



“Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into...” Dependence of Matt 22:13 on Plato’s *Euthyphro* 4c?

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Abstract: There is a striking similarity, both in form and content, between Matt 22:13, where the king punishes the invited guest for lacking a “wedding robe,” and Plato’s *Euthyphro* 4c, where Euthyphro’s father punishes the hired laborer for murder. The most probable explanation for these similarities is that Matt 22:13 reflects an echo of Plato’s text.

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In Matt 22, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who held a wedding feast for his son. However, the invited guests disregard the king’s invitation, killing the servants he sent. The king becomes furious and orders their execution:

⁸ Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into (δήσαντες αὐτοῦ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ἐκβάλετε αὐτὸν εἰς) the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matt 22:8–13 NRSV)¹

In Plato’s dialogue, *Euthyphro* (4th c. BC), Euthyphro, an Athenian religious prophet, informs Socrates that he has brought charges against his father for murder. We then read:

The man who was killed was a hired workman of mine, and when we were farming at Naxos, he was working there on our land. Now he got drunk, got angry with one of our house slaves, and butchered him. So my father bound him hand and foot, threw him into (συνδήσας τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καταβαλὼν εἰς) a ditch, and sent a man here

¹ The Greek text according to NA²⁸.

to Athens to ask the religious adviser what he ought to do. [4d] In the meantime he paid no attention to the man as he lay there bound, and neglected him, thinking that he was a murderer and it did not matter if he were to die. And that is just what happened to him. For he died of hunger and cold and his bonds. (*Euthyphr.* 4c–d; LCL 36, 15)

The similarity between the phrases “δήσαντες αὐτοῦ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ἐβάλετε αὐτόν εἰς...” (Matt 22:13) and “συνδήσας τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καταβαλὼν εἰς...” (*Euthyphr.* 4c) immediately catches the eye.² These phrases share a formal resemblance unique among known texts in ancient literature (TLG): within a radius of 9 words, the character sequences δησ, ποδασ, χειρασ, βαλ, εἰσ appear in the same order.³ The similarity deepens when we notice that these character sequences either form identical words (πόδας, χεῖρας, εἰς) or analogous words (δήσαντες / συν-δήσας as forms of the aorist active participle of the verb δέω; ἐκ-βάλετε / κατα-βαλὼν as forms of the aorist of the verb βάλλω). Moreover, contextually, these narratives are similar to such a degree that one could construct a story that equally encapsulates both of them (CND)⁴: “A stranger arrives at a place where, in a convivial situation, he commits a specific reprehensible act. The master of the place orders the outsider to be bound hand and foot and then cast into a dark place, where he subsequently experiences ultimate suffering.”

How can this similarity between the two stories be explained without resorting to the category of coincidence? Admittedly, we could imagine that a ruler binding someone hand and foot and casting them into some dark place is something that could occur under virtually any latitude or longitude. However, the fact that the specific reprehensible act is committed by an outsider in a convivial situation, and that the ultimate suffering he experiences as a consequence of this act serves as the climax and resolution of a self-contained narrative unit, compels us to consider the possibility of a connection between the two texts. There is not the slightest indication that we are dealing with a “narratological scheme” in the Proppian sense.

² As far as I know, no one in the scholarly literature has yet noted this similarity. Only John Duncan Martin Derrett, in the margin of his study dedicated to exploring the connection between the description of Lazarus in John 11:44 (ὁ τεθνηκὼς δεδεμένους τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας) and Matt 22:13, as a parallel passage also mentions *Euthyphr.* 4c: “It is obvious that, to arrest people, and to prevent them from moving, both feet and hands should be tied. Isaac asked to be tied by hands and feet (Tanhuma, ed. Buber, *Wayyirā*, 114). Evidence from Homer (*Od.* 22.173, 189) and from Plato (*Euthyphro* 4c) confirms that this was the procedure.” (Derrett 1995, 195) Derrett pointed out *Odyssey*, where Odysseus gives the order to capture and imprison the goatherd Melanthius: “but do you two bend behind him his feet and his arms above, and throw him into the storeroom [σφῶϊ δ’ ἀποστρέψαντε πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὑπερθεν | ἐς θάλαμον βαλεῖν].” (*Od.* 22.173–74) The verb βάλλω also appears here as well as the preposition ἐς. A similarity to both *Euthyphr.* 4c and Matt 22:13, however, emphasizes an even greater similarity that exists between *Euthyphr.* 4c and Matt 22:13. It cannot be ruled out that Plato, who knew Homer “by heart,” was inspired (perhaps subconsciously) by *Od.* 22.173–74.

³ Accessed July 7, 2024. <https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>. For comparison, see n. 2.

⁴ “Common Narrative Denominator.” (Kozłowski and Poloczek 2024, 3)

Nor is there any evidence to suggest that Matt 22:8–13 and *Euthyphr.* 4c–d depend on the same source. Let us now examine the plausibility of Matthew being directly inspired by Plato.

In Galatians Paul most probably references the Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* (Reece 2022, 215; Renahan 1973, 23–24). In recent years, a number of references to Plato’s dialogues have been identified in Luke: *Timaeus* (Hubbard 2022), *Apology of Socrates* (Chodyko and Kozłowski 2023; Reece 2021) and *Phaedo* (Kozłowski 2024). As far as I know, no references to Plato’s dialogues have been identified in Matthew so far. However, we do know that Matthew contains obvious references to the text of Aesop’s fables (Reece 2016). In light of the above, the most plausible explanation for the formal and contextual parallels between the texts is that *Euthyphr.* 4c is a hypotext of Matt 22:8–13. It does not seem that we are dealing with a reference that is significant for interpretation: by recognizing this reference, we do not learn anything about the meaning of the parable that we did not already know. We would therefore be dealing here with an *echo* of Plato’s text, as understood by Benjamin D. Sommer.⁵ The evangelist, at some point in his literary formation, must have encountered the beginning of *Euthyphro* and remembered that phrase along with the context in which it appears. Subsequently, in a narrative situation deemed analogous by him, he used it as a sort of template.

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⁵ “An echo alters nothing in the interpretation of the sign itself, though the presence of a familiar phrase makes the text more interesting.” (Sommer 1998, 16)

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