

*'Breaking the code of guest-friendship (xenia) is a crime with serious consequence.' How far do you agree with this statement? In your answer you should explain what the code of guest-friendship involves and include discussion of incidents when this code was broken and of their consequence.*

I agree greatly with the above mentioned statement, since it is made clear from a number of episodes in the Odyssey that those who violate the code of xenia suffer horribly. Guest friendship is an important theme throughout the Odyssey, and it helps not only to put into perspective different characters' motives, but also gives an important insight into individual characters social values. The Odyssey itself can be treated as a guide for the virtues of guest hospitality, since it shows a variety of breaches as well as a range of positive portrayals of this theme.

When Telemachos visits Nestor in Pylos, he receives a grand welcome. However, in the beginning of this episode, there is a sense of confusion, since Nestor is oblivious to his visitor's identity, yet he still follows the principles of xenia, and of course does so after he learns that he is the son of Odysseus, which culminates in him receiving the assistance of his son Peisistratos and a horse to aid him on his visit to Sparta.

This serves as a good example of the duties which are covered by Xenia, as every need of Telemachos is met by Nestor as best as possible. However, the two also share another bond; that Nestor fought alongside Odysseus in Troy. It is due to this particular bond that Nestor can advise Telemachos in his quest.

Another example of good xenia is that of the treatment offered by the Phaiakians. However, there are a range of factors which hint at the fact that Scheria is not the most embracing place for visitors. For example, Athene places a magical mist around him so the locals cannot see him and taunt him into revealing his identity. This is done by Homer to highlight the negative aspects of Scheria, as the goddess fears that they may not fulfill the aspects of xenia if they already know Odysseus' identity.

Again, when he meets the royal family there are a few differences in the way xenia is carried out. For example, he begs the Queen to let him stay, and thereafter King Alkinoos offers him his daughters hand in marriage after knowing him for a very short period of time. This is in stark contrast to the hostility with which Athene assumed Odysseus

would be greeted with. Inviting a visitor to become part of the royal family highlights the apparent worth of the bloodline as well as causing the community to appear weaker. Whilst on Scheria, he is generally treated well, despite a quarrel with Euryalos, who challenges Odysseus' athletic abilities. It is not as perfect as the treatment Telemachos receives from the likes of Menelaos and Nestor, but it is heartening to see that Odysseus is welcomed outside of the general Greek community of islands. This is further emphasized by the fact that Scheria is a community not particularly welcoming to newcomers.

Furthermore, another crucial example of *xenia* is the interaction which takes place between Odysseus and his swineherd Eumaios. This also serves as an effective juxtaposition due to the environment; Eumaios' hut, which is far cry from the palaces of Nestor and Menelaos. Despite this, the swineherd entertains Odysseus within the confines of his meager house. This highlights the fact that *xenia* is a responsibility that all should fulfill.

The next example of *xenia* is a negative one, and one that highlights the main objective of this question, that breaking the code of *xenia* will lead to serious consequences. Homer presents the reader with the life of Polyphemos, the Cyclopes. Polyphemos gives Odysseus and his comrades the most unfriendly welcome, as he completely ignores the proper hospitality procedure. The Cyclops reverses the processes of *xenia* in every way, therefore implying that his sense of culture and community is backwards from what the reader has previously experienced. The lack of community becomes clear as the reader is shown how the Cyclops lives.

The traditional process of gift giving is forgotten, as Polyphemos informs Odysseus that the only gift he will receive will be that he will be eaten last by the monster. He lives in a cave by himself, is completely self-sufficient, and only interacts with the other Cyclops when he is in trouble and shouts out to them. The lack of women on the island also seems odd, since women make up a large part of any classic Greek community. Perhaps the fact that there are no women mentioned causes the Cyclops to seem even more uncivilized in comparison to the other communities. Women were often responsible for keeping the home in Greece and their duties in this way helped make the home feel more welcoming. Therefore, the idea of the Cyclops taking care of his own home takes away from the openness and friendliness of the island even more.

The Cyclops ends up losing his eyesight as a result of his negligence

of the laws of xenia. This clearly shows that consequences will be deeply severe. Similarly the suitors suffer a similar fate, which is even prophesized by Theoklymenos, but the suitors fail to take note of the warning. This once again highlights the fact that those who ignore the laws will suffer, and those who uphold the laws will be rewarded. Therefore I agree with the statement.