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Greek Theatre in the Context of Cult and Culture*

Different Theoretical Approaches

Paper is going to research Greek theatre and its relation to Dionysian cult, giving an outline of the most recognized theories in the field dealing with the issue, in order to map some of the methods and insights of the contemporary approach to Antiquity. Side by side to the acknowledged theories of Jean-Pierre Vernant (French Anthropological School of Antiquity) and of Walter Burkert, I am going to represent research of theoretician, Classicist and a specialist in Balkan linguistics and religion of an older generation, active in Belgrade still in the middle of the 20th century, Milan Budimir, whose visionary work sheds a new light on the contemporary theories.

Key words: theatre, cult, Dionysos, anthropology
of antiquity, theories and methods

Introduction

The aim of this paper is threefold. First, I want to introduce some of the key concepts, and arguments of the most influential and approved approaches to antiquity today – by Walter Burkert and by one of the representatives of French Anthropological School of Antiquity, in particular Jean-Pierre Vernant. I am going to focus on their studies problematizing ancient tragedy in the context of the Dionysos' cult. Side by side to mentioned theories, I would like to put forward the argumentation about a theoretician less recognized world-wide and out of his own language area, Milan Budimir. Although belonging to a different, earlier generation, the ideas and work of Milan Budimir deserve to be presented together with the most influen-

* Research was supported by Serbian Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection, Project 147020.

Translated by the author.

tial theories of today. The importance of this is basic for the standpoint of the French Anthropological school (as well the other humanities) that science, unlike religion, searches not for the truth, but for knowledge. The frontiers of knowledge broaden in all directions, not only through obtaining of new knowledge, but also through preventing from forgetting the old ones.¹ Following this request, the second aim of this paper is to save from the oblivion the original and well argued work of Milan Budimir concerning the origins of European scene (as a technical term in theatre) that reveal archaic strata of the Athenian theatre. Budimir's research is based in the first place on his exceptional knowledge of ancient Balkan languages and historic grammar. This specialization enabled him to produce a detailed analysis of terminology related to the theatre and to the cult of Dionysos with all complexities that are consequences of different times and local specificities both of the cult and of the theater. Unlike most of the studies that are dealing with the archaic beginnings of the theatre, which are based usually on the "hard" historical and archeological evidence that are actually very fragmentary and lead to incomplete argumentation, Budimir introduces completely new arguments and approach, which shed a new light on the issue. From this follows the third aim of this paper, which is re-reading theories by Burkert and Vernant from a new-old perspective and with the specific knowledge that Budimir offered.

I am going to start with the few remarks on the methodological approach of the French Anthropological School that has been developed in the Centre Luis Gernet (EHESS) in Paris, not only because of Jean-Pierre Vernant, whose two studies on the theatre and god Dionysus I am going to present, but mainly because of the methodological standpoints by the researchers of the School that I am accepting and starting from.

The centre itself got its name after a pioneer of the innovative approach to the antiquity, Louis Gernet, who re-questioned philological methods of the German school and introduced an anthropological approach to the study of Antiquity, including original views on Greek antiquity. Thus, anthropology of antiquity, as a part of historical anthropology represents a discipline that addresses an intersection between anthropologically-informed history, historically-informed anthropology and the history of ethnographic and anthropological representations through the various disciplines devoted to study of antiquity, such as archeology, epigraphy, numismatics, linguistics or philology. Each discipline exceeds its traditionally established frameworks, mutually overlapping and being used to widen the context, to set up the anthropological perspective and to simulate the ethnographical interview in the required, antique context. The method is based on reading Ancient texts (literary or visual) using other Ancient texts in the Ancient context, without imposing contemporary values, which is achieved through the constant requestioning of researcher's own position. Greece has been compared to other cultures and anthropological fieldwork experience related to Greek or some other culture is regarded useful for researcher's positioning when facing particular historical and cultural context. Re-

¹Svetlana Slapšak, *Za antropologijo antičnih svetov*, ŠOU&ISH, Ljubljana 2000, 57.

search, for example, of identity construction (of gender, citizenship, the Other) in ancient Greece demands similar research in the contemporary context.

The interdisciplinary approach of anthropology of antiquity deals also with the beginning of the European culture questioning and denying many prejudices and delusions that the conservative approach to Classics has established hand in hand with the European appropriation and colonization of Greek antiquity. This calls for questioning of each of the invention of the antiquity by setting them in the original, antique perspective. From this further originates research of contemporary cultures and their reception of antiquity and spread stereotypes related to it. In this context it becomes clear that problem of the origin of the theater completely exceeds the framework of traditional literary criticism calling exactly for the approach of anthropology of antiquity, including both religious and political context in which it appeared.

The main characteristic of the anthropology of the Ancient world is that different approaches and methodologies do not exclude each other. One of the themes of anthropology of Antiquity is the anthropology of theatre. Louis Gernet already pointed out that the tragedy deals with the social and public thought that is characteristic for the Athenian city-state. His followers, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pier Vidal Naquet continued and expanded the work that Gernet started. These two have published first collection of essays on Greek tragedy in the year of 1972.² This book has completely changed the direction of the researches of the topic widening and combining methods of anthropology and classical philology.³ In this paper I am going to focus my attention to two studies by Vernant published in the second volume of the mentioned book: *The God of Tragic Fiction* and *Features of the Mask in Ancient Greece*.⁴ Vernant's reading of tragedy is based on its relation with Greek democracy. He searches for the reflection of the meeting and tensions between two

² *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, Maspero, Paris 1972. Serbian translation by Živojin Živojinović appeared in 1993 under the title *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, Sremski Karlovci 1993.

³ The exceptional collection of essays on Greek tragedy and comedy in the social context, which represents the continuity of work that started Vernan and Naquet, particularly based on the extra-textual reading of these dramatic forms was published in the year of 1990 by Princeton University under the title *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* Title itself problematizes old Athenian proverb that was still in antiquity interpreted differently, referring in the first place to the growing complexity and innovation of dramatic performances, as if they were distancing from the god Dionysos and the cult they belonged to. Theoreticians that participated in this book are: Simon Glodhill, Jeffrey Henderson, David Konstan, Françoise Lissarague, Odone Longo, Nicole Loraux, Ruth Padel, John Winkler, Froma Zeitlin, Jasper Svenbro and others.

⁴ First article was published for the first time in the journal *Comédie française* under the title *La dieu de la fiction tragique* and the second one, *Figures du Masque en Grèce Ancienne* in *Journal de Psychologie* with F. Frontisi-Ducroux in 1983. Both articles were republished in the second volume of *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* in 1986. I am using Serbian translation of the book *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, Izd. Knjiž. Zorana Stojanovića, Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad 1995.

types of religiousness – older, traditional one and one prescribed by the state.⁵ His research focuses also on the theatre in the social context emphasizing that the classical Athenian theatre, unlike the modern one, became one of the institutions of Athenian polis, where all citizens were gathering to watch and to reflect upon, even being paid for that. Therefore, the audience consisted of the same people (active participants in democracy, which mean only men) that were also gathering in Assembly and other polis' institutions. The specificity of the theatre as a public institution was that it was the only place where all those problems that could not be raised in the assembly were discussed and problematized. Tragedy was an ideal new medium, which marked and enabled the formation of the inner, responsible individual – political subject.⁶

Another theory that I would like to present is one by Walter Burkert, probably the most eminent and recognized scholar of Greek religion nowadays. Originating from the German school of thought, Burkert follows the ideas established by the Cambridge School of Anthropology and James Frazer.⁷ Aware of the impossibility to separate Mediterranean, Near Eastern, Euro-Asian elements from Greek and pre-Greek religion, through multidisciplinary approach that often includes linguistics, Burkert combines minute research of religion with evolutionary and biological knowledge and with the newest achievements of prehistory studies from sociological and psychological perspective.

Tragōidia and the Cult of Dionysos

Aware of the complexity of the origin⁸ of theatre and its relation to the cult of Dionysos,⁹ Burkert interprets its origin in relation to the one of the most impor-

⁵ This standpoint Vernant develops in his study about Antigone and Kreont. Namely, Kreont tries to deprive Antigone from her right to bury her brother, but nevertheless and at the price of death, she does not want to give up in her right “given by the gods” to bury her brother.

⁶ J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, I, 11.

⁷ English School of Anthropology is also known under the name of Cambridge Ritualists. Active in the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century they were all classicists who tried to step out from the blind alley in which researchers of the Antiquity framed on exclusively philological approach found themselves and to include in their approach some anthropological aspects to the themes of antique religion. Most famous representatives were Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford, and Arthur B. Cook, as well as very famous and close to the group, but never its permanent member, James G. Frazer. Wishing to harmonize with, for that time, new and progressive concepts of evolution, their ideas about religion were based in the first place on the long-termed development of the religious ideas that they researched together with the origins of literature. They were first who applied the idea of the ritual basis on Greek religion and the first who, consequently, raised the question of European (Western) values that are, even today, very often believed to originate from a Greek source.

⁸ The article *Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual* has been published for the first time in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 7 in the year of 1966. Later it appeared in the book *Wilder Ursprung* in the 1990. Used English translation by Peter Being in *Savage Energies*, Chicago&London 2001.

tant institutions and practices in Greek religion and its rituality – sacrificial ritual, and particularly the sacrifice of a goat characteristic for this cult. Burkert also re-questions the term *tragōidia* refuting the wide spread interpretation about tragedy as a “song of goats”, i.e. of dancers dressed like goats and develops his idea in the context of sacrificial ritual and its relation to the theatre performance, interpreting *tragedy* as a “song at the sacrifice of a goat”.

Namely, the tradition of understanding *tragedy* as the “song of goats” according to which *tragoi* are identified with *saturōi* (members of the tragic choruses), owes its popularity in modern times to Wilamowitz-Moellendorff.¹⁰ However, foundation for such assumption is grounded in the Ancient evidence that points to such a conclusion, in *Etymologicum Magnum*, s.v. *tragōidia* (764.5), which, after three other explanations gives a definition that tragedy is named “after the choruses that were mostly composed of satyrs, whom they called goats”.

However, in order to prove this standpoint, Burkert grounds his thesis in the study of sacrificial ritual in general, combining that with a critical reading of Wilamowitz through rereading Aristotle as well as images of *satyrs* on the vases. The starting position of Burkert is quite unclearly motivated refutation of Aristotle’s remark, according to which tragedy developed from a satyr play.¹¹ This position Burkert overtakes from Brömer, who, on the grounds of the satyr’s images on the vases asserts that first representation of satyr-plays occurred after 520 B.C. As this date is later than first tragedy by Thespis, conclusion is that the first satyr-play could have appeared only as a new invention, younger than tragedy.¹² Not convinced in such an argument, Burkert’s argumentation stays unclear upon the issue, offering compromise and possibility of the existence of earlier “proto-satyr-play”, as Burkert terms it.¹³

The next argument that Burkert offers is far more clear and suitable for the subject. Namely, he turns to the wide known vase images of satyrs that, all up to Hellenistic period, although represented as theriomorphic creatures, actually do not have characteristics of goats, but of the horses (tail, ears, hoofs), wherefore it becomes difficult to connect satyrs with goats (*saturōi* with *tragoi*). Actually, there is

⁹ The production of tragedies and comedies in Athens was inseparably related to the annual festival of City Dionysia. This strong relation to the ritual and the fact that theater actually appeared as one of the institutions of Athenian polis, the audience of which consisted of the same few thousands citizens with full civil rights, are the reasons why ancient theater is so distant and different from the modern one.

¹⁰ About *saturōi* = *tragoi* see Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Kleine Schriften*, Berlin 1935, 372, Albin Lesky, *Die Tragische Dichtung der Hellenem*, Göttingen 1964, 15ff; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, Oxford 1927, 164.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a20cf.22.

¹² Frank Brommer, *Satyroi*, Würzburg 1937, 36.

¹³ Walter Burkert, *Savage Energies*, University Of Chicago Press 2001, 3.

a consensus upon this issue among three presented theoreticians – Burkert, Vernant and Budimir.¹⁴

In order to support his argument about tragedy as a song at the sacrifice of goat, Burkert researches and confirms this type of sacrifice also in other Dionysus' cults.¹⁵ Apart from that, he points out that at the center of the Dionysiac orchestra there was an altar for sacrifice (*thumelē*) usually used for the play, when the altar was required in the dramatic plot.¹⁶ Burkert concludes that the altar (*thumelē*) can not exist without scarifying (*thuein*) and that existence of the altar in the middle of the orchestra represents the memory of the sacrifice of the goat.¹⁷

In the article *La dieu de la fiction tragique* Vernant interprets the existence of *thumelē* in the center of *orchestra* as the imitation of the one in Dionysos' temple that he recognizes in the architecture of theater itself.¹⁸ However, he refutes any possibility that *tragos* stands in relation to the tragedy, because there are no evidence that would prove that in the theatre and on the occasion of City Dionysia, he-goats were sacrificed more than she-goats. Apart from that, the only epithet that is found in the cult of Dionysos and that stands in relation with some animal from the genus of Capra is *aix*.¹⁹ Considering these arguments, the mentioned standpoint of Burkert seems indefensible.

At this point I would like to introduce the linguistic argumentation concerning the subject, developed by a Yugoslav scholar and a specialist in Balkan linguistics already in the middle of the 20th century, Milan Budimir. In his article *The Origin of European Scene*, Budimir approaches this problem not only through the research of ritual and the cult of Dionysos, but also offering philological arguments. Unlike Burkert, whose reference to ritual context in which theatre has developed is more in general and refers in the first place to the meaning and the origin of sacrifice in any ritual, Budimir analyzes the cult of the god Dionysos with all its specific characteristics and particularities as well as different hypostases and functions of this god, in order to clarify, as much as it is possible, the ritual context in which theatre appeared. Beginning with the archaic strata of the cult and the theatre, Budimir allows himself to move freely through diachrony (from Campanian *attellana*, to traditional puppet heaters and even to the films) when that allows him to confirm the continuity in existence of certain phenomenon.²⁰ Starting from the original space of Dionysos' cult that is the north-eastern Balkan (the area of Thracia), Budimir develops analysis of terminology related to the theatre. Using his

¹⁴ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 3; M. Budimir, *Sa balkanskih istočnika*, SKZ, Beograd 1969, 100; J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija antičkoj Grčkoj*, II, 25.

¹⁵ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 2001, 8.

¹⁶ The orchestra is central round space in front of the spectators where the chorus would dance, sing, and interact with the actors who were on the stage near the skēne.

¹⁷ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 9.

¹⁸ J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, II, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 25.

²⁰ Such diachronic approach also approved by French school of anthropology of antiquity.

exceptional knowledge of Ancient Balkan languages, he concludes that only a few terms related to the theatre of classical Athens belong to the Greek language (*skēnē*, *orchestra*, etc.). Many others, referring to the types of verses, chorus members, actors, such as *imabos*, *dithyrambos*, *saturos* etc. are the words of the Balkan pre-Greek settlers. This reflects that the Athenian theatre has developed from the cultural contacts with Ancient Balkan settlers and Greek invaders (the term is to be taken with caution, the dynamics of migrating and taking new territories much more extended in time). Through the linguistic research of terms related to theatre and the cult of Dionysos, Budimir sheds new light on the relation of Dionysos and theatre, offering also the explanation of the origin and the meaning of the word *tragōidoi*.

Budimir argues that term *tragōidia* compared to the *trugōidia* and *trugōidos* (these two terms were introduced by Aristophanes and overtaken by peripatetics for denoting a dramatic form completely different from and contrary to tragedy) bears a very common alternation typical for Illyrian phonetics (*a/u*).²¹ To these arguments, author adds that in Sophocles' *Tracking Satyrs*, satyr is called *Drakis*.²² There is also a Latin word for the comedian of Illyrian origin – *draucus* in relation to Gre. *drakis*, *drakistēs* – words denoting buffoon, comedian, actor. Thus, concludes Budimir, the relation of satyrs (buffoons) with the goats (*tragoi*) may only be a paraetymological adaptation of the word that denotes an actor.²³

Turning his attention to the vase images of satyrs and their relation to Dionysos, the same as Burkert and Vernant did, Budimir supports the hypothesis about satyrs as half-human, half-animal creatures with the horse characteristics – tail, hoofs and phallus. Budimir points that exaggeratedly large phallus is directly linked to the comedy and the satyr play, through the laughter caused by obscenity, which is immanent for those forms.²⁴ In the wider context of god Dionysos, Budimir points that one of Dionysos' cultic names on Peloponnesus (from where the oldest comedy moved to Attica) was *Phallēn* and *Phalēs*, and he relates it to another cultic name *Taūros*, also with the same meaning of phallus. But, before turning to the laughter in Dionysian cult, let us go back to the horses in the wider context of other Dionysos' festivities Apatouria²⁵ and Anthesteria that are both devoted to the cult of the dead and the hero cult. Namely, on the occasion of these Dionysian festivities, the souls of the dead are believed to appear among the living on the wild

²¹ The same alternation is recognizable in the variants of Dionysos name – *Bakos/Bukhis*.

²² Budimir emphasizes the same root *drak* is related to another Dionysos' name, but also for denoting cultic sticks that were used by Bakhants during the Dionysian festivities. Bakhants would wave with those sticks with the strong magical power, which had the gall on the top of it, the shape of which actually recalls phallus. Budimir confirms this association of the stick and phallus also by the Epicharmus Sicilians who for denoting it, uses word stick – *geron*.

²³ M. Budimir, *Poreklo evrpske scene*, 1969, 99-100.

²⁴ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 3; M. Budimir, *Sa balkanskih istočnika*, 101.

²⁵ The festival of Apatouria is devoted to the young wine, but also to young Athenians who are becoming the members of the cultic community, called *phratría*.

horses.²⁶ Thus, concludes Budimir, Dionysian satyrs might only be related to horses or horse riders (dead souls), while their large phalluses do not have any relation with the goats.²⁷

Satyrs are thus related to the souls of the dead. The festival Anthesteria is the Ancient Greek All Souls day, so fertility god Dionysos is not related to death only through his own yearly dying and rebirth. Satyrs are related on one hand to death and divinity of the dead, but at the same time, they are funny, obscene creatures provoking laughter. The images on the vases represent them as Dionysos' followers, in the company of Maenads, dancing to the music or performing, drinking wine until they get drunk, celebrating the moment, the desire, the erotic tension of any kind.²⁸ The world they are living in is turned upside down, non-regulated, imaginary and utopian, presenting the opposite of the citizen's ideals. Exaggerated obscenity of satyrs arousing laughter is related to their carnevalesque way of expression. But what is its place in ritual? They provoke laughter that, according to Budimir, represents the antidote against death and its demons.²⁹ It also represents the greatest manifestation of life and in the ritual context (as this one is) it always has very strong religious motivation.³⁰

Thus, there are two important aspects of cult that are important in enlightening the origin of the theater. On one hand, there are phallophoric processions and rites that are related to the general fertility domain, which both in the case of Dionysos, or of Demeter (Eleuseian Mysteries) were introduced to the Greeks from old Balkan settlers.³¹ Another cultic dimension at which Budimir points out is the hero and the dead cult. Having this in mind, Budimir focuses on the antique texts – both of tragedies and comedies as well as on those texts that refer to them. When Budimir asserts that there is no tragedy without a hero, his opinion does not diverge from the one by Vernant or Burkert. But let us see what are the arguments and conclusions of Budimir on this issue. Namely, to the Aristotle's definition of tragedy and comedy, according to which the comedy is just "merry tragedy", Budimir adds the short definition of Theophrastes, according to whom tragedy is about the hero

²⁶ The relation of Dionysos with the horses Budimir also finds in the etymology that he offers for the Dionysus name, refuting the argumentation of P. Kretschmer according to whom Dionysos' name means *a child of Zeus: Dio-nusos*. Namely, Budimir argues that the last syllable in Dionysos is long, wherefore it is related to the old Balkan (Tyrsenian) word for horse *damnos* from **daunos* (**deu-*, **dau* – "run"). Budimir 1969, 115.

²⁷ Ibid, 102. Lissarague's detailed analysis of representation of satyrs on the vases emphasizes exactly the fact that satyrs always move in group, never alone, which is exactly the case for the dead souls and their visit to the world of Living during the All Souls Day. Françoise Lissarague, *O divjaštvu satirov* in Podoba, pogled, pomen, ed. Svetlana Slapšak, Darija Štребенс, ISH&ŠOU, Ljubljana 2000, 99.

²⁸ John D. Beazley, *Heracles derubato* in Apollo III/IV, Salerno 1963-1964, 3-14.

²⁹ M. Budimir, *Sa balkanskih istočnika*, 97.

³⁰ About ritual laughter in the context of sacrificial and funeral rituals see Čajkanović, *Magični smeј*, in Sabrana dela iz srpske religije i folklor, SKZ, Beograd 1994, I, 292-314.

³¹ Still Herodotus thought that Greeks overtook phallophoric processions from Pelasgoi, warns Budimir. M. Budimir, *Poreklo evropske scene*, 128.

and his suffering. But what does Budimir also reveal? Emphasizing that hero originally is cultic term that only later, in the epic context, started to denote the hero in general, Budimir points to the case of Heracles – a hero and a common figure both of the tragedy and of the comedy. He also analyzes two Euripides' dramas, which sometimes resemble more a comedy or a satyr play than a tragedy – *Alcestis* and *Heracles*. In the first tragedy *Alcestis* decides to die instead of her husband (whose behaviour is not heroic at all), but the tragedy ends happily, when the drunken Heracles saves *Alcestis*. Heracles, the hero, appears both as a tragic and as a comic figure. With this, Budimir proves the origin of tragedy from the satyr play and the cultic nature of the theatre that unifies sorrow and laughter.

Taking into account all these arguments, Budimir turns to the Aristotle's position on comedy and tragedy. Such a broad approach allows Budimir to accept what Burekrt hesitates about - that tragedy and comedy once had common nature and common root in Dionysiac cult and that one is serious and the other merry due to a fact that tragedy started to be controlled by the city-state.³² Budimir also reminds of Socrates' statement (in Plato's *Symposium*) that good dramatic writer has to be proficient both when writing comedies and tragedies.³³

Another very important contribution of this study by Milan Budimir is his argumentation on a very important aspect of dramatic plays that is still usually misinterpreted – *katharsis*. The main defect of such theories is that they do not take into account the fact that the origin of theater lies in ritual, and that *katharsis* that Aristotle mentions might be exclusively ritual one, though Aristotle emphasized the ritual meaning of this concept. Budimir approaches this problem using the text emendations and mistakes that often appear in these emendations. Burkert namely suggests that the word *mathēmatōn* (that in the text follows *katharsis*) should be read as *miasmatōn*, since *thē* on papyruses often stands for *s*.³⁴ In the light of this discovery that clarifies that the *katharsis* “purification” refers to “ritual impurity”, which is usually related to any (ritual) contact with the dead or death,³⁵ it is easy to conclude that function of tragedy is ritual purification.

Budimir undoubtedly proves the ritual character of the Greek theatre as well as that its origin, and the nature of dramatic plays – comedies, tragedies and satyr plays (those two are always performed and written by the same dramatic poet in the combination of three tragedies and one satyr play), tends to confront the specta-

³² Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5.

³³ Plato, *Symp.*

³⁴ M. Budimir, *Sa balkanskih istočnika*, 137.

³⁵ During three days of Anthesteria festival called *miarai hemerai* (impure days) that are devoted to the dead ancestors and heroes (about whom tragedy speaks), the dead come to visit their alive relatives.

On ritual impurity see capital work Robert Parker, *Miasma, Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Oxford University Press 1990.

tor with the forces of death and life, leading him, through release and purification, to life confirmation and celebration.³⁶

But, let us turn to the study of Vernant to see how does he approach the relation of the theater and cult. The methodology of Vernant in this study is based on reading of the visual, but also the text images of Dionysos' mask. The first type is reading of archeological data (masks of different dimensions that were not worn, but hung; painted images on the vases that depict mask on the pillars) and the other are textual descriptions in the first place in Euripides' *Bacchants* in which Dionysian mania is presented. While reading the text in anthropology of antiquity undermines reading one text using the other (or using reading of visual materials), reading of images represents structural analysis in which each object has to be named and then analyzed in a defined context. Rejecting popular aesthetic evaluation, very often found in the writing on antiquity, structuralist approach demands that the condition for understanding a phenomenon is to think about it as a part of the system, the part that mutually depends on all other parts of that system.

Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchants* appears masked. He is disguised into a human shape, while this shape is ambiguous: man-woman, with the long hair, wearing a strange Asiatic dress, Dionysos represents himself as one of his prophets. That is the way in which his epiphany appears to the people – face to face. On some presentation the big mask of Dionysos is surrounded by wild Menads and Satyrs.³⁷ Their unrestrained behaviour and the disappearance of the borders between human and animal (incarnated in satyrs), between human and divine, of social roles, gender and age, lead to Dionysiac trance and acceptance of the divine mania. This reveals another important aspect of the god - the Dionysian joy and liberating frenzy.³⁸ The technique of forgetting the human destiny and erasing, at least for a moment, the knowledge of human mortality, is achieved through the laughter. Here standpoints of Budimir and Vernant meet: the laughter in the cult of Dionysos appears as the strongest antidote for death, blurring the limits between of the world of the dead and the world of the alive.

Let us return now to the study of Burkert and how he connects the cult of Dionysos and the theatre. He interprets the goat sacrifice in relation to Dionysos and the tragedy through the theory about sacrificial ritual that “touches the roots of human existence”.³⁹ Burkert actually starts from his theory on the anthropology of Greek sacrificial ritual and myth that he developed and published in his capital book in the year of 1983, under the title *Homo necans*. The first premise in this theory is that one of the crucial inborn instincts – aggression – primarily rooted in inter-

³⁶ The probable order of events on City Dionysia in classical Athens was following: first day – contest of ten boys in dithyramps (one from each tribe) and contest of ten men's dithyramps (one from each tribe); on the second day it was a contest of five comedies; next three days: contest of three tragic ensemble (each with three tragedies and a satyr-play).

³⁷ This is also obvious from the mentioned tragedy by Euripides.

³⁸ J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, I, 44-50.

³⁹ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 16.

human relations, was re-directed towards the animals in the hunting phase of society. Hunter must have felt guilty when he killed the animal, but hunting as a source of food at the same time makes life possible. Therefore, killing is being celebrated as a renewal. This feeling of guilt, remorse and the anxiety provoked by sympathy that hunter feels for his quarry, becomes the root of sacrificial ritual which is, as Burkert argues “the basic experience of the sacred. Homo religiosus acts and attains self-awareness as homo necans”.⁴⁰ And therefore, the killing in sacrifice, the same as in hunt, represents encounter with death, while sacrificial feast and joy are the way of overcoming the feeling of guilt and remorse for sacrificial killing, which mirrors human respect for life. Exactly through the remorse, people try to restore disturbed equilibrium, stressing “the continuity of life through death”.⁴¹ The experience of guilt and remorse provokes the feeling of deep respect for life, states Burkert.⁴²

And although Burkert evidently develops his theory from what he considers to be “inborn aggressive instincts”, he regards it not within the question what “inventor” of some ritual had in mind when performing it, but what is the impact that ritual have had on society and what are the reasons for some rituals to survive. This functionalist approach and understanding that life affirmation is achieved and approved through the sacrificial rituals, Burkert further expands through the research of immanent connections between sacrifice and tragedy that is recognizable in the content of some tragedies, i.e. in the described sacrifices.⁴³ On the grounds of this theory Burkert concludes that tragedy is a form that developed from the ritual of sacrificing the goat, while *tragōidoi* are masked men of Dionysian ritual that originally collected in a troop to perform the sacrifice of a goat (*tragos*).

Conclusion

I have presented three theories that are dealing with the relation of the theater to the cult of Dionysos. Using linguistic arguments Budimir was the first to take the position later confirmed by Vernant and Burkert, that *tragōidia* is not the “song of goats”. Budimir refuted this paraetymological explanation proving that *trag* in this compound stands for the “buffoon, actor”. Analyzing different aspects of Dionysos and his festivities, especially Apatouria (the festival of Athenian phratry – in which the clan system is closely related to the cult of the dead) he succeeded to

⁴⁰ Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans, The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, University of California Press, 1983, 3.

⁴¹ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 15.

⁴² *Ibid*, 11-13.

⁴³ One of the illustrations how “sacrificial killing” (*thuein*) functions in tragedies is the example of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. First, Agamemnon appears as the Sacrificer of his own daughter. Receiving the news about the death of her daughter, Clytemnestra prepares a great sacrifice (83, 261, 587), (pros sphagas) (for slaughter 1056), calling for *ololougē* (sacrificial cry 1118). The way in which Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon resembles ritually killing of a bull. She throws a net over him and kills him with an axe (pelekus, bouplēx). *Ibid*, 18

go even to the deeper strata of language and thus to elucidate the meaning of this word. Namely, he suggested that supposed Indo-European form of this term would be *droughos*.⁴⁴ Adding to this the argument that Indo-European diphthong *ou* appears in Greek also as *ō*, (Greek word *trōzō* “mingle”), he indicated in his conclusion that *tragōidia* and *kōmōdia* bear the same meaning, signifying “the song of the community; choir song”.⁴⁵ This argumentation is thus refuting the starting position of Burkert that *tragedy* is a “song at the sacrifice of a goat” (refuted also by Vernant) from which he actually subsequently applies and inscribes his theory of sacrificial ritual.

Except from agreeing that *tragoi* are not *saturōi*, theories of Budimir and Burkert overlap in the conclusion that tragedy confronts people with the forces of life and death. However, unlike Budimir, Burekrt takes into consideration tragedy as a form independent and isolated from other theatrical performances, being a transformed form of sacrificial ritual itself in relation to heroic myths. “If tragedy draws on heroic myth, every hero has his cults, i.e., his sacrifices. The situation of the sacrifice may be just the point where heroic myth and Dionysiac *tragōidia* meet each other.”⁴⁶ Although revealing relation between Dionysos and the cult of the dead and heroes, Budimir reminds us what Burkert forgot about: that the hero appears both in tragedy and comedy and as such appears with both aspects: serious (tragic) as well as the comic one. Thus, Burkert’s argumentation about the relation between hero cult and sacrifice in and tragedy remains unconvincing.

Another weak point in Burkert's theorizing, or rather omitting a point in history of the Athenian tragedy: it was only after the performance of Phrynichus’s drama *Capture of Miletus* in 492. B.C. that the law was introduced to control the plots of tragedies, which from that time on, could have only be based on the mythical core or events from the far past, not recent events. Phrynichus’ play was based on the tragic siege of Miletus by Persians. Athenians felt such a strong sympathy for Ionians that experienced this horrible event, that their sorrow and reaction to the play influenced the change of whole tragic genre.⁴⁷ Vernant analyzes the approach of tragedians to heroic myths emphasizing that unlike in epic poetry, in which hero is praised, dramatic hero has problems, he re-questions himself over and over in front of the audience.⁴⁸

And in the end let us once more turn to the relation between religion and theatre. What Budimir does in his study is tracing the path of the origin and development of the theatre in the frame of Dionysos' cult through the constant critical

⁴⁴ Serbian word “drug”.

⁴⁵ M. Budimir, *Poreklo evropske scene*, 1969, 112.

⁴⁶ W. Burkert, *Savage Energies*, 18.

⁴⁷ “Tragedy represents the grief of the Other, not the Self. The Other must be distanced from the Self, whether in time (hence the appropriateness of myth in general) or in space (hence of the appropriateness of Persia in Aeschylus’s Persians).” Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, translated in English by Corinne Pache, Cornell University Press, 1998, xi.

⁴⁸ J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, II, 26.

reading of the linguistic evidences related to the theatre and Dionysos in the context of patient analysis of different aspects of this god. What Burkert does is searching the relation between sacrificial ritual and origin of the theater. He also searches the relation between the two in the embodiment of sacrificial ritual in tragedy, seeing tragic play only as a form of sacrifice. Vernant, however, makes structural analysis through the reading of Dionysos' mask images both in the cult and in the theater. The fact that Vernant does not deal with the origins of tragedy is not originated in his standpoint that the context from which it derives is not important, but because he himself does not find arguments for that.⁴⁹ The analysis of Dionysos' mask, which enables the epiphany of the god, led Vernant to the problem of theater and how the audience perceived the heroes of tragedies (with masks) – they are completely aware that those, though present at the stage, are at the same time absent, belonging to myth of far past. Thus, theater itself represents the embodiment of this Dionysian aspect of the constant suspension of borders and shift between reality and illusion.⁵⁰ The spectator is thus always aware that what he sees is fake, it is illusion, it is imaginary. Exactly this is what makes tragedy so close and inseparable from Dionysos – who is divinity that is related to the mixture and transgression between This and Another world.

The study of Budimir is the most detailed and complete. Each argument of Budimir is grounded on considerable knowledge very patiently and subtly put in the concrete context. Reading this study now, at the present moment, opens the possibility to compare it to the more recent studies. Due to the fact that it was not accessible to the wider audience, studies of Burkert and Vernant were written without knowledge of it. And although some standpoints and conclusions overlap, this study has made possible to read critically Vernant and Burkert from the new perspective and to draw conclusions more easily. What is obvious is that the arguments of Budimir confirm much more the thesis and method developed by Vernant (and French Anthropological School of Antiquity), revealing the weak points of Burkert's study. The fact that I did not exhausted all potentials and arguments of this study of Budimir (and of course his others studies) offers the possibility for further re-readings and re-interpretations of this brilliant scholar.

⁴⁹ Svetlana Slapšak points out that Vernant does not repudiate the possibility and importance of archaic strata. What Vernant rejects is the intellectual myth about "the cradle" and the researches that are supporting this myth. S. Slapšak, *Za antropologiju antičnih svetov*, 38.

⁵⁰ J. P. Vernant, *Mit i tragedija u antičkoj Grčkoj*, II, 50.

Лада Стевановић

Грчко позориште у контексту култа и културе

различити теоријски приступи

Кључне речи: позориште, Дионис, антропологија
антике, теорије и методе

Проблематика грчког позоришта и његова повезаност са култом бога Диониса несумњива је. Тема рада је представљање најзначајнијих теорија које се баве овим проблемом, као и мапирање неких метода и закључака савремених приступа антици и то кроз теорије Валтера Буркерта, најпризнатијег савременог теоретичара античке грчке религије, и Жан-Пјер Вернана, једног од представника француске антрополошке школе, на основу чијих је методолошких полазишта написан и овај рад. Антропологија антике представља дисциплину у оквиру историјске антропологије, која настаје на пресеку антрополошки информисане историје, историјски информисане антропологије и историје етнографских и антрополошких истраживања кроз различите дисциплине изучавања антике као што су археологија, епиграфија, лингвистика или филологија. Ове дисциплине се комбинују како би се симулирао етнографски интервју у траженом, античком контексту. Главна методолошка полазишта овог приступа заснивају се на ишчитавању античких текстова уз помоћ других античких текстова, са тежњом да се у истраживање не уписују савремене вредности, што се постиже непрестаним преиспитивањем полазишта истраживача. Грчку, дакле, не треба посматрати као „колевку цивилизације“, а поређење са другим културама и искуство у теренским истраживањим везаним за грчку или неку другу културу сматра се пољњим и корисним. Често се прибегава структуралној анализи која подразумева да је појаву могуће разумети само у оквиру затвореног система у коме се сви елементи међусобно условљавају и повезују. Различите методологије међусобно се не искључују. Осим тежње да се стичу нова знања, спречава се и заборављање старих. У том контексту, поред споменутих признатих теоретичара, представићу и рад у свету мање познатог, али не и мање значајног истраживача – изузетног познаваоца старих балканских језика и религије, Милана Будимира. Премда Будимир генерацијски претходи Вернану и Буркерту, његов рад захваљујући изузетном познавању балканских језика расветљава бројне недоумице у вези са позориштем и култом у коме је оно

настало. Бавећи се пореклом и почецима позоришта, Будмир је успео да надмаши све оне који су се овом темом бавили углавном на основу фрагментарних археолошких доказа. То му је омогућило и бољи увид у разумевање самих драмских жанрова (трагедије, сатирске игре и комедије), њихових особености и међусобне повезаности. У раду *Почеци европске сцене*, Будимир је детаљним лингвистичким истраживањима анализирао временске и локалне специфичности култа бога Диониса (пре и после прве грчке колонизације Балкана) и позоришта, стварајући тако мозаик кроз који је изронила не само комплексна слика овог божанства и култа, већ и самих драмских жанрова и појава иманентних и за култ и за позориште, као што је суочавање са силама живота и смрти. На тај начин, ова оригинална и снажно аргументована студија Милана Будимира, коју истовремено одликују и широка перспектива и прецизна анализа дубинских језичких структура и култа, баца ново светло на радове Вернана и Буркерта, не само доказујући тезе које је поставио и аргументовао Вернан, већ потврђујући и методолошку ваљаност француске антрополошке школе антике којој Вернан припада.