

When Julius Caesar was a young man, he was captured by Cilician pirates. As usual, the pirates offered to release their captive upon payment of a considerable ransom: twenty talents. Caesar, being Caesar, valued his life rather more highly, and suggested to them that they demand fifty talents. He then despatched his companions to various quarters in order to raise the money, and was finally left more or less alone with the savage brutes for some thirty-eight days. But the poor brutes could not keep up with Caesar. He bullied and cajoled and browbeat them, ordering silence when they kept him awake at night, accusing them of barbarous illiteracy when they failed to appreciate his poetry, and threatening to come back and hang them once he was set free. The pirates thought he was quite the card, but the denouement of the incident was less amusing: immediately upon his release Caesar gathered a fleet and captured his erstwhile piratical companions, crucifying them without even the by-your-leave of the governor of Asia.

But Caesar's story is unusual, and not at all representative of the experience of the average victim. His story makes it easy to overlook the overwhelming emotional and psychological impact on the human beings who were victimized by piratical raids. Not everyone was a Caesar, and not all pirates were Caesar's fatuous friends. Slavery would have been inescapable for pirate captives who were not so lucky as Julius Caesar. Pirates might prefer to ask for ransom money first; after all, even Caesar was unlikely to fetch fifty talents on the slave market. But if the ransom demand was not met, then slavery was the ultimate fate of most captives. As with all rules, however, there were exceptions, and an inscription from the small island of Thera informs us of a highly peculiar one.

The inscription is fragmented and often difficult to interpret. It seems to be a letter written by a Ptolemaic navarch, one of the Ptolemaic officials still to be found in the Aegean after the dwindling of Ptolemaic interests there in the later third century BC. The subject matter of the letter was of grave and immediate interest to the people of Thera themselves, as it concerns the fate of a number of their fellow citizens at the hands of a band of pirates from Allaria, a still unidentified site somewhere on the north coast of Crete. The author of the letter was charged with the delicate

task of negotiating between the Theraians and the Allariote pirates. At some point more than three years previous to the writing of the letter, certain Theraians had fallen into the hands of these pirates, perhaps during a night raid on the island. The Theraians were held captive for a period of three years, after which the Allariotes "freed" them. They were not, however, restored to Thera by this act of liberation; rather, they were given lands and some kind of status amongst the Allariotes themselves. The reason for this, evidently, is that not only were the Theraian captives fully cognizant of the piratical activities of the Allariotes, they had even joined forces with them and actually turned to piracy themselves.

One of the most intriguing aspects of this enigmatic inscription is that its brief and largely colourless account masks what must have been an intensely traumatic emotional and psychological experience. The initial violence of the pirate raid, the intense fear evoked by the threat of death, the despair at the loss of family and the isolation of captivity and the thought of slavery, the general impotence of the captive and the resultant loss of self-esteem, all would have produced profound psychological symptoms. While the immediate fear of death might become less acute with the passage of time, the despondency and sense of isolation could only increase. Since the Theraian captives were held prisoner for at least three years, it would not be surprising if they had begun to manifest one of the well-known psychological responses to captivity trauma: the so-called "Stockholm syndrome".

The Stockholm syndrome is well-known and well-documented, though its psychological origins remain a matter of debate. It is, naturally, not a syndrome limited to residents of Sweden, just as it is clearly not a syndrome limited to inhabitants of the late twentieth century. It derives its name, however, from a single incident which took place a quarter of a century ago in Stockholm, between August 23 and August 28, 1973. At 10:15 in the morning, a 32-year-old felon named Jan-Erik Olsson entered the Sveriges Kreditbank in Stockholm, and attempted an armed robbery. For the next 131 hours, he and a fellow prisoner, whose release he had demanded, held four employees hostage in the bank's vault, demanding money and safe conduct out of the country. The authorities refused to accede to the demands of the hostage takers (largely because those demands included taking their captives out of the country with them), and for five and a half days tried to negotiate another solution. But the hostages themselves had other ideas. Contrary to what the authorities (as

yet unversed in the Stockholm syndrome) expected, the hostages, in particular the outspoken 23-year-old Kristin Ehnmark, insisted that their only safety lay in complying with their captors, that the authorities did not know or care what was happening to them, and that it was not the robbers, but the police who were endangering their (the hostages') lives. At one point, in a telephone call to the Swedish prime minister, one of the hostages even expressed the sentiment, "The robbers are protecting us from the police." Even after the end of the incident, when the hostages were free, and their captors in jail, the hostages did not hate the robbers. Far from it. They were grateful to the robbers, for not killing them, and Kristin Ehnmark, the most vociferous advocate for the hostage takers during the event, was said to have formed a romantic attachment to Olsson.

The Stockholm syndrome is generally described as having the following three characteristics, though all three need not be present at the same time or in the same degree: positive feelings on the part of the hostages towards their captor; negative feelings on the part of the hostage towards the authorities and rescue officials; and positive feelings on the part of the captor toward the hostage. Victims who have developed the Stockholm syndrome cannot always be trusted by the authorities; they may, for example, give away rescue plans to the hostage taker, or they may put themselves in danger in an effort to protect their captor. Their feelings of affinity for the captor are real and can be very intense, and can persist long beyond the duration of the captivity; when those feelings eventually abate, victims can even feel grief at their loss. An extreme example of the Stockholm syndrome would be Patricia Hearst, whose enthusiastic plunge into the activities of her captors was so shocking to the world.

The case of Patty Hearst brings the discussion back to our Theraian captives again. They had signed up with their Allariote captors and engaged in piratical behaviour, victimizing others in precisely the same way they had been victimized themselves. What were the mechanisms that turned the exploited into exploiters?

The external factors that promote the development of the Stockholm syndrome are generally agreed upon, though there are a number of different theories as to its psychological origins. Factors promoting the development of the syndrome are: length of captivity; positive contact between captor and captive (with the threat of death nevertheless always

present); and some degree of psychological distancing (on the part of the captives) from the authorities. Of course we are not well enough informed about the Theraian-Allariote incident to enable us to speak with authority on the presence or absence of all of these factors. Some things, however, are obvious. For three years, the Theraians were at the mercy of their Allariote captors, facing always the threat of being sold or killed. For years they were trapped in a relationship with a dominant group that had the power of life and death over them, a situation in which the most adaptive and successful response would have been to adopt a submissive and cooperative behaviour. As to the surface relations between the Allariotes and their captives, however, there is no reason to believe that they would be particularly abusive on a day-to-day basis. We have no way of knowing how "distanced" the Theraian captives were from the authorities of their own state, or how negative their own feelings towards their homeland might have become; there is nothing to tell us. On the other hand, we do know that the ransom had not been immediately forthcoming; these negotiations were taking place at least three years after the Theraians were taken captive. If they had become despairing about their eventual release and hostile to those who were apparently failing to do anything about it, it would be no wonder.

What would have faced the Theraian captives when they finally were returned to Thera? Most modern psychological literature on the Stockholm syndrome resounds with pleas not to blame the victim for his or her apparent "treachery". Society today recognizes the inherent tendency it has to blame the victim merely for being a victim, but in spite of efforts to raise consciousness, this trend still continues, and may well always continue. The tendency is exacerbated in the case of the Stockholm syndrome, because the victim undergoes a genuine shift in his or her belief system; she or he sincerely sympathizes with the captor, and when freed will probably continue to have that attachment for some time. In spite of the wealth of psychological research and dissemination of knowledge about the dynamics that produce the syndrome, society at large finds it difficult to cope with such an apparently paradoxical attitude.

The reintegration of the Theraian captives into Theraian society cannot, therefore, have been an easy task for either the ex-captives or their families. Post-captivity trauma is well documented, bringing with it a host of problems: anxiety, depression, paranoia, and various psychosomatic complaints. These are problems even when the victim is supported by a

fully understanding family and enlightened psychological therapy. In antiquity, when the psychological mechanisms producing the syndrome could scarcely have been guessed at, and when the Theraian captives went so far as to not only be sympathetic to their captors, but actually to pull a "Patty Hearst", the situation upon their restoration must have been just that much worse. The Stockholm syndrome is a psychological defence mechanism, and those captives who succumb to it may be more likely to survive captivity; but it can intensify the social and psychological problems a victim faces on being reintegrated into society. Seen from that angle, Julius Caesar's defiant approach to captivity has something to recommend it.