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Funeral Ritual and Power: Farewelling the Dead in the Ancient Greek Funerary Ritual*

The paper discusses the development of the traditional genre of lament for the deed in Greek antiquity, that is possible to follow since the earliest written traces (of oral tradition such as Iliad) all up to Modern Greek times. However, focus of the paper is made on the development of this female oral genre and restrictive laws and measurements against this traditional form as a consequence of the formation of the first Greek city-states. What were these measurements like, who were they aimed against and why was it necessary to control ritual lament? Was this control successful?

Key words:

lament, women, men, power, Solonian law

Women in mourning and men in praising

*Moderate lamentation is the right of the dead;
Excessive grief the enemy to the living.*

Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well*, 1.1.54-55

*At the cemetery everybody is dead,
only women are alive.*

Duško Radović

Hecuba: "O child, son of my hapless boy, an unjust fate robs me and your mother of your life. How is it with me? What can I do for you, luckless one? For you I strike upon my head and beat my breast, my only gift; for that is in my power."

(Euripides *Trojan Women* 789 – 795)¹

* This paper is the result of Project no.147020 "In between traditionalism and modernization – ethnological/anthropological studies of cultural processes in Serbia", granted by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Lamentation is the central part of each funerary rite. The earliest evidence that testify the existence of lament in Greece goes back to the Mycenaean period (1600-1100 BC). Painted sarcophagi with the representations of mourners from the end of the Bronze age were found in Tanagra in Boetia.² These mourners appear either in processions, or individually, with their hands raised to their heads, at the bier or around the grave. This schematic pose coincides with images from the Geometric vases, Archaic clay plaques and vases, as well as the white-ground *lekuqoi* from the Classical period. Apart from these, among Mycenaean votive and funerary offerings, we come across variation of the female clay figurine with both hands placed on the head, while the clay models from the Geometric and Archaic period repeat the same gestures. These kind of offerings, the same as painted mourners on vases or sarcophagi actually represent more lasting embodiment of an important part of funeral ritual – the expression of grief for the deceased one.³

Lamentation in the age of archaic, classical Greece, as well as the one of the rural Greece, is performed during the wake, and sometimes (when otherwise is not prescribed by the laws) during the procession and at the grave site itself. It is the duty of women and, above all, it belongs to the household and the feminine space. Therefore, by the time, it became most firmly related to the preburial wake, which is tied to the household. The lament quoted above is a fragment from the Euripides' tragedy, which, the same as many traditional laments, begins with the wailing of lamenter's (mother's) own ill fate, describing as well the acts of self-mutilation, characteristic for this phase of the ritual. Exactly these types of laments, from tragedies, represent the precious material for the research of Classical Greek ritual lamentation. Although belonging to the literary tradition, it is possible to regard it as a trustworthy evidence of antique everyday ritual practice. This position is based on the argumentation developed by Nicole Loraux, and her critique of Plato's understanding of the mimesis and the theatre.⁴ Namely, Loraux argues that Athenian theatre is not mere imitation of life, but actually archetypal re-enactment of life. This standpoint is further supported by the argumentation of Olga Freidenberg, who developed the whole theory about the transformation and the development of the Greek literary forms, directly from the religious behavior, which further implies very strong intertwinement between ritual forms, genres, and literary contents.⁵ On these grounds it is possible to regard laments from the tragedies as models for eve-

¹ Greek text ed., by Gilbert Murray, English translation by E. P. Coleridge. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

² Mourners painted on clay sarcophagi. About 1250-1150 B.C. Iakovidis 1966, 49, figs.5,6 cf. D. Kurtz & J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, Cornell University Press 1971, 27.

³ D. Kurtz & J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, 27-28.

⁴ Plato on mimesis, *Laws*, 658-659c, 669b-670b. Despising women's behavior during lamentation *Laws*, 395 d/e.

⁵ See Olga Fredienberg, *Mit i antička književnost*, translated into Serbian by Radmila Mečanin, Prosveta, Beograd 1987.

ryday life laments.⁶ Apart from that, tragedies and their plots are, from the earliest examples, related to the topics of death; they deal with murders, revenge, sacrifice, guilt, retribution and, of course, with lament.⁷ Concerning lamentation and funeral rituals of other Greek poleis, it should be noted that, apart from Sparta - famous for its inhumanly heroic mothers (who, offering a shield to their sons going to war, bid them goodbye with words to come back “with it or on it”), it is supposed that the praxis of lamentation in other parts of the Greek world was similar to the Athenian one.

Although Greek tradition of lamentation ascribes in particular to women this important praxis, there is an one earlier evidence, from *Iliad*, in which Achilles mourns, and (this is even more surprising), shows excessive grief for his killed friend Patroklos:

A dark cloud of grief fell upon Achilles as he listened. He filled both hands with dust from off the ground, and poured it over his head, disfiguring his comely face, and letting the refuse settle over his shirt so fair and new. He flung himself down all huge and hugely at full length, and tore his hair with his hands.

(*Iliad* XVIII, 22-27)⁸

Achilles' incontrollable behavior is a unique example of men's excessive mourning in Greek tradition. The hero pours the dust on his own head and painfully lays outstretched on the ground, tearing his hear. Finally, his pain turns into wraith, and he decides to fight against the Trojans. In the *Republic*, Plato, through the words of Socrates, comments that such exaggerated wailing is not appropriate for women, let alone men, even criticizing Homer for presenting Achilles in such unrestrained manner:

We will beg Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we cancel those and all similar passages, not that they are not poetic and pleasing to most hearers, but because the more poetic they are the less are they suited to the ears of boys and men who are destined to be free and to be more afraid of slavery than of death.

(Plato, *Respublica* 3.387 b)⁹

⁶ Loraux also suggests that lament in tragedies follows the model of professional rather than non-professional norms, which is the reason why tragedy does not distinguish (as epic does) difference between the professional and the nonprofessional one (*qrhno-* and *gob-*). Loraux 1985, x.

⁷ Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Lament and Greek Literature*, T J Press Ltd, Patsdow, Cornwall 1995, 127.

⁸ www.perseus.tufts.edu; . English translation by Samuele Buttler.

⁹ Plato, *Respublica* 3.387b-d; Greek text based on Platonis Opera, ed. John Burnet, Oxford University Press, 1903. and English translation Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6 translated by Paul Shorey, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

It is clear from this fragment that the very emotional reaction and expression of feelings on the occasion of someone's death is not desirable. The reason for this should be searched in the male (citizen) identity construction in Athens during fifth and fourth ct. BC. Namely, showing, experiencing and sharing someone's pain for the loss of someone dear, might put into question desirability of bravery and readiness to die for the motherland, the essential component of Athenian (and Greek) civil identity.¹⁰

This description of Achilles' mourning as a male ritual behavior, has no parallels in Greek tradition. However, there are in Iliad some laments of women (either human or divine) that clearly belong to the Greek tradition. Particularly interesting example is the lament of Briseis for Patroklos:

Briseis, fair as Aphrodite, when she saw the mangled body of Patroklos, flung herself upon it and cried aloud, tearing her breast, her neck, and her lovely face with both her hands. Beautiful as a goddess she wept and said, "Patroklos, dearest friend, when I went hence I left you living; I return, O prince, to find you dead; thus do fresh sorrows multiply upon me one after the other. I saw him to whom my father and mother married me, cut down before our city, and my three own dear brothers perished with him on the self-same day; but you, Patroklos, even when Achilles slew my husband and sacked the city of noble Mynes, told me that I was not to weep, for you said you would make Achilles marry me, and take me back with him to Phtyhia, we should have a wedding feast among the Myrmidonos. You were always kind to me and I shall never cease to grieve for you."

(*Iliad*, XIX 282 – 300)¹¹

There are many patterns in this lament that may be followed through the Greek tradition of lament performing all up to 20th century. First of all Briseis mutilates herself, tearing her breasts and her neck, beginning the lament with the direct addressing Patroklos, focusing also on her own misfortune. Also, she praises him for all he has done for her, wherefore she would not ever stop grieving him.

Another example that fits into the patterns of traditional Greek laments is the one of divine Thetis and her sisters Nereides, devoted to Achilles, before he meets his death: Thetis mourns together with her sisters; she starts with the mourning herself and her ill-omen, focuses afterwards on her son's qualities and praises, comparing him to a tall tree and finishes wailing the misfortune of her son's ill fate:

"Listen," she cried, "sisters, daughters of Nereus, that you may hear the burden of my sorrows. Alas, woe is me, woe in that I have borne the most glorious of offspring. I bore him fair and strong, hero among heroes, and he shot up as a sapling; I tended him as a plant in a goodly

¹⁰ Moreover, if everybody could have grieved according to one's own wish, than it would have been difficult for the city-state to control the rage and conflict.

¹¹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>; English translation by Samuele Buttler.

garden, and sent him with his ships to Ilion to fight the Trojans, but never shall I welcome him back to the house of Peleus. So long as he lives to look upon the light of the sun he is in heaviness, and though I go to him I cannot help him. Nevertheless I will go, that I may see my dear son and learn what sorrow has befallen him though he is still holding aloof from battle.”

(Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII, 52 – 64)¹²

Terminology and Structure of the Greek Lament

When it comes to terminology for the laments and mourning in ancient Greece, the most common are *gōv-*, *qrhno-* and later *kōmmōv*. The etymology for the first two (*gōv-* and *qrhno-*) is Indo-European and refers in both cases to the shrill cry.¹³ And though etymology is very valuable as an indicator of the word origins, it does not have the essential impact on the later usage and meaning development of words. Thus, the meaning of those two words changed over time, sometimes diverging in different directions, sometimes becoming similar again. Concerning archaic usage and usage by Homer, the meaning *qrhno-* is more ordered and polished, associated often with divine performers and musical elements usually performed by professional mourners.¹⁴ *Gōv-*, as a term for a less restrained lament, was a spontaneous weeping of the kinswomen. From the time of Homer and onwards, *gōv-*, was becoming more and more individualized and developed more into the narrative. But then again, when we come to the language of tragedies, these terms are often mixed up and treated as the same. Concerning later scholarly definitions *qrhno-* stands for the ritual lament for the dead, which also contains some elements of praising; it is sung on the occasions of death, but also on various occasions of mourning at the tomb. In tragedies we come across one more term - *kōmmōv*. At the beginning it was a specific type of tragic lament, often followed by the wild gestures and associated with the Asiatic ecstasy, and the same as *ip/emo-* it was also used in tragedy in the meaning of “lament, dirge”.¹⁵ Eastern connection point that it is unlikely that this term is exclusively related to tragedy, and it probably evolved as a dramatic form from the ritual antiphonal lament of the professional and predominately choral mourners on the one hand, and the solo and narrative improvisations of the kinswomen on the other. From the Classical period onwards, the tendency was to treat as synonyms all different terms for a poetic lament that had originally denoted distinct aspects of the ritual lamentation of the women. Though

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Frisk, s.v. *gōv-*, *qrhno-*.

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* XXIV, 60, *Iliad*, XXIV, 720, *Plu. Sol.* 21, 5; *Pi. I.* 8.63-4, *Pi, P.* 12.6-8; *Pl. R.* 388d, 398e. This is also reflected in the literary *qrhnoi*.

of Pindar and Simonides, characteristic for gnomic and consolatory character.

¹⁵ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Rowman&Littlefield, Oxford 2002, 103.

the terminology is mixed and imprecise in the matter of laments in tragedies, it is important that all these laments marked with different terminology, might be treated as *qrhnoi* according to its scholarly definition, which means as ritual laments and not literary ones, since theatre and mimesis that is specific for it, represents re-enactment of the real life.¹⁶

On the other hand, it is also possible to trace the tradition (though for the most part literary one) of the men's way of expression at one's death. Unlike women's lament, which is based on a ritual act or cry of lamentation, often accompanied with music, another (literary) tradition — of epigrams, *epigo-*, *epitafio- logo-* and *epikhdeion* — developed from the social and literary activity of men. This tradition is characteristic, above all, for the elements of commemoration and praise, which are, although to much less extent, presented in the archaic *qrhno-*. I am going to return to topic of male tradition again in the context of the state control over the funeral ritual, which led to the introduction of the new rhetorical genre – funeral oration (*epitafio- logo-*).

Apart from the sources from tragedies, the research of ancient ritual lament is, due to recognizable folklore tradition, often complemented with studies of modern laments. Namely, despite the long historical period that separates them, modern and ancient laments show remarkable similarities and numerous coinciding survivals of motives and ideas. There is also linguistic confirmation that witnesses continuity. The etymology of the word *moirologoi* points to the ancient origin: both components *moiro-* and *logoi-* belong also to demotic Greek. The first is probably derived from the noun *moira* (fate)¹⁷. In the modern folk tradition *moirologoi* are thus ritual laments sung at the occasion of death. The word that is used in learned and religious language is *qrhno-*.

The comparative researches of ritual laments in Greek tradition from Classical, across Byzantine all up to the Neo-Hellenistic period, based on researching on the diversity of sources (literary, archaeological, historical, and field research) revealed that Greek traditional lament is characterized for emotional intensity, it is improvised and it has antiphonic performative structure, focusing on negative aspects of the separation of the dead from the kin group, having sociological base in the discourse of women. The characteristic of numerous fragments is to address the deceased. Also, concerning the fact that lament represents a form of public speech (since it is held not only at home, but also on the grave, which belongs to the public domain), it delivers certain (public) message to the living. Apart from this, communicational function, it also has a psychological one — it channels the pain, both of

¹⁶ Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in mourning*, Cornell University Press 1998, XI.

¹⁷ Homer often uses *moira* in the formulaic phrases as the agent of death or bringer of doom. *Iliad* IV, 517, XIX. 409-10, XIII, 119 cf. Loraux 1985, 110.

lamenting herself and of the whole collective.¹⁸ This, almost proverbial idea in antiquity, is expressed by the chorus of Trojan women to Hekabe:

*“What sweet relief to sufferers it is to weep, to mourn, lament,
and chant the dirge that tells of grief!”*

(Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 608- 609)¹⁹

So, apart from being connected to the uncontrolled behavior and self-mutilation (tearing the hair, beating the breasts and grabbing the face) that might be perceived as a danger and manifestation of madness, lament functions at least on two different levels: psychological and communicational.²⁰ Concerning the psychological level, its main function is the direct confrontation with pain and loss, that, in the case when people lose someone very close, provokes enormous sorrow that sometimes might be disastrous. It is the funeral ritual and especially lamentation, which provide the bereaved ones with the strong and direct confrontation with their own pain in order to live it through, with the support of those who are present at the funeral. The mere fact that funeral ritual is spatially and temporarily divided from the everyday reality, speaks in favor of the argument that it represents a kind of support to the bereaved to return to normal life after defined (and limited!) time period, relieved and recovered, after experiencing and going through a great distress.

Concerning the communicational aspects, lament covers two of them, addressing both the deceased and the living. The second aspect develops in the political sphere, since lament, and the domain of death and those who control it, provides very strong power in the public domain, giving the lamenters an opportunity to influence the community.

Although lament is the form that is not fixed and is being spontaneously created at the occasion of death as an emotional response to it, at the same time it is a form that is creative, and as such it obeys to certain, defined rules, or as Gail Holst-Warhaft defines, it is a “structured emotional response to death”.²¹ Besides that, the lament is not expressed only by an individual woman, but by many (usually the closest kin, or professional mourners), and in the case that one loses control, other join to help her. That is why there are usually several lamenters, so some of them can mediate the behavior of others, if necessary. Apart from that, the participation of more women in lamentation might have also psychological function – to support the bereaved in her enormous pain. In relation to collective character of performance stands also the antiphonal structure of lament that is traceable to Homer’s

¹⁸ See more in M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Rowman&Littlefield, Oxford 2002. G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices...N. Loraux, Mothers in Mourning...*

¹⁹ English translation by E. P. Coleridge. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

²⁰ The examples of self-mutilation that follow lamentation are numerous in tragedies. Cf. Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 22-31, 423-428. *Persai* 1054- 1065. Sophocles, *Electra* 89-91, Euripides, *Supplices* 71, 826-827, 977-999, 1160, *Alkestis* 86 – 92, 98 – 104, *Andromache*, 825-835. *Phoenissae* 1485 -1492. Earlier evidence also in *Iliad* X, 78, 406, XXIV, 711.

²¹ G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices...39.*

Iliad.²² This antiphonal structure also survived in popular hymns such as the one devoted to Kouretes and the Elian Hymn to Dionysos.²³ And, of course, due to its inherently dramatic potentiality, the antiphonal lament in tragedy passed through very rich development. It is not necessary to turn attention to all particular forms of antiphony in tragedy (soloist plus choir in refrain; chorus alone; one or more soloist and chorus; imagined dialog between the living and the dead).²⁴ The key point about this issue is that the same antiphonal structure is still characteristic for modern Greek laments.

In the close relation to the antiphonal structure of lament stands specific socio-communicational code of women. Namely, recent sociological researches of men's and women's communication, point that men are more adapted to speak publicly and in monologues, while women communicate easier to other women, preferring to take turn in conversation while somebody else is speaking, developing by reference to the previous speaker.²⁵ Exactly such dialog nature is characteristic for numerous lamentations, which implies the same women's socio-communicational model with many dialogs and taking turns in conversation, continuously exists throughout the Greek patriarchal area ever since antiquity.

Concerning the period of lamentation and circumstances under which it is being performed, it is necessary to point that to be indulged in mourning and lamentation is proper only for the defined period of time and to certain extent. The period of lamentation (as well as the form, in the wider sense of meaning) is regulated exactly by the distribution of other ritual duties. And apart from devoting herself to mourning, and being "controlled" by the other lamenters, the mourner as well had to pay attention to her own needs, thinking of having a good meal. And exactly the eating at the funeral feast defines the end of mourning.

In spite of the fact that funeral ritual and mourning ceremonies have not changed much in Greece, from the Bronze Age until the beginning or the middle of the 20th century, even later (although it only in some remote, rural parts of the country), this ritual has not always been supported by the state, and occasionally there were attempts to restrict it, especially to restrict women's role in it.²⁶ Why was at

²² The simple strophic pattern Ax Ax Ax² is illustrated in the laments for Hector in the end of *Iliad*, XXIV, 723-46, 747-60, 761-76.

²³ Page 1962, 871.

²⁴ For detailed analysis on the issue see Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Rowman&Littlefield, Oxford 2002, Chapter 7.

²⁵ See more on this topic in K. Minister "A Feminist Frame of the Oral History Interview", in *Women's words. The feminist practice of oral history*, S.B.Gluck and D.Patai, (eds.), New York, Rutledge, 1991, 27-41.

²⁶ Emily Vermeule *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, University of California Press, Berkley 1979, 12; Nadia Seremetakis who researched laments in Inner Mani in Peloponnese, during the 1980s, defines these village, their ritual praxis and believes as "internal margin of the modernity". Nadia Seremetakis, *Last Word: Women, Death, Divination in Inner Mani*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991, 1.

all necessary to control funeral ritual and expressions of pain in laments related to it and what kind of restrictions were expected by these laws?

Control over funeral rituals

According to the Athenian legislation of Solon from the 6th century BC, it was not allowed to mourn the dead openly and loudly, except for the closest kin. Apart from that, the dirge was prohibited on the day following the burial, as well on the tenth day after it, or on the anniversary of the burial. Also it was forbidden to lacerate own skin or to beat the breasts (self-mutilation as an imitation of the disintegration of the corpse), or to have in any way loud or noticeable procession. The law was also aimed against too much luxury in the funerals, characteristic for the former periods and apparent from e.g. so-called Dipylon (geometric) vases from Athens. The images on these sepulchral vases from the eight century BC represent usual funeral from the period: luxurious funeral procession that consisted of carriage with the rich carpets followed by mourners, but also the games testified by the rows of the racing chariots. According to Solonian law, the luxury was eliminated – it was prohibited to bury, as a sacrifice, more than three dresses, to sacrifice an ox, and speak bad about the dead.²⁷ Apart from Plutarchus, who cites the Solon's law, there is another source for it:

The deceased shall be laid out in the house in any way one chooses, and they shall carry out the deceased on the day after that on which they lay him out, before the sun rises. And the men shall walk in front, when they carry him out, and the women behind. And no woman less than sixty years of age shall be permitted to enter the chamber of the deceased, or to follow the deceased when he is carried to the tomb, except those who are within the degree of children of cousins; nor shall any woman be permitted to enter the chamber of the deceased when the body is carried out, except those who are within the degree of children of cousins.

(Demosthenes, *Against Macartatus* 43. 62)²⁸

²⁷ Plutarch, *Solon*, 21. 4-7 Those who offended this law were punished by *gunaikonomoi* – officials specially in charged to deal with women affairs, because women always indulge in unmanly and extravagante effeminate sorrow when they mourn. It is said that this law of Solon had been influenced by Epineides of Crete, who had enacted similar law in Phaistos. M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament...* 2002, 15. More on the relation of limitation of luxury and regulation of rituals see C. Ampolo, "Il lusso funerario" in *AION* 6, 1984, pp. 71-102.

1984.

²⁸ "The deceased shall be laid out in the house in any way one chooses, and they shall carry out the deceased on the day after that on which they lay him out, before the sun rises. And the men shall walk in front, when they carry him out, and the women behind. And no woman less than sixty years of age shall be permitted to enter the chamber of the deceased, or to follow the deceased when he is carried to the tomb, except those who are within the degree of children of cousins; nor shall any woman be permitted to enter the chamber of the deceased when the body is car-

In this passage Demosthenes informs us that the wake was moved from the grave to the house, while the procession at the grave had to be finished by the sunrise. Apart from that, during procession (*ekfora*), which was actually the central part of the ritual, women were not allowed to go in front of the men, but behind them, while the right to be on the wake had only women older than sixty and the closest keen.²⁹

Concerning the island Ceos, there was a law from the second half of the 5th century BC, which was probably revisited version of earlier law, with the similar main points as the Athenian one. The procession had to be performed in a deep silence and women had to leave the grave (*shma*) before men appeared, not to disturb them with emotions. Unlike in Athens, the allowance of offerings was not so limited, but the vessels had to be removed from grave afterwards.³⁰

Another restrictive law concerning funerals was introduced in Delphi. Dated to the end of the 5th century, this law, the same as the one from Ceos, represents probably later version of an earlier law. This one refers to the limitation of the expenses for the offerings as well as to the procession – *ekfora*, during which the corpse had to be closely veiled. It was forbidden for the procession to stop for the lamentation. This law also forbade wailing and dirges at the tombs of those that passed away long time ago. All members of the family, except the closest kin, had to go to their own homes immediately after the funeral, while only the closest kin went home of the deceased. Another interesting regulation at Ceos concerned women's clothing. Namely, the clothes of mourners should have been grey/brown (this depends on how we translate the word *faian*), i. e. mixture of black and white, but never one of those colors.³¹ This limitation referred to women only, while men and children could have worn white. This information is interesting from the perspective of some contemporary Balkan areas, especially rural places, where, still, women dressed in black and with the black kerchiefs on their heads, are automatically perceived by the surroundings as mourning women.

All the laws mentioned were aimed in the first place at limiting the number of female relatives and moderating their role in the funeral ritual – in order to be more quiet, and as invisible as possible. What is obvious is that constitution of city-states (poleis) and introduction of democracy that brought with itself limiting display of feminine grief, actually tended to move women as far as possible from the political and public sphere. However, it should not be forgotten that laws often diverge from the social practice and that it is impossible to find out to what extent these regulations were obeyed in Athenian democracy.

ried out, except those who are within the degree of children of cousins.” Greek tekst and English translation by A. T. Murray from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

²⁹ This is testified also by texts from Aeschylus's *Choephoroi* 430, 8; Diodorus 11,38; However, the word this word often refers to denote whole ceremony.

³⁰ M. Alexiou, *Ritual lament...* 2002, 15 cf. LGS 93 A, pp. 261-2.

³¹ Polybius even uses it in the meaning of “mourning”. Polybius, *Histories*, 30. 4. 5.

There are theorists who suggest that due to restrictions of women's role in funerary ritual, women, as a kind of compensation, got important role in all those life-cycle festivities (Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, Eleusian Mysteries, Adonia) that were celebrated both in vivacious and in mourning atmosphere,³² and some of which are exclusively women festivals.

As already mentioned, Greek lament has been considered to be harmful for society since antiquity and according to Gail Holst-Warhaft, the force of lament is understood by the society as a kind of possession of lamenter by dangerous powers of dark – madness.³³ And it is the very power of madness and the authority of the lamenter over the rituals of death, that turn whole society upside down.³⁴ This relationship between death and madness is recognizable as well in the carnivalesque atmosphere of fertility rituals that are characteristic for such a behavior, which is completely opposite from the normal. It is in that transitional period, when one social order is broken and before the new one is constituted, that women who lament overtake the control. Although there are some cultures that perceive lamenters as mad, lamenters actually mediate emotions of the whole collective.

Obviously, the city-state was afraid of the institution of lament, as well as of the impossibility to control it – and that is why mentioned laws were introduced. Namely, one of the regulations of Solonian law that I have not mentioned yet, stipulated forbidding to talk bad about the deceased.³⁵ What does this mean? And does it go about some kind of censorship in the period of crisis provoked by death? Nicole Loraux claims that it does, and that controlling the ritual, was actually aimed at controlling women.³⁶ This control and the necessity to have it, should not be understood as if women were gathering after funerals and going to agora to make demands. Women's power was spread through the lamentation on the occasion of funeral, being grounded on two basic emotions – grief and sorrow. According to Nicole Loraux, it happens during the wailing, and in the moment when the mourning one confronts with incurable loss, that eternal sorrow turns into wreath (*mhni-*), and inverts into the wish and the call for revenge.³⁷ And this call is directly related

³² N. Loraux, *Mothers in mourning...*, 1998, 21, Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous voices...*, 1995, 100. Holst-Warhaft has noticed that all those festivities (Thesmophoria, Anthesteria, Eleusian Mysteries, Adonia) were rites performed for the gods in mourning, sometimes celebrated in vivacious, sometimes in the mourning atmosphere, but obviously expressing two sides of one genuine feeling, an outburst provoked in the confrontation to the forces of life and death. Nevertheless, some of the Festivities were supported by the city-state, may be as a kind of substitution for restricted female role in funerals (for example Thesmophoria).

³³ Holst-Warhaft compares the possession of the lamenter with witches and shamans who are, in certain historical periods and cultures, perceived as mediums for the dangerous powers. Holst-Warhaft 1995, 27.

³⁴ About death and madness as a preoccupation of western society see Foucault 1965.

³⁵ Plut. *Solon* 21. 1

³⁶ N. Loraux, *Mothers in mourning...*, 1998, 19; This control is also related to the decisions on property inheritance. Holst-Warhaft 1985, 117.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 44; Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 318-23; *Antigone* 1249 and 1254.

to the blood revenge (vendetta). So this is the reason why the state introduced laws in order to control ritual and to keep silence about events that the polis wanted to suppress, causing the oblivion. Unlike in the period of aristocratic clan system (when women were allowed to lament publicly), the state overtook the control over the relations and conflicts between people.³⁸ Thus, it is possible to conclude that restriction of women's role in funeral rituals and the impact that it had on the whole community, went hand in hand with the restrictive laws that were aimed at the reducing the importance and influence of the aristocratic clans. We find the evidence for just lament, arising the spirit of revenge in the verses from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*:

The murdered man has his dirge;
the guilty man is revealed.
Justified lament for fathers and for parents,
when raised loud and strong,
makes its search everywhere.

(Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 327 – 331)³⁹

Such an interpretation of laws controlling mourning and its impact on blood revenge, may be supported and clarified also through the research of laments in rural Greece (i.e. in some part of it),⁴⁰ where blood feuds existed until half and even the end of the 20th century, such as one done by Nadia Seremetakis, who proved the influence of lament on vendetta (sometimes supporting the conflict to continue, sometimes mediating it, but usually calling for revenge).⁴¹ In her study, called "The Last Word", Nadia Semetakis has researched the Inner Mani region,

³⁸ G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous voices...*, 1995, 102-103.

³⁹ Greek text and English translation by English Herbert Weir Smyth, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>

⁴⁰ One of the most important methodological postulates of anthropology of antiquity is the requirement to compare ancient Greek culture to other cultures (regardless the time span that might appear) and anthropological fieldwork experience related to Greek or other cultures is regarded useful for researcher's positioning towards a particular historical and cultural context. This standpoint is directly related to the conservative and abandoned idea that Greece is a cradle of civilization is wherefore it should and may not be compared to any other culture.

⁴¹ The method of including recent research on lament, based on the immediate anthropological fieldwork experience enlightens not only some aspects of Greek lament in the historical perspective, but also helps researcher's positioning towards particular context. The study of Nadia Seremetakis is particularly interesting, since it is based on the research during the longer period of time (1981-1991), while researcher herself has been not only outside scholar, but due to her family relation with the Inner Mani settlers, she herself shared everyday life with the settlers (during uninterrupted fifteen-month stay, and also during shorter, three- to four-month seasonal stays, but also through the ongoing contacts with the Mainiants in the Athens-Pireus area and in New York, where she lived). During her stays in Greece, she shared life with her family, participated in all the rituals she was researching, even lamenting herself. The Maniants accepted her as one of them, and she successfully succeeded to mediate the multiplicity of roles (kinswoman, representative of her clan, ethnographer) using this as an advantage for the constant change of perspectives. N. Seremetakis, *Last word* 1991.

exploring this area and social practices that surround death (including dreaming, lament improvisation, burying and unburying of the dead, as well as historical inscription of emotion and senses related to the persons, things and places).⁴²

Seremetakis notices that in Inner Mani, isolated villages in southern part of Peloponnesus, society used to be divided into two kin institutions: *gerondikiy* council of all male elders and *klama*, the women's mourning ceremonies. These two institutions at the same time complemented and opposed each other in the social structure. While *gerondikiy* represented the formal juridical institution, the *klama* had indirect political and juridical power achieved through public ritualization. The conflictual relations between two institutions expressed the inherent tension between maximal lineage of the male social unit and the minimal lineage of the household. The discussion raised upon the same issues (code killings, inheritance, property disputes, marital relations and kin obligations) was subjected to different value system. The *klama* sometimes reinforced the decision of *gerondikiy* and sometimes contested them. This opposition reflects pervasive feminine critique of the control of the social order by men and exists even today, due to a fact that *klama* still appears as a social institution.⁴³ This, in particular, means that words said by women on the funeral were the command for male and emphasizes confrontation between male and female. Gail Holst-Warhaft does not agree in terms of confrontation that Seremetakis emphasizes and underlines that women were appreciated among men when singing and creating laments but agrees with her position about female influence on further relations in the conflicts.⁴⁴ How open is the call for revenge in those lamentations may be clear from on of the examples that Seremetakis quotes:

*Eh, Lazaros and Panayis
and you, Fokas and Thodoris,
what are you waiting for?
The killer of Panagos
is staying in Yerakia.
Come close to me Periklis,
you dog of ----clan,
for me to ask you
and you tell me
if you happened to be there
at the St. Stephanos locale
when the killing occurred*

⁴² N. Seremetakis, *Last word...* 1991, 1.

⁴³ As a social institution, *klama* formally outlived *gerondikiy*. The last one nominally does not exist any more, but it has continued in the new institution of urbanization and modernization – the ideologies dominated by men. Thus, the continuity of tension women's and men's practices has not ended. *Ibid.* 126 -127.

⁴⁴ G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous voices...* 1995, 47.

*of big Panagoulakas.*⁴⁵

Apart from this additional, indirect, diachronic evidence of the power of words pronounced by women on the occasion of funerals, a direct one is given by Plutarch, who explains the legislation of Solon as an attempt to prevent blood feuds. Namely, the Solon's legislative measurement against "everlasting hostility" was a reaction to the Kylon affair: the blood feud that followed Megakles' massacre of Kylon's fellow conspirators, who, after the failed coup d'état, escaped to one of the city's most sacred altars.⁴⁶ Related to this restrictive legislation is also the establishing of a genre of *epitafio- logo-*, funeral oration, which was held by some representative of the authorities (which means men) on the occasion of public funerals. This genre has a literary origin and its main characteristic is the praise and commemoration of the dead. It was Athenian invention and Demosthenes mentions that only Athenians give funeral orations for the citizens that died for their country.⁴⁷ According to the so-called ancestral law (*patrio- nomo-*), introduced by the city-state, the corpses of the fallen soldiers were returned to Athens and buried together.⁴⁸ Namely, the conclusion that we might make through the interpretation of the title of this law is that this custom has been existing from time immemorial, although it was introduced by Athenian city-state in the 5th ct. Exactly referring to "our ancestors" had the purpose of providing it with legitimacy and power.⁴⁹

In accordance to the fact that during the wartime, the polis, which took care of the funeral of its soldiers, deprived families i.e. women, from their exclusive right to take care of their dead and to accompany them to the other world. More precisely, women could participate and mourn their dead who died as soldiers, but only in the frame of public ritual organized by the city-state. Women's right to organize and perform whole funeral ritual and thus to accompany the deceased to the Underworld was, in the periods critical for the polis, taken away from them. The voice of mothers, wives and sisters was damped in a mass, not to be heard. The main differences between *epitafio- log-* and *qrhno-* is that the later is characterized with emotional intensity, focusing on the negative aspects of the separation of the dead from the kin group, while *epitafio- log-*, praises death and the dead.

In spite all the measurements, laws and obstinate efforts, first of the city-state, and later of the church (which introduced its own ritual speech over the dead) to overtake the power and the control over the dead, and through that – over the living, the women's tradition of lament was not easy to eliminate, and it continued to exist parallel to all new models of talking on the funeral, surviving all up to modernity.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 129.

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Solon*, 21.

⁴⁷ Demosthenes, *Against Leptines*, 141.

⁴⁸ The corpses, or all bones dead that were found, used to be grouped by tribe in common coffins and interred together. Thucydides 2.34.

⁴⁹ Lada Stevanović, "Human or Superhuman: The concept of Hero in Ancient Greek Religion and/in Politics" in *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta* 56/2 Beograd 2008, 16.

Лада Стевановић

Погребни ритуал и моћ: опраштање од мртвих у античком грчком погребном ритуалу

Кључне речи:

тужбалица, жене, мушкарци, моћ,
Солонов закон

У једном од најстаријих људских обреда, оном који прати умирање и растајање од покојника, постојање тужбалице и оплакивања на простору Грчке забележено је на вазном сликарству још у микенском периоду. Овај рад се пре свега бави тужбалицом у класичном периоду, са посебним освртом на архајско доба, али узимајући у обзир читав распон у коме се ова форма, коју су као главне учеснице погребног ритуала изводиле жене (било професионалне нарикаче, било најближе сроднице умрлих – мајке, супруге и сестре), може пратити у грчкој традицији. Упркос огромном временском распону, препознатљиви су континуитет начина извођења (антифоновог) и мотиви који се у тужбалици појављују. Ово је посебно занимљиво и стога што је кроз историју било више покушаја да се над женским оплакивањем и нарицањем успостави контрола. Наиме, након оснивања градова-држава (полиса), широм грчког света дошло је до увођења законских мера које су ограничавале и регулисале нарицање, и то на тај начин што су прописивале место и време за тужбалицу. Наиме, према новим правилима, нарицање је са гробља и из погребне поворке трбало да се пресели у кућу, где је било дозвољено само најближим сродницама. Детаљном анализом ових закона – Солоновог у Атини, као и закона са Коса и из Делфа, у раду се закључује да је разлог за то следећи: увођењем нове политичке (тј. државне) структуре и напуштањем клановског уређења друштва у Грчкој, спроводе се нова правила према којима у јавном животу (а самим тим и у јавном простору) учествују искључиво мушкарци. Међутим, управо кроз традиционалну, тј. ритуалну праксу, жене су ипак задржале могућност да говоре јавно – и то на гробљу, и то у време кризе изазване смрћу, када и порука тужбалице – која је упућена једнако мртвима колико и живима – одјекује још снажније него у свакодневним приликама. Моћ над живима у том тренутку повезана је са моћи над мртвима, коју су жене у погребним ритуалима несумњиво имале. Парадоксална ситуација повезана је са ритуалном нечистоћом (тзв. *миазмом*) која прати сваки контакт са мртвима, што је несумњиво више погађало жене. Управо изложеност *миазми* носила је са собом забрану изласка у јавни простор и одласка у храмове, и могуће је да је разлог томе што су жене остале

суверене владарке овог ритуала управо тај што су мушкарци избегавали да буду изложени оваквој нечистоћи. Дакле, уместо запоседања ритуалног простора који је био и остао женска сфера, држава је (а касније и црква) покушавала да спроведе законске мере којима би сузбила погребни ритуал и утицај који су жене кроз њега добијале. Једна од форми ове „борбе“ јесте и увођење посебног реторичког жанра – надгробне беседе, коју су изводили мушкарци, углавном државници, и то на јавним сахранама након погибије војника. За разлику од тужбалице у којој се смрт оплакивала и жалила, и кроз коју су се најближи (и оне које су нарицале, али и сви остали присутни) лично опраштали од покојника, у беседи се величао покојник, као и сама смрт. Овај рад одговара на питања зашто је било толико важно успоставити контролу над тужбалицом, тј. над онима које су је изводиле, као и на питања да ли је и којој мери је то било могуће.