σοι”, (λέγων), “ἔχειν τὴν γυναῖκα (5)
Φίλιππου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου· ἀπόθου αὐτήν”.
Θέλω οὖν ἤδη τὴν ἄκαιρον παρρησίαν
τοῦ τολμηροῦ ἀποκόψαι, ἃν εὖρω καιρόν·
ἀφελῶ αὐτοῦ τὴν γλῶτταν, μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν,
καὶ λοιπὸν οὐ λυποῦμαι ἔχουσα ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ (10)
τὴν ζωὴν μου τὴν πρόσκαιρον.

Herodias' question, "Why did you spare John and prefer to your mother?", is aimed to prick her daughter's conscience – suggesting that she loves John the Baptist more than her own mother. The claim that John "hates their life" is an attempt to manipulate the daughter's mind. The mother continues, however, in a more conciliatory tone, wondering whether her daughter is unaware that John urged Herod to abandon Herodias. The underlying reason, that she is the wife of Herod's brother, is irrelevant to her, what matters is that someone, in principle, has the arrogance to put forth such an idea. She believes that John's death will free her from distress and render secure her earthly existence, "which is transitory". Herodias' words suggest that she is aware of the brevity of human life and that she has fully oriented herself to this world. The daughter remains unyielding, because she sees the plan as destructive to the continuity of her family's life. She raises the moral aspects of the idea and even gives a "sermon", presenting Jezebel as a warning prefigure and comparing Elijah with John. She realizes the danger of the eternal shame that such enterprise would bring about: "We shall be sinning, mother, not against others, but against ourselves and our life. ... destroy this pit, lest you commit a shame that is eternal and not transitory."⁷ Herodias is clearly irritated with her (Παῦρ' ἔμοῦ διδάσκου, ἀνοοία) but, thinking that the daughter is not really capable of understanding the issue at hand, explains it once more:

Learn from me, you wicked girl; do not try to advice me
before you have learned everything in full. Now it eludes you;
you do not understand, nor are you able to.
For truly the Baptist continues to insult me, and if he seems to live,
everyone will assume freedom of speech against me
and say against me what he wishes
as though I were some chance person, not a queen,

⁷ (5) Ἀσεβοῦμεν, μήτηρ, οὐκ εἰς ἄλλους, ἀλλ' εἰς ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν,
ὥσπερ Ἰεζάβελ τὸν Ἥλιαν δλέσα θέλουσα τὸν δίκαιον
ἕαντὴν μᾶλλον ἀπόλεσεν·
Ὁ Ἥλιος μὲν ἐντόνωσ, Ἰωάννης δὲ ἐννόμως ἤλεγξεν ἡμᾶς·
ὁ ἔρημίτης σὺν ἀδστηρότητι εἶπεν (5)
ὡς παραινῶν τῷ Ἡρώδῃ· ὄυκ ἔξεστι σοί·
ὁ δὲ Θεοσβίτης μετὰ πρᾶυτητος εἶρξε
τοῦ Ἀχαάβ τὰς νεφέλας· οὐκ ἔβρεξε γάρ·
διὰ τοῦτο, δέσποινά μου,
θάψον τὸ σκέμμα σου νῦν
καὶ τὸ σκάμμα νεκρώσης, μὴ ποιήσης ὡς ἄει (10)
τὴν αἰσχύνην τὴν πρόσκαρον.

as the wife of an ordinary individual, and not of an august person.
 But peace, my child, I know better than you and many people
 what is expedient; I know how to possess honour
 that is lasting and not temporary.⁸

Here Herodias presents a new argument, and undoubtedly the decisive one. As long as John remains unsilenced, “everyone” will assume freedom of speech against her and say against her “what he wishes”. It is clear that a queen and the wife of an august person is never treated like that. However, Herodias wants to be reconciled with her daughter and calms the frightened child (ἡσύχασον, παιδίσκη) by saying that she knows very well what is profitable and how to win honour. The daughter is not ready to give in. She asks the mother, so intent on accomplishing the impious scheme, “Who would not grow numb at slaying a prophet of Christ?”⁹ The answer is shocking: “You, as daughter, go along with the one who bore you to destroy my enemy and become my right arm.”¹⁰ The daughter begs her mother not to bleed harmless blood through her. She is afraid that she will harm herself and finally refuses to be of service.¹¹ Herodias flies into a fury:

Is John to be given preference by you, o wretched and miserable one,
 over the one who bore you in her bosom? Does the Baptist
 appear to your folly in greater need?

⁸ (6) Παρ’ ἐμοῦ διδάσκου, ἀνοσία, μὴ ἐπιχείρου νουθετήσα με·
 ὅταν γὰρ πάντα μάθῃς, πληροῖς τὰ νῦν ἐπιλανθάνει σε·
 οὐ νοεῖς· οὐδὲ γὰρ δύνασαι·
 ἂν γὰρ οὗτος ὁ βαπτίζων ἐπιμείνῃ με ὑβρίζων καὶ φαίνηται ζῶν,
 ἔκαστος αἴρει τὴν πρὸς ἐμὲ παρηγοίαν, (5)
 καί, ἅπερ θέλει, ὡς θέλει λέγει κατ’ ἐμοῦ
 ὡς τῆς τυχοῦσης, οὐχὶ δὲ βασιλευούσης,
 ὡς γυναικὸς ιδιώτου καὶ οὐ σεβαστοῦ·
 ἀλλ’ ἡσύχασον, παιδίσκη· πλεον γὰρ σοῦ καὶ πολλῶν
 τὸ συμφέρον γνώσκω· οἶδα κτήσασθαι τιμὴν (10)
 αἰωνίαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

⁹ (7.1–4) Ἐρωτῶ σε, μήτηρ, τὸ τοιοῦτον πότε βουλεύει τελεσθῆναι σοι;
 ἐν τῷ φωτὶ ἢ ἐν τῷ σκότει; τὸ ἀσεβὲς γὰρ σου ἐνθύμημα
 τῆς νυκτὸς ἐστιν ἐπάξιον·

διὰ τίνος οὖν τελεῖται; τίς μὴ ναρκήσει φονεῦσαι προφήτην Χριστοῦ;

¹⁰ (7.5–6) Σὺ ὡς θυγάτηρ συνέρχου τῇ σε τεκούσῃ
 τοῦ ἀνελεῖν τὸν ἐχθρόν μου καὶ γένη μοι χεῖρ·

¹¹ (7.7–11) Δέομαι, μήτηρ, μὴ δι’ ἐμοῦ τῆς ἀθλίας
 δέξεται ἡ γῆ τὸ ἀθῶνον αἷμα τοῦ σοφοῦ·
 ὡς ἐσφάγη Ζαχαρίας, νῦν Ἰωάννης τιμηθῆ·
 κἀγὼ μὴ ὑπουργήσω, μήπως λήψωμαι πληγὴν
 αἰωνίαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

It is not to shame my breasts, which gave you nourishment? Would that they had not!

For why did I, against my own interests, seek to nourish her who, through her rebellion, would be hostile to me?

Why was I constrained to union with the king for the sake of saving the one who would be giving me distress?

But why do I distress myself in advance? Let my command be done, and what I wish will be accomplished; and though you are unwilling, you will do

my will for the time being.¹²

Herodias admonishes her daughter (ὃ παναθλία καὶ ταλαίπωρε); she got her life from her mother and nourishment from her breasts. Now the mother is asking herself why she did that. She also asks why she was constrained to union with the king if it resulted in distress, the cause of which she should be able to put right. Nevertheless, Herodias also knows she will have the last word. The end suggests that the daughter will submit to her mother's will, regardless. She leaves the daughter alone but keeps her own mind:

Now I shall keep still, and I shall not show the miserable girl what I am planning; She who was brought into the world for my correction will never see and understand the undertaking that is on my heart.

While these things were considered and said many times by the mother, the daughter remained in silence.¹³

Herodias is aware that the daughter, whom she brought into the world, has put her in a moral school (ἡ τεχθεῖσα μου εἰς κόλασιν).¹⁴ How-

¹² (8) Ἰωάννης σοι προετιμήθη, ὃ παναθλία καὶ ταλαίπωρε,
τῆς βαστασάσης σε κοιλίας; ὁ βαπτιστῆς ἀναγκαιότερος
κατεφάνη τῇ ἀνοίᾳ σου;
οὐκ αἰδεῖσαι τοὺς μαστοὺς μου, οἳ ἐποίησαν τροφήν σου; ὡς εἴθους γε μή
τί γὰρ ἐζήτηον κατ' ἑμαυτῆς ἀναθρέψαι (5)
τὴν διὰ τῆς ἀπειθείας ἐχθραίνουσαν μέ;
τί δὲ ἠπειρήθη τῷ βασιλεῖ συναφθῆναι
διὰ τὸ περισωθῆναι τὴν ὀλίβουσαν μέ;
διὰ τί δὲ προλυποῦμαι; γένηται ὄῤῃμα ἑμόν
καὶ ὁ θέλω τελεῖται καὶ μὴ θέλουσα ποιεῖς (10)
τὴν βουλήν μου τὴν πρόσκαιρον.

¹³ (9.1–5) Νῦν οὖν ἡσυχάσω καὶ μὴ δεῖξω τῇ παγκακούργῳ ἃ βουλεύομαι
μήποτε σκέψηται καὶ εὖρη τοῦ ἐνθυμίου μου ἀναίρεισιν
ἡ τεχθεῖσα μου εἰς κόλασιν.
τῶν τοιούτων ἐσκεμμένων καὶ πολλάκις εἰρημένων ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς
ἡ μὲν θυγάτηρ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ διήγεν.

¹⁴ LS: κόλασις, ἡ, a pruning; a checking, punishing, correction, chastening.

ever, the counterarguments and pleads of the daughter have no effect on her, Herodias's only response being indignation. Because of her lack of any sense of sin or morality, Herodias is able to create the circumstances in which her plan can be realized. She turns to Herod:

But the mother clings to her husband,
saying, Husband, it is the time of your birthday;
make it a day of joyous festivity;
let us rejoice in your old age, for your brother,
taking my youth, wickedly destroyed me
for life for a time.¹⁵

Herod, then beguiled by the words of the plotter,
broke into a hearty laugh, and, stupid fellow, he raised
his voice as he laughed and said:
My wife and consort, in this your love charm I take pleasure.
Then, if I shall celebrate my birthday,
what gift will you give me that is worthy of me?
What shall I offer you? Myself, your slave, and again
I shall have my daughter dance for you,
she has given you much pleasure, and truly I shall enliven for you
your birthday, a day, O King, that you will pass
in passing pleasure.¹⁶

The strategy of Herodias is plain: she appeals to Herod's feelings – it is all about Herod's well-being. His birthday shall be celebrated with proper splendour so that he can rejoice at least in his old age with his wife, whose youth was robbed of him by his brother. Herodias knows

¹⁵ (9.6–11) ἡ δὲ τεκοῦσα ἐνήχει τότε τῷ ἀνδρὶ
λέγουσα· Ἄνερ, τῶν γενεσίων σου ὥρα·
ποιήσον ἡμῖν ἡμέραν φαιδρᾶς ἑορτῆς·
εὐφρανθῶμεν ἐν τῷ γήρει· τὴν γὰρ νεότητα μοῦ
λαβὼν ὁ ἀδελφός σου περιέσυρε κακῶς
εἰς τὸν βίον τὸν πρόσκαιρον.

¹⁶ (10) Ὁ Ἡρώδης οὖν ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῆς ἐπιβούλου βουκολούμενος
μέγα ἐκραύγασε βοήσας καὶ ὡς ἀσύνετος ἐν γέλῳτι
τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀνύψωσε·
Κοινωνέ μου, λέγων, γύναι, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χάριν ἔχω τῷ φίλτρῳ τῷ σῶ·
ἂν οὖν τελέσω τῶν γενεσίων τὴν ὥραν, (5)
οὐ τί προσάγεις μοι δῶρον ἄξιον ἐμοῦ;
Τί σοι προσάξω; δούλην ἑμαυτὴν, καὶ πάλιν
τὴν ἕξ ἐμοῦ παραστήσω ὀρχήστριαν σοί,
τὴν εὐφραίνουσάν σε πάνυ, καὶ φαιδρυνῶ ἀληθῶς
τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἡμέραν, ἣν ποιήσεις, βασιλεῦ, (10)
διὰ τέρψιν τὴν πρόσκαιρον.

the right strings to pull, for Herod answers: “My wife and consort, in this your love charm I take pleasure.” Now, since she has allured Herod with the idea of the celebration, it occurs to him to ask what gift his wife would give him, the king. Herodias’ flattery is at its height: “Myself, your slave.”¹⁷ In addition, she is going to offer her own daughter’s dance (τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ παραστήσω ὀρχήστριαν σοί), because she knows that it will give him great pleasure. Such a present looks natural and harmless, as if it were the essential requisite for a successful birthday banquet. Herodias’ plan is as follows: as the guests get drunk, she will urge her unsuspecting daughter to dance in order to “turn the heart of majesty towards us” and make him promise a gift in return, a gift whose implications she alone is aware of.

Herodias was a historical figure of whom recorded “facts” exist, which makes it possible to judge the character Romanos describes from an other angle as well. Historical information of Herodias is found in two works by the Jewish historian and general Josephus Flavius (A.D. 37?–c. 100), in *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*.¹⁸ *The Antiquities* recounts that the execution of John took place in a prison but is silent about Herodias’ share and the banquet.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Josephus provides us with three relevant pieces of information. The first is related to Herodias’ high status: she is descended from a royal family (Herod I),²⁰ daughter of the king’s son (Aristobulus), sister of a king (Agrippa), wife of a king (Herod Antipas, her uncle), and divorced (from Herod Philip, the half-brother of Herod Antipas, her uncle on the father’s side).

The second piece of information illuminates the circumstances which lead to her marriage with Herod Antipas: “[Herod Antipas] was once sent to Rome and he lodged with Herod [Philip], who was his brother

¹⁷ Slaves were property which was sold, bought or inherited.

¹⁸ Flavii Iosephi Opera, ed. B. NIESE, s.v. Ἡρωδίας, vol. 4, Ant. Iud. XVIII, 110–113, 136, 148, 240, 246, 253, 255. Berlin 1892; vol. 6, De bello I, 552, II 182sq. Berlin 1895.

¹⁹ According to Josephus Herod put John to death for political reasons: “Herod, who feared the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advice) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late”, Ant. Iud. XVIII, 118–119, transl. by W. WHISTON (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>).

²⁰ The “royal family” or Herodian dynasty exerted highest local political authority in Palestine under Roman rulership.

indeed, but not by the same mother... He fell in love with Herodias, this last Herod's [Philip] wife, who was the daughter of Aristobulus, their brother, and the sister of Agrippa the Great, and ventured to talk about marriage between them. When she consented, the agreement was made for her to change her habitation and come to him... One article of this agreement said that he should put away/divorce the daughter of Aretas [king's daughter, with whom he had lived a long time]."²¹ The third piece of historical information confirms that Herodias had a daughter, whose name was Salome, and further that Herodias broke a norm: "Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod [Philip], the son of Herod the Great, who was born of Mariamme, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome. After her birth Herodias took it upon herself to confound the laws of our tradition and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive and was married to Herod [Antipas]."²²

As we have seen, Herodias lived at the beginning of the Christian era in Rome, when Herod met her. Rome was also the place where the agreement on Herodias' second marriage was made. Although the historian does not refer to her divorce, a judicial declaration to dissolve her marriage with Herod Philip must have been made before her remarriage. What Josephus leaves out are facts that were generally known to all, that marriage was considered to be a "partnership, whose primary purpose was to have legitimate descendants to whom the property, status, and family qualities could be handed down through the generations".²³ In other words, Herodias' first marriage with her uncle, Herod Philip, had been arranged in the interests of the Herodian household.²⁴ Here we can note that it was permissible to marry the daughter of a brother.²⁵ "Girls had to be at least twelve years old to be legally mar-

²¹ στελλόμενος δὲ ἐπὶ Ῥώμης κατάγει ἐν Ἡρώδου ἀδελφοῦ ὄντος οὐκ ὁμομητρίου... ἐρασθεῖς δὲ Ἡρωδιάδος τῆς τούτου γυναίκος, θυγάτηρ δὲ ἦν Ἀριστοβούλου καὶ οὗτος ἀδελφὸς αὐτῶν, Ἀγρίππου δὲ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ μεγάλου, τοιμᾶ ἄπεισθα λόγον περὶ γάμου. καὶ δεξαμένης συνθήκαι γίνονται μετοικίασσθαι παρ' αὐτὸν... ἦν δὲ ἐν ταῖς συνθήκαις ὡστε καὶ τοῦ Ἀρέτα τὴν θυγατέρα ἐμβαλεῖν. *Ant. Iud.* XVIII, 109–111.

²² Ἡρωδιάς δὲ αὐτῶν ἡ ἀδελφὴ γίνεται Ἡρώδη Ἡρώδου τοῦ μεγάλου παιδὶ γεγονότι ἐκ Μαρίας τῆς τοῦ Σίμωνος τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, καὶ αὐτοῖς Σαλώμη γίνεται, μεθ' ἧς τὰς γονὰς Ἡρωδιάς ἐπὶ συγχύσει φρονήσασα τῶν πατρῶν Ἡρώδη γαμεῖται τοῦ ἀνδρός τῷ ὁμοπατρίῳ ἀδελφῷ διαστᾶσα ζῶντος. *Ibid.* 136.

²³ J. EVANS GRUBBS, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire. A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood.* London–New York 2002, 81.

²⁴ Cf. *Ant. Iud.* XVIII, 130–142.

²⁵ EVANS GRUBBS 138.

ried, though they could be betrothed at an earlier age.”²⁶ It is inconceivable that in the Herodian royal house the young Herodias’ opinion, let alone her consent, would ever have been asked for.²⁷ By Philip she had a daughter, Salome, who in turn married into the same household.²⁸

Josephus’ account makes it clear that it was Herod who fell in love with his brother’s wife. (To the male historian the feelings of a woman were probably irrelevant, but we can still speculate on what might have happened, had Herodias not responded to Herod’s feelings.) The passage in question suggests that talk about marriage between them was possible for two reasons: their kinship, and their high rank. We can assume that Herod Philip did not object to his wife’s wish – perhaps it was merely a welcome and advantageous opportunity for him to free himself of the “old” wife, for divorce was possible according to Roman law.²⁹ The clause in the marriage agreement, according to which Herod had to divorce his wife, was accomplished in an extraordinary manner by his wife, who had previously learned about the matter.³⁰ The marriage of Herod and Herodias seems to have been in accordance with established standards of Roman social practice, but it is clear that in Jewish tradition their marriage was considered illegitimate. That is why it appears necessary for Josephus to emphasize that Herodias “took upon her to confound the laws of our tradition and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive and was married”. On the other hand, although John the Baptist had been telling Herod that ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’, he did not reproach Herodias. Yet it was she who had a grudge against him. Why Herodias? The Gospel gives us no answer.

Let us return to Romanos. It is evident from his narration that in his eyes Herodias had already committed a crime, adultery, in addition

²⁶ Ibid. 88.

²⁷ Consent to marriage “clearly depended on family interrelationships that were beyond the scope of the law.”, *ibid.* 89. Cf. how the daughters were married off: *Ant. Iud.* XVIII, v. 4.

²⁸ “Her daughter Salome was married to Philip, the son of Herod, and tetrarch of Trachonitis; and as he died childless, Aristobulus, the son of Herod, the brother of Agrippa, married her.” – ἡ δὲ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς Σαλώμη Φιλίππου γαμεῖται Ἡρώδου παιδὶ τῷ τετράρχῃ τῆς Τραχωνίδος, καὶ ἄπαιδος τελευτήσαντος Ἀριστοβούλου αὐτὴν ἄγεται Ἡρώδου παῖς τοῦ Ἀγρίππου ἀδελφοῦ. *Ant. Iud.* XVIII, 136–137.

²⁹ EVANS GRUBBS 187: “Whether unilateral or by mutual agreement, divorce was an accepted fact of Roman life, and was subject to very few restrictions until the fourth century C.E.”

³⁰ Cf. *Ant. Iud.* XVIII, 111–113.

to which she is now committing a new crime. Her motivation seems to be revenge:

When she saw that all were drunk, the extremely tricky Herodias,
As she found the occasion she sought, she said to herself:

See the time that I have been searching for;

Now what I wanted will be accomplished, and the one who calls me adulteress will be put to death.³¹

Romanos also considers Herod to be an adulterer and Herodias' accomplice, but the actual criminal and sinner is Herodias, whose shame is put on stage as the eyes of the guests "testify" and their thoughts "reveal":

...[Herod] acted impiously

in order that he might enjoy the one whom he seduced.

For the adulteress, not the maiden, sought to cut off the head
of the offspring of the sterile woman.³²

With these words, the wicked woman changed the mind of the little girl,
and when she was adorned for the shameful deed, she cast around her
dishonour as a cloak.

The friends of Herod greatly praised the beauty of the maiden,
as they recognized the indomitable will and the purpose
of the mother, they secretly said:

Do you see the intention of the harlot, Herodias,
how she wants to show the child she has produced as like herself?
She has not been satisfied with her own shamefulness,
but she has defiled her own child before us
for our passing pleasure.³³

³¹ (13) Ὡς οὖν εἶδε πάντας μεθυσθέντας Ἡρωδιάς ἡ πολυμήχανος,
ἦνπερ ἐζήτει εὐκαιρίαν εὐροῦσα, εἶπεν ἐν ψυχῇ αὐτῆς
Ἴδε, ὥρα ἦν ἐθήρευον·

νῦν τελεῖται ὄπερ ἠθελον, καὶ φονεύεται ὁ λέγων μοιχάδα ἐμέ·

³² (2.2–4) ...τὸ ἀσεβές εὐθὺς ἐποίησεν,

ἵνα τέρψη ἦν ἐμοίχευσεν·

ἢ μοιχὰς γάρ, οὐκ ἡ κόρη ἀποκόψαι τὸν τῆς στείρας ἐζήτει καρπὸν·

³³ (14) Μετεποίησεν ἡ ἀνοσία τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις τὸ κοράσιον,
καὶ κοσμηθὲν ἐπὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ ἀναιδὲς περιεβάλλετο
ἀτμίαν ὡς ἱμάτιον·

οἱ δὲ φίλοι τοῦ Ἡρώδου τὸ μὲν κάλλος τῆς παιδίσκης ἤνεσαν πολὺ,

τῆς δὲ τεκούσης τὴν ἀδιάτρεπτον γνώμην (5)

καὶ τὸν σκοπὸν ἐννοοῦντες εἶπαν ἐν κρυφῇ·

Βλέπετε γνώμην Ἡρωδιάδος τῆς πόρνης,

πῶς καὶ ἦν ἔτεκε θέλει δεῖξαι κατ' αὐτήν;

οὐκ ἠρκέσθη τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἀναισχυντίᾳ αὐτῆς,

ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐκ σπλάγχνων ἔχρανεν ἐπὶ ἡμῶν (10)

διὰ τέρψην τὴν πρόσοικαρον.

Adulteress, harlot, shamelessness (μοιχάς, πόρνη, ἀναισχυντία) – these invectives illustrate Romanos’ judgement of her character. Romanos was a child of his time. These words were directed at those who digressed from Christian ethics and broke the norms of society.³⁴ They are found repeatedly in homiletics and hagiographical writings, but we also meet with them in Procopius, the historian and contemporary of Romanos. If, as I believe, Anthony Kaldellis’ claim in relation to Procopius’ *Secret History* and *Wars* is correct, viz., that “no other author gives us a better flavor of life in the sixth century”,³⁵ then we can take Romanos’ words to have literal meaning. When describing Herodias’ case, he simply interprets the sentiments of the inhabitants of Constantinople. Furthermore, the genre of hymnography that Romanos represents, the *kontakion*, has its roots in the extremely emotional Syriac poetry, as we know it from Ephrem, and “authorizes” the poet to express his feelings powerfully.

In the end, the attitudes of Romanos and Procopius – perhaps Procopius even a little more than Romanos – owe much to the Roman and Byzantine social order, which legislation reflects. It is easy to see that throughout Roman history social intercourse rested on the conviction that people knew how to behave. Prestige, family status, determined how a person was expected to be treated and how he or she was expected to behave and treat others in return.³⁶ From this point of view, Roman/Byzantine law provides evidence of what was desirable in the social context. Nevertheless, people did not always behave according to law – otherwise there would never have been any demand for lawyers. I see that the gap between what was desirable, a norm or a sanction, and what was prohibited, existed then as it does now. Within this margin, which is sometimes broader, sometimes narrower, people lived as they saw fit and acted according to what made sense to them – regard-

³⁴ EVANS GRUBBS 48 (referring to J. BEAUCAMP, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4^e–7^e siècle). I. Le droit impérial*. Paris 1990, 17–23): “Stress on feminine chastity and sense of modesty is particularly marked in late Roman law, reaching its culmination with the sixth-century emperor Justinian.” The study of S. LEONTSINI, *Die Prostitution im frühen Byzanz. Dissertationen der Universität Wien* 194. Wien 1989, points out the extraordinary wide use and application of the concept *porneia*.

³⁵ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea, Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*. Philadelphia 2004, 43.

³⁶ Cf. EVANS GRUBBS 16–80 (The status of women in Roman law). Her remark is illuminating: “In studying the legal position of women in the Roman Empire, the importance of social status must always be kept in mind.” *Ibid.* 12.

less of law, sanctions and moral codes, even under the threat of being rejected by their communities and sentenced in a court of law. That this is also plain to Romanos is evident in his description of Herodias's motives, even if his intention is to show that this depraved human being is capable of anything because she has no shame.

Hence, if we listen to Romanos' Herodias, we hear that she is distressed because, as long as John "seems to live", there remains the possibility that people would feel free to speak what they like against her. This possibility, not revenge, is her real motive, for the wife of an august person is never addressed without respect. Roman society was always so "highly status-conscious" that it is justifiable to suppose that the resentment Herodias felt for John the Baptist was ultimately connected with status.³⁷ To Romanos, who lived in such highly status-conscious society, the insult and its possible consequences must have been self-evident when he pondered on the events described in the Gospel.

Since Romanos knew the "rules" of his society in terms of honourable conduct and behaviour, he was also able to put into words the concern about honour. Thus Herodias's daughter is afraid that her family would leave behind "an evil memory, which is eternal and not temporal".³⁸ She knows that her family is already branded by shame as she warns her mother not to make the temporary shame eternal.³⁹ While the daughter is worried, Herodias does not care, for she believes she knows "how to possess honour (οἶδα κτήσασθαι τιμὴν) that is lasting and not temporary". Herod's guests for their part are well aware of Herodias' dishonour. Because "honour was what one had in the eyes of other, due to birth and social status",⁴⁰ the attitude of the guests at the banquet appears to disclose the normal Constantinopolitan stand towards women whose behaviour was judged to be unchaste and impudent. For, according to Roman and Byzantine standards of morality, chastity and modesty were the virtues of women *par excellence*. We are probably unable to understand the full implications of the dance scene as it would have appeared to Romanos and his contemporaries. Danc-

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 71.

³⁸ (3.9–11) ἐὰν θάνῃ Ἰωάννης...
καὶ ἐτάφημεν ζῶντες μνήμην λείψαντες κακίην,
αἰωνίαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

³⁹ (5.9–11) θάψον τὸ σκέμμα σου νῦν
καὶ τὸ σκάμμα νεκρώσης, μὴ ποιήσης ὡς αἰεὶ
τὴν αἰσχύνην τὴν πρόσκαιρον.

⁴⁰ EVANS GRUBBS 12.

ers, actresses and others working on the stage were only one step removed from the lowest rank of society, the prostitutes.⁴¹ It is difficult to say whether Romanos associated the girl's displaying of her body during the dance with professional stage performances. Nevertheless, in the context of her performance, the question of honour is particularly striking.

In such an atmosphere of controlled morality there must always have been uttered and unuttered reproaches in the air. It is very likely that Romanos had around him sufficient examples for describing a person who is harbouring thoughts of revenge. Therefore Romanos could "hear" even the unspoken reproaches of the Jewish against Herodias and envisage the effect this would have on her mental state. It is quite understandable to anyone who imagines herself or himself in Herodias' place that she must have felt a burning need to get rid of her torment. As we have seen, this is what Romanos implies, although it is not his deliberate emphasis. Here we come back to my thesis about "the plausible which equates with reality". The interpretation Romanos offers for Herodias' emotional argument to justify the execution of John is credible in historical respect, because it reflects the values and social mores of his own time, clearly distinguishable in the text. It is also credible within a psychological framework in general, because even when separated from its historical context, the description of Herodias' mental dynamics is understandable. Thus, Romanos' interpretation seems to bear universal validity.

Notwithstanding, this essay about Herodias' character would not be complete if it failed to discuss her actions in terms of responsibility. The topic will not be treated in accordance with Romanos' intention of teaching "us" to follow the Forerunner, for this approach would not allow for a wider exploration of Herodias' mental qualities. To Romanos, as a Byzantine preacher of Christian morality, Herodias was a woman whose deeds and intrigues disclosed her depraved mind in which there were no other dimensions to explore, for she was incurably evil. In spite of this, we can consider the question of responsibility, because Romanos' text allows us to investigate the "impious act" within a psychological framework. My orientation to the topic will be along the theories of Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy.⁴² The basic

⁴¹ Cf. BEAUCAMP 121–132, 206–210.

⁴² V. E. FRANKL, *Man's Search for Meaning. The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust*. London et al. 2004. (First published in German in 1946 under the title

concepts of logotherapy, an internationally recognized form of applied psychiatric therapy whose significance has been proven in empirical research,⁴³ provide me with the theoretical tools to widen my understanding of this character, who seems to lack any sense of sin and morality.

The philosophical core of Frankl's theory is concerned with meaning in life. His theory rests on three premises: (1) that human beings have free will towards inner and outer conditions; (2) that the will to meaning is our basic motivation; and (3) furthermore, that life always has meaning. In this context, however, the term 'meaning of life' is not understood as a general meaning of life but "rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment".⁴⁴ Frankl is famous for his thesis that a human being can be robbed of everything except for the ultimate of human freedoms – that of choosing one's attitude in any given set of circumstances. As for Herodias, the question whether she could have acted in another way is intriguing in the context of research on late antique/Byzantine society. It is commonly believed that speculations like this are a waste of time, because they cannot be proved by empirical evidence. The question may look absurd, but if we consider that it is the image of Herodias that Romanos displayed on the Constantinopolitan platform of Christian ethics and Roman moral values, the image upon which his audience was expected to reflect, then we realize that we are in fact dealing with Byzantine ideology and mentality. Seen from this angle, it no longer matters that we are not going to consider the "original" Herodias, who as a historical person with her thoughts and feelings will forever remain a mystery to us, as is the case with everybody who does not express herself/himself to others. The focus is on the fact that Romanos really presents for consideration the idea that Herodias could have acted differently had she wished to do so: this is suggested by the role given to her daughter.

We have already learned from the dialogues how the daughter reacted, but it is useful to examine her responses in detail to assess what arguments Romanos considered to be possible *in principle* to bring someone to change her/his mind. In her first dialogue, the daughter says

Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager.) Ibid., *The Will to Meaning. Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy. Expanded Edition.* Meridian, Penguin Books 1988.

⁴³ A. BATHYANY—D. GUTTMANN, *Empirical Research in Logotherapy and Meaning-Oriented Psychotherapy.* Annotated bibliography. Phoenix, AZ 2005.

⁴⁴ FRANKL 1988, 171.

that the mother will cause much greater harm to herself if she does not give up her plan.⁴⁵ She continues that, should John die, not only the mother but their race will face doom and be destroyed. Finally, she presents her vision that all things would become dead, and they would be buried alive leaving behind an eternal evil memory. In her second dialogue, the daughter appeals to her mother's religious sentiments.⁴⁶ The daughter understands that sinning will revenge itself within their lifetime, and she warns her mother of the fate of Jezebel: "Just as Jezebel, wishing to destroy the righteous Elijah, rather destroyed herself."⁴⁷ She compares Elijah with John, who "lawfully accused us", indicating that putting a righteous man to death would only eternalize their shame. In the last dialogue, she cries out in despair that the very thought of slaying Christ's prophet is ungodly.⁴⁸ None of these arguments cuts: neither the plead to safeguard Herodias' own interests nor the appeal to protect the entire family from destruction. It is also obvious that Herodias is immune to religious persuasion. The daughter's reaction indicates that for her it is a matter of conscience if the "harmless blood of the wise man" should be shed. Her fear of eternal harm that might befall her, should she become involved, is in stark contrast to Herodias' insensibility.

Through Herodias' responses, Romanos portrays what he perceives to be her main character trait. In the first place, Herodias believes that her safety from any threat in this life is assured as soon as John is out

⁴⁵ (3) Ὑπακούσασα δὲ ἡ παιδίσκη τοῦ παρανόμου μελετήματος
 ἔφριξεν, ἔκραξεν ὦ μῆτερ, ὃ τί δεινόν ἐστι τὸ πάθος σου·
 ἄφες τοῦτο ἀνιάτρευτον
 ἂν γὰρ θέλης θεραπεῦσαι χαλεπότερον τὸ τραῦμα ποιεῖς σεαυτῆ·
 κοιμήσον ἔνδον τῶν λογισμῶν σου τὸ ῥῆμα, (5)
 μήποτε γένηται πτόμα τῷ γένει ἡμῶν·
 οὔτε γὰρ μόνη τὸν ἕξ αὐτοῦ μόρον δέχη,
 ἀλλὰ καὶ γὼ καὶ Ἡρώδης καὶ οἱ ἕξ ἡμῶν.
 ἐὰν θάνῃ Ἰωάννης, γέγονε πάντα νεκρά,
 καὶ ἐτάφημεν ζῶντες μνήμην λείψαντες κακὴν, (10)
 αἰώνιαν, οὐ πρόσκαιρον.

⁴⁶ See footnote 7 for the Greek text.

⁴⁷ 2 Kings 9,10 (= IV Regn 9,10): "The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and no one shall bury her." Ref. to Jezebel: 1 Kings 16,31; 18,4.13.19; 19,1f.; 21,5-25; 2 Kings 9,10 (= LXX: III Regn 16,31; 18,4.13.19; 19,1f.; 20,5-23); Rev. 2,20.

⁴⁸ See footnote 9 for the Greek text.

of the way.⁴⁹ In other words, she feels that John represents a living danger to her existence, here and now. As we saw earlier, Herodias appears completely orientated to this world. This orientation is her fundamental character trait.⁵⁰ It is clear that to Romanos, as a Christian hymn writer, anyone of such a disposition appears unreligious, having no spirit of reverence toward God. Therefore, when the daughter tries to reason with Herodias to abandon her plan, which in her mind equals sinning, Herodias does not understand her message. She insists that she has a better understanding than the daughter and many others of what is expedient – she knows how to gain lasting respect – but she is speaking in a worldly, social, context, while the daughter’s reasoning occurs in a religious one.

On this basis we can approach the question of meaning in life. My first argument is paradoxical for, contrary to what we might expect, Romanos’ Herodias is no “victim of circumstances”, which would merely allow her to play the role of the depraved avenger depicted in the Gospel. No, the character Romanos creates shows mental qualities which justify the reputation of this individual as evil. In this respect, Viktor E. Frankl’s observation, “It is a characteristic constituent of human existence that it transcends itself, that it reaches out for something other than itself,” provides us with the key to the soul of a person whose existence does not transcend itself.⁵¹ Herodias is such a person. Of course, this does not mean that she must automatically also be immoral. She is exceedingly familiar with the visible world, it is true, but that is no crime. Only her attitude towards the others, John the Baptist, the daughter, and Herod, reveals her self-centred character, for the fulfilment of her life is achieved at the cost of others. She abuses and manipulates them in different ways through violent behaviour and dishonesty, and makes them pay the price for her peace of mind. This is the immoral figure that is revealed in Romanos’ characterization, when his scornful vituperations about Herodias’ adultery are put to one side.

There is no doubt that for Herodias, as a character of Romanos’ narration, the meaning in life is inseparable from her existence in life. We remember that her genuine motive is the fear of being subjected to

⁴⁹ (4.10–11) καὶ λοιπὸν οὐ λυποῦμαι ἔχουσα ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ / τὴν ζωὴν μου τὴν πρόσκαιρον.
The word ἀσφάλεια indicates also “security” or “personal safety”.

⁵⁰ Implicated also by refrains in strophes 4, 6, 9, 10.

⁵¹ FRANKL 1988, 55.

insults at any time. It is not difficult to imagine that in her experience her circumstances are unbearable, for she is not able (or willing) to change the fact that she is married to Herod. This feeling gives rise to her motivation, which in turn moves her to act as she does. The feeling is so urgent that the frustration caused by her daughter's refusal forces Herodias to question the reasons for the circumstances that distress her, i.e., she wants to know the reason for her suffering. That she does suffer is obvious even to the daughter, who at the beginning of their dialogues shudders at it: "O mother, what a terrible suffering is yours."⁵² Herodias' reaction corresponds with Frankl's observation that man's search for meaning is provoked or promoted by a crisis.

Now we can consider the question whether Herodias could have acted in any other way. How should we understand the degree to which she is responsible? Is she "doomed" to her fate, like the figures of ancient Greek tragedy? I believe we can start with the supposition that Herodias is well aware of her position in society and knows the limits of her powers. There are no elements in the story to indicate that she as an agent could not choose another approach towards John, should she want to. But she does *not* want to. She has already decided upon her approach before revealing her plan to the daughter. If she were unsure of the justification of her actions, the daughter's arguments would provide her with more than one way out of her decision. However, Herodias' rationale, the fear of being a target of possible insults, verbal attacks or gossip, weighs heavily in favour of putting John to death. That makes sense to her, for after such an act, who would dare to give vocal expression to her/his thoughts about her? If John's tongue was merely torn from his mouth (which was quite a common punishment for criminals at that time), he would bear eternal witness to the reason for his mutilation.

In the framework of Frankl's theory we can approach the question of Herodias' responsibility from "her point of view". I think we can admit that the reasons behind Herodias' resentment against John are real rather than imagined. We "know" that, in the end, these reasons are Roman law and social practice on the one hand and Jewish religious law on the other, challenging Herodias's circumstances. It would appear that in Justinian's time liberal Roman attitudes towards divorce had changed and divorce was now considered as adultery.⁵³ In Byzantine

⁵² (3.2) ὦ μήτερον, ὃ τί δεινόν ἐστι τὸ πάθος σου·

⁵³ Cf. EVANS GRUBBS 202ff.

law and understanding, adultery was a woman's crime, upon which Romanos reflects. However, the text shows that the actual confrontation takes place between Herodias' position as queen and the values represented by the daughter. Herodias cannot change her circumstances; what remains is the freedom to choose her approach. We know what decision she makes. According to this interpretation, her evil reputation is not due to her "adultery", but due to her choice, for which she is ultimately responsible. In fact, Romanos' text suggests the same, for this interpretation would not be possible without the setting which justifies the emotions and motivation of his character. As a narrator he must tell a story, which, to be credible, must be aligned with real life. The emotions of Romanos' creation are indicative of the reaction that is common to all human beings in a stressful situation. Therefore I see that the figure of Herodias, even though a literary one, is a universal character, whose existence is not bound to Romanos' time but eternal.

Conclusions

It is clear that what an author considers to be self-evident to his contemporaries needs no explanation. I believe that to Romanos' audience, Herodias' viewpoint was immediately evident from the social setting. Unlike us, who inhabit a different world of values, they were able to understand at once what Herodias won through her act: the luxury of the privileged people to be treated with respect, regardless of their morality or lack thereof. Of course, they grasped that the price for Herodias' safe and comfortable existence was the life of another unique human being, which is a matter of morality and against the commandment of God, "You shall not murder".⁵⁴ To us as outsiders, however, life's realities in early Byzantine Constantinople are not strikingly evident in Romanos' text, because his "accusations" against Herodias are based on her adultery and on the crime she is going to commit as revenge. That is a Christian interpretation, which, as we have seen, is also illuminating on a historical level. Had our analysis been based on the author's objectives, we would have overlooked as irrelevant a whole range of emotional nuances in the character of Herodias. The application of the basic ideas of Frankl's theories have been beneficial to our treatment of her by enabling us to discern the existential space

⁵⁴ Ex 20,13.

of this character from the external conditions that surround her. I am thus convinced that the Byzantine study of women, being at the mercy of male sources, would in general profit from a theoretical approach in order to complete the interpretation in a historical context.

[I thank Anna-Maria Hajba for having polished my English manuscript.]

